

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 21

May 19-25, 2014

Acts 7:9-7:44

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 twenty-one, along with the readings for week twenty-two appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

Week Twenty-one Readings

<p>5/19 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:9-7:19</p> <p>Gen 41-44</p> <p>5/20 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:9-7:19</p> <p>Gen 45-48 Gen 49:2-49:7 Gen 49:13-50:26</p> <p>5/21 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:17-7:34</p> <p>Ex 1:1-2:25 Ex 3:7-4:20</p>	<p>5/22 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:35-7:43</p> <p>Ex 24 Amos 5:21-5:27 Deut 1:1-3:20 Deut 4:44-4:49 Deut 6:20-6:25 Deut 6:10-6:15 Deut 9</p> <p>5/23 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:35-7:43</p> <p>2 Kgs 15,16 Prov 16:12 Prov 20:8 2 Kgs 21, 24 Jer 36</p>	<p>5/24 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:44</p> <p>Ex 26,27 Ex 30:11-30:38 Heb 9:1-9:10 Heb 9:15-9:28 Deut 3:21-3:29 Deut 31:1-31:13 Deut 33,34</p> <p><i>5/25 Off</i></p>
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STEPHEN'S SPEECH (Acts 7:9-7:44)

We continue several weeks of reading in support of Stephen's speech to the authorities where Stephen defended his message that proclaimed a resurrected Jesus as both Lord and Messiah. Stephen told Old Testament stories to the authorities, and Luke gives a synopsis in Acts. We give the greater storyline through the contextual readings.

Because Stephen's narrative follows the Old Testament historical story of God and Israel, we will change the format of these lessons a bit to cover the same storyline from the Old Testament texts, rather than working to break out the Scriptures on a daily basis. Those Scriptures that go beyond the narrative will be segregated out as relevant.

READING PURPOSE: For Stephen and the early church, Jesus and Christianity were not divorced from the Old Testament. Jesus was not the Son of a new God. God had not changed with the incarnation. God was working toward Jesus' transforming moment for humanity from the very beginning. We will see this as we continue to explore the fuller narratives behind Stephen's speech.

Genesis 41-48; 49:2-49:7; 49:13-50:26

When Joseph went to prison, he left Potiphar, his job, his home, and his friends, but God never left Joseph. The narrative makes a point to say:

But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison (Gen 39:21).

It is the same story we saw in Joseph's slavery to Potiphar. In a matter of time, Joseph was in charge of all the other prisoners. Joseph's confinement brought great freedom to the warden!

Whatever was done there, he [Joseph] was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed (Gen 39:22-39:23).

Among the inmates were two of Pharaoh's servants, his cupbearer and his baker. While in custody, the two had disturbing dreams. After awaking, both men were troubled likely missing their access to the people normally charged with interpreting dreams.

In Egypt as far back as perhaps the 19th and 20th centuries BC, there were written prognostications and interpretations to be accorded dreams. In a copy dating from Rameses II's era (early thirteenth century BC), there are lists of dream subjects followed

by a label of “good” or “bad” and then followed by the interpretation.¹ In prison, the cupbearer and baker did not have access to this insight and they were troubled. Joseph explained he needed no such book, for the interpretation of dreams came from God.

The cupbearer went first explaining his dream. He had dreamed of a grape vine that had three branches. The branches fruited and the cupbearer pressed the grapes into Pharaoh’s cup, giving the cup to Pharaoh.

Joseph interpreted: the branches were three days, the length of time that would pass before Pharaoh gave the cupbearer his old job back. Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember Joseph upon his release.

Liking the interpretation, the baker then told Joseph his dream. The baker had dreamed of three baskets loaded with baked goods on his head. Birds were eating the foods. Joseph explained that in three days, Pharaoh would lift the baker’s head up and hang him. The birds would then come feed on the baker’s dead flesh.

Three days passed and the events unfolded exactly as Joseph predicted. The cupbearer was restored to Pharaoh and the baker ceased hanging around. Despite Joseph’s imploring, the cupbearer totally forgot to mention Joseph to Pharaoh, leaving Joseph imprisoned for another two years.

Two years passed when Pharaoh had disturbing dreams of his own. Pharaoh’s wise men and court practitioners of the arts were not able (or at least claimed not to be able²) to interpret the dreams. The dreams continued to trouble Pharaoh and finally the cupbearer recalled his dream experiences with Joseph. The cupbearer recounted those events to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph.

Joseph readied himself (cleaned up, shaved³, put on non-prison garb) and came before Pharaoh. At their initial meeting, Joseph starts out emphasizing that God gets all credit

¹ See the Papyrus Chester Beatty III published by A. H. Gardiner, *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum I-II* (British Museum 1935), 7-23 and plates 5-8a, 12-12a. See comments and explanations in Kitchen at 350f.

² Some scholars note that the sages might have feared Pharaoh’s reaction if they told him the bad news in the dreams. Joseph has no such concerns and gives the news, good and bad, along with a wise solution for dealing with the bad aspects.

³ The Story of Sinuhe (c.1960 BC) discusses the life of an Egyptian who lived among the Canaanites. Upon his return to Egypt, Sinuhe recounted his preparations, very similar in this respect to Joseph’s:

I left the audience-hall, the royal daughters giving me their hands. We went through the great portals, and I was put in the house of a prince. In it were luxuries: a bathroom and mirrors. In it were riches from the treasury; clothes of royal linen, myrrh, and the choice perfume of the king and of his favorite courtiers were in every room. Every servant was at his task. Years were removed from my body. I was shaved; my hair was combed. Thus was my squalor returned to the foreign land, my dress to the Sand-farers. I was clothed in

for proper interpretation of dreams. Pharaoh then launched into the dreams. In one, seven plump cows came out of the Nile and ate the reed grass. Seven thin and ugly cows then came and ate the seven plump cows. Even after eating the good cows, the thin ones stayed gaunt.

The second dream followed the first and it was similar but with ears of corn. Seven good ears grew on a stalk followed by seven bad ears on another. The bad ears then ate the good ears.

Joseph then told Pharaoh the dreams' interpretations.

The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do (Gen 41:25).

Joseph explained that seven years of plentiful production and harvest were coming to Egypt followed by seven years of famine. Joseph then went a step further and offered Pharaoh some unsolicited advice. Joseph recommended setting a man over a group of overseers that would collect twenty percent of the land's produce during the bountiful years for storage and disbursement during the famine.

Pharaoh saw God's wisdom in Joseph and appointed Joseph to the task. At this point, Joseph was 30 years old, and had spent almost half his life (13 years) in Egypt. He assumed the awesome responsibility Pharaoh assigned and excelled in it, just like he had most everything else. During the seven prosperous years, Joseph married an Egyptian and fathered two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

The dreams came true precisely as Joseph had predicted, and Egypt was ready for the fierce famine. The famine reached not only the borders of Egypt, but beyond. Many people outside Egypt came to Pharaoh seeking food, setting up a family reunion of sorts.

Among those affected by the famine were Joseph's father and siblings back in Canaan. Over twenty years had gone by and doubtless many things had changed, but one thing remained constant—Jacob's inordinate love for the children of Rachel. Since the apparent death of Joseph, Jacob had become extra protective over the youngest child, Benjamin.

Jacob learned of the food available in Egypt and sent all the brothers, save Benjamin, to buy grain. As governor over the land, Joseph was in charge of selling the food. He recognized his ten brothers as they bowed before him, but the brothers did not see the nearly forty-year-old Egyptian official as their long lost brother whom they had last seen as a teenager.

fine linen; I was anointed with fine oil. I slept on a bed. I had returned the sand to those who dwell in it, the tree-oil to those who grease themselves with it.

The dialogue between the brothers is interesting as Joseph spoke roughly and challenged their professed identity. It was hard on the brothers and they saw the difficulties as punishment for their sins against Joseph from twenty years earlier. The guilt from their crime continued to plague them decades later. They spoke of this in their native tongue, not realizing Joseph could understand them (Joseph had been using a translator to aid in concealing his identity). This moved Joseph to tears, and he left the room.

Ultimately, Joseph sold them the food but insisted they return with their youngest brother to prove their identity and validate their story. Unknown to the brothers, Joseph also had the Egyptian staff put their money back into their sacks along with the grain. Joseph held one brother, Simeon, and sent the others back. Once they arrived home and gave Jacob the news, he got quite upset. He was not over the loss of Joseph some 20 years earlier, bringing it up along with the new loss of Simeon, and the potential for losing Benjamin.

While Jacob initially refused to let Benjamin return with the brothers to reclaim Simeon, the famine was so severe that the brothers ultimately had to return to Egypt for more food. Knowing they had no chance without their youngest brother, they finally got Jacob to relent and allow him to go. The brothers went back taking not only the new money to buy grain, but also the original money that was mysteriously in their baggage upon their initial return to Canaan.

Once the brothers reached Joseph in Egypt, they were ushered in for a dinner. Joseph continued to ply the role of Egyptian governor as he quizzed his brothers about their family. In this way, he discreetly learned of his father's health. Recognizing Benjamin for who he was, Joseph had to leave the room because he could not stop from crying.

Joseph then put his brothers to a test. He sent them their grain and again had their money replaced in the sacks. This time, however, he had his own silver cup put in the bag of Benjamin. The brothers were on the road out of town when Joseph's guards caught up and asserted that they repaid Joseph's hospitality by stealing Joseph's cup. The brothers rashly proclaimed,

Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we will also be my lord's servants (Gen 44:9).

The search is dramatic, for it starts with the oldest and works down. The cup is not found in the first, second, third, or fourth bag. It is not until the eleventh and final bag is opened, that of Benjamin, that the cup is discovered.

Once the brothers realized the situation, they went into full panic mode. They offered to all enter into slavery, but Joseph refused, claiming only the right to Benjamin. At this point Judah stepped forward and gave a decently honest rendition of why this action would destroy their father. The speech is long, but each word stings and is worth note:

Then Judah went up to him and said, "Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father, or a brother?' And we said to my lord, 'We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.' Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.' We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.'

"When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' we said, 'We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.' Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One left me, and I said, "Surely he has been torn to pieces," and I have never seen him since. If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.'

"Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life, as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, 'If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.' Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father." (Gen 44:18-44:34)

Joseph could handle this no longer. He sent all the Egyptians out, including the interpreter he had been using. Then, Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers. I doubt anyone could record how stunned the brothers were as they realized what was going on. Twenty years earlier, they had sold their dreaming brother into slavery and now found themselves dependent upon him for their lives and the lives of their families. What is more, Joseph did not hold their sins against them, instead seeing that what they had meant for harm, God used to protect the whole family.

Pharaoh heard of Joseph's brothers' presence and sent wagons and men to bring Joseph's family into the best parts of Egypt for their living.

Joseph stayed in Egypt working while his brothers returned to Jacob with the wagons, the gifts, and the food. When Jacob first heard the news, it seemed too good to be true. At first, he did not believe them, but he was ultimately persuaded that they were telling the truth. Jacob then had his spirit "revived" and declared,

It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die (Gen 45:28).

Jacob decided to travel to Egypt and before he left, God came to him in a night vision and assured him the descent to Egypt was the right thing to do. God assured Jacob he would still fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, making of Jacob a great nation and giving his offspring Canaan.

God assured Jacob,

I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes (Gen 46:4).

So seventy people from the house of Jacob descended into Egypt with the promise of return at the right time.⁴

Jacob arrived in Goshen, the area in Egypt where his family would ultimately settle. Joseph mounted his chariot and drove to find his father, collapsing in tears while hugging him. Jacob proclaimed,

Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive (Gen 46:30).

Joseph then brought Jacob into the presence of Pharaoh and the two conversed. Jacob blessed Pharaoh before leaving. For the last seventeen years of his life, Jacob lived in Egypt with all of his offspring.

Once Jacob died, Joseph mourned him ordering the Egyptian embalmers to do their best work. With Pharaoh's permission, Joseph took Jacob's body back to the cave at Machpelah where Abraham and Isaac were buried. Jacob was added to the family tomb.

Joseph returned to Egypt where his brothers feared for their lives. Still living with the guilt and memory of what they had done to Joseph now almost forty years earlier, they bowed to him again seeking his forgiveness. Joseph explained his understanding that God was at work, even in the midst of their sin. Here Genesis ends with the Israelites in Egypt, setting the stage for the coming Exodus.

Exodus 1:1-2:25; 3:7-4:20; 24; Amos 5:21-27

⁴ The Septuagint reads 75 people rather than 70. The difference is reckoned on whether to count Jacob and Joseph, and also how to count the other children of Joseph. See Hamilton, Victor, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, (Eerdmans 1995) at 598. Stephen uses the Septuagint number in his defense speech in Acts 7.

God's greatest act of deliverance, until the deliverance through Jesus, came from Israel's bondage to Egyptian slavery. It came about through Moses, born to a mother who dared defy the authority of Pharaoh, Egypt's ultimate ruler, worshipped as one of the gods.

In so many ways, this deliverance of God not only defined Israel, it defined God. When God presented himself to Moses in the burning bush, Moses asked for God's "name." Our English Bibles give God's answer as follows:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Ex 3:14).

In the Greek translation of this done in the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the name of God written "I AM who I AM" is *ego eimi ho on*. *Ego eimi* is one way in Greek to say "I am," and *ho on* is a second. Over and over in the Greek text of Moses' encounter with God, we see God using "*ego eimi*" in describing himself:

- **Ex. 3:6** And he said, "I am [*ego eimi*] the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.
- **Ex. 7:5** "The Egyptians shall know that I am [*ego eimi*] the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."
- **Ex. 8:22** But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am [*ego eimi*] the LORD in the midst of the earth.
- **Ex. 14:4** "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am [*ego eimi*] the LORD." And they did so.
- **Ex. 14:18** "And the Egyptians shall know that I am [*ego eimi*] the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."
- **Ex. 20:2** "I am [*ego eimi*] the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

God, the ever-present, the ever-active, the "I AM," rescued his people from bondage in Egypt. This was deep and fertile soil for Stephen to plant seeds of the rescuing work of Jesus, who also called himself, "I AM." (See, Jn 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19).

God brought the Israelites out from Egypt to Sinai, where he entered into covenant with them working through Moses (Ex 24). Stephen reminded the authorities that the Israelites rejected God in that covenant, turning their hearts to idolatry instead.

Stephen did a masterful job of weaving into his testimony the words of Amos, the 8th century BC prophet who prophesied over 500 years after the exodus. Amos invoked the exodus to illustrate God's refusal to accept the sacrifices and worship of the Israelites. If the people's hearts are not really tuned toward respect, honor and the obedience that flow from such (all key parts of worship), God despises the assemblies. They are really no more than idolatry fests. In that sense, Amos reminded his hearers of the Israelites who left with Moses. They worshipped false gods, claiming the idols were the gods that brought them from Egypt. God sent the people of Amos's day into exile. Would he hold back judgment from those listening to Stephen, thinking all the while that their temple worship was going to buy their peace with God?

Deuteronomy 1:1-3:20; 4:44-4:49; 6:10-6:15; 6:20-6:25; 9:1-29

Stephen was speaking to a ruling body that thought itself right before God, comfortable with its rituals and satisfied that it was doing those things necessary to satisfy God. Stephen walked through the historical disobedience of the people before God, which should have served as a wake-up call for those listening. It didn't.

In the Deuteronomy selection, we read of the people approaching the Promised Land after a wandering in the desert experiencing God's miracles. God instructed the people to enter the Promised Land, but they refused. They saw God's blessings, but in their eyes, framed by their own rebellious hearts, they saw the blessings as curses. Their unbelief makes little sense to us as we read through the lens of history, but we should be cautious with that judgment. It is easy to get caught up in the crisis of the moment, especially if one is not living in a deep relational walk with the Lord.

The people were cursed to wander in the wilderness for another forty years, as God removed the faithless generation and brought up on more faithful. Then the people finally were charged with entering the Promised Land. As Deuteronomy 9 emphasized, God told them they were not entering because of the righteousness of the Israelites. Rather, it was the unrighteousness of the occupying people as well as the promise God had made to the patriarchs that was behind the Israelite invasion.

2 Kings 15;16; Proverbs 16:12; 20:8

Amos prophesied about the downfall of Israel. In 2 Kings 15-16, we read about Israel's last days. With this background information, we now turn to the Biblical account of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. As we have already seen, the Biblical account is written in narrative most fully in 2 Kings. There is a considerable amount of material also contained in the prophets of Hosea and Amos, both of whom prophesied about the fall. Isaiah also has references to the events surrounding the Assyrian expansion and fall of Israel/Samaria. We will use 2 Kings as our basis, supplementing as helpful from other Old Testament passages as well as the historical documents from Assyria.

Israel's relationship with Assyria begins over 100 years before its fall and its first mention in the Bible.⁵ Jehu, the general who took over the kingship of Israel in 841 BC, paid tribute to Assyria as a vassal state under King Shalmaneser III. This payment was likely made when Shalmaneser was attacking territories near Israel around 838 BC. We read in the inscription of the Black Obelisk (now in the British Museum):

I received the tribute of Jehu, Omri: silver, gold, a gold a gold vase (?), gold goblets, buckets, tin, a royal scepter javelins.⁶



son of bowl, gold (and)

After Jehu, we read of his grandson making payments to Assyria in the Assyrian records. “Joash of Samaria” sent tribute to Adad-nerari III somewhere around 805-796 BC. This relationship is likely the biblical reference to the Lord sending “Israel a savior [Assyria], so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly” (2 Kgs 13:5). Assyrian records show that Assyria warred Syria (Damascus) into submission at this time.

The Kings account in the context readings speak of Assyria's King Tiglath Pileser, known to modern scholars as Tiglath-Pileser III (“T-P”).

T-P⁷ took the throne at a time when Assyria had been stagnant or even declining for decades. A good number of scholars think that T-P was a usurper, and not the rightful heir to the throne.⁸ Regardless of how he came into power, T-P proved to be incredibly strong as a military leader as well as a government organizer. In his reign, which lasted from 744 to 727 BC, he changed the



Tiglath-Pileser from a stele kept at the British Museum.

⁵ We do not count here the three references in Genesis (2:14; 10:11; 25:18) to Assyria. They are geographic references, not points of contact between Israel and Assyria.

⁶ Text translation by Cogan, *Ibid.*, at 23.

⁷ Tiglath-Pileser III was also known simply as Pulu (in the Bible this is why he is also called “Pul”). Grayson dismisses the scholars that think the name was a regnal name for T-P's enthronement in Babylon. Instead, Grayson speculates that “Pulu” may somehow derive from the “Pileser” part of T-P's name. Grayson, at 73.

⁸ See, e.g., Grayson, A. K., “Assyria: Tiglath-Pileser III to Sargon II”, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, (Cambridge 2007), 2d ed., Vol III, Pt 2, at 74; Olmstead, A. T., *History of Assyria*, (U. of Chicago 1951), at 175.

way kings waged war as well as the make-up of the Assyrian Empire. T-P was an imperialist. He readily and quickly assimilated key semi-independent vassal states into the empire, carving them up into provinces ruled by his assigned governors. Even these provinces, T-P kept intentionally small so the governors would never have too much power.⁹



T-P originated the original early Pony Express (maybe “Camel Express”!), setting postal offices at specified stages on main routes so that he could communicate efficiently and quickly with all points of his empire. T-P also set up trading centers in distant lands to assist in commerce and trade. One was set up in the Philistine city of Gaza, as T-P conquered up to Egypt’s border.¹⁰ Cogan sees this as an important indicator of T-P’s drive to conquer lands as, in part at least, economically motivated.

The founding of a customs-house in Philistia, one of the innovations of Tiglath-Pileser III, clearly points to the strong economic drive at the base of Assyrian expansion, whose goal was the domination of international trade. Gaza sat astride the road that led from Egypt northward and its port served the export of goods from south Arabia.¹¹

T-P was the first to instigate a policy of wholesale deportation of conquered people. His mass transportation was designed to break up ties with history, land and neighbors so that people were less likely to rebel in the future. T-P would send rebellious residents into forced labor while others would simply be transmigrated into another distant land.

While T-P began his reign in a time of decline, he readily used the military to reshape Assyria into the superpower of its day. His military prowess reorganized the army into a more efficient machine. He led the troops into battles against enemies in the north, south, east and west, going to war every year of his reign except one. In war, T-P’s tactics included leveling cities, destroying olive groves, and impaling people alive on display:

His chief ministers, alive I impaled, and had (the people) of his land behold them.¹²

⁹ Grayson, at 204.

¹⁰ Grayson, at 77.

¹¹ Cogan, Mordechai, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel*, (Carta 2008), at 64.

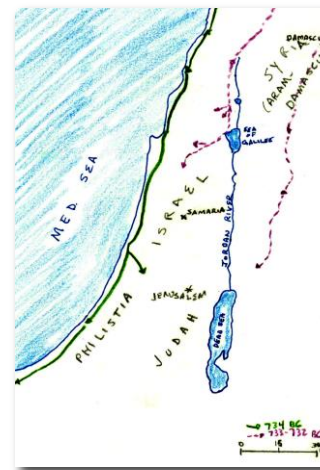
¹² Text translation by Cogan, *Ibid.*, at 74.

We will see how T-P dealt with rebellious vassal states in more detail with the rebellion of Israel below. By the time of T-P's death in 727 BC, he had expanded the borders of Assyria far beyond what they had ever been in its over 1,000 year history.

By the time of T-P, however, the strength of Assyria had weakened so that a number of vassal states, including Israel, no longer paid tribute. This was one matter that T-P set out to rectify. Assyria was incredibly diligent at record keeping, and this would certainly have been on the national radar.

The build up to war was in earlier chapters of Kings. Menahem became king of Israel after striking down the previous king, Shallum, who himself had killed his predecessor Zechariah (2 Kings 15:8-15:22). Menahem then proceeded to pay Tiglath-Pileser (the text calls him "Pul") 1,000 talents of silver (a talent was about 75 pounds!). Menahem raised the money by taxing all wealthy men in Israel 50 shekels apiece (a shekel was about 2/5ths of an ounce). Scholars vary on the exact dates for when Menahem made the payment but Assyrian records from 740 and 738 BC include Menahem among the kings paying tribute to T-P, although those may be additional payments beyond the 1,000 talents of silver.¹³ Typically, vassal states made annual payments; it was not a one-time deal!

Reading through T-P's records, we notice a difference in the records of 734 BC. At that point in time, both Samaria (Israel) and Rezin of Damascus drop from the list of vassal states paying tribute. Making an appearance on the list, however, is Ahaz of Judah (under his fuller name Jehoahaz). At this point, the records show that T-P spent 734-732 warring against Samaria, Damascus, and Tyre, three countries in rebellion to Assyria and no longer honoring their tribute obligations.¹⁴



T-P's later records present a summary of T-P's accomplishments in 734-732 BC. In these summaries, we read that T-P conquered lands from the rebellious states of Syria (Damascus), Tyre, and Samaria, setting up his own king in Samaria, Hoshea. This brought Samaria again into the fold as a vassal state with Hoshea ruling in place of the deposed and assassinated rebellious King Pekah.¹⁵ In this same time period, T-P destroyed Damascus, finally

¹³ Cogan, at 52-53.

¹⁴ This same tablet records that T-P placed a usurping king (Hulli) on the throne of Tabal. What was the cost to Hulli for this "opportunity"? 1,000 talents of silver! This is the same price paid by Menahem for his "throne," and must have been the going rate!

¹⁵ Cogan translates the tablet and comments at 61ff. Another tablet that is missing a good bit of text was recovered citing the same information but adding the name of Pekah as the deposed king and citing payment in silver by Hoshea for his title. Yet another tablet discusses the first wave of conquering in the

defeating its King Rezin and putting him to death. This did not come about until after a long siege and the destruction of orchards, other cities, and the impaling of officials while still alive, before the besieged city (referenced and quoted earlier).

This Assyrian recording supplements the Biblical account consistently, shedding a bit of light on several points. The Biblical text recording the perspective of the Prophet Historian responsible for Kings does not directly reference the earlier tribute of Israel to Assyria under the reign of Jehu or Joash. Once Menahem bursts onto the scene; however, the Biblical story corresponds with the Assyrian records. Menahem stole the throne and paid the standard amount to the Assyrians to be guaranteed his throne as long as he conducted affairs properly as a vassal state (2 Kgs 15:17). It was the heavy tax that apparently led to the rebellion against the house of Menahem. His son was not on the throne even a year before his assassination at the hands of Pekah. Pekah was fronting a rebellion against Assyria. Rather than pay the annual taxes, Pekah rebelled, joining forces with Rezin from (Syria) Damascus. These two tried to get Ahaz to join them in their fight against T-P, and failing that, tried to replace him on the throne of Judah (2 Kings 16:4-16:6; Isa 7:1-7:8). Rather than join Pekah and Rezin, Ahaz paid tribute to T-P seeking his assistance.

This judgment came upon Israel because the appeals to the governing officials by the Lord through Amos and Hosea were fruitless. The officials (kings) did nothing, despite the admonition of proverbs like Prov 16:12 and 20:8. The Ordeal then was commencing! The Lord himself was pronouncing judgment and the judgment was coming! This is no different than what Stephen was indicating would befall those of his day if they refused the salvation found in Jesus.

T-P came against Damascus, Tyre, Israel (“Samaria”) and Philistia. T-P wrought devastation as he conquered lands, leveled cities, and forced submission. T-P claims in his records that he replaced the Samarian King Pekah with Hoshea. The Biblical record contains the same fact, setting it out:

In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria. Then Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah and struck him down and put him to death and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah (2 Kgs 15:29-15:30).

These are the lands of Galilee and Gilead spoken of in T-P’s records. The “conspiracy” of Hoshea was likely his move in cooperation with T-P. We do know from other records that Assyria typically kept spies in foreign courts, especially those of vassal states.

Galilee and Gilead areas, carving the land into provinces and appointing Assyrian governors. See Cogan, at 76ff.

Likely, T-P had people in Samaria during this time that would effectuate and further such a conspiracy.

Among the list of cities conquered by T-P set out above in 2 Kings 15:29, is Hazor. This city gives insight not only into the warring approach of T-P, but also the Prophet Historian's unfelt need to exaggerate what happened. Scripture simply notes the city was "captured" and the people carried captive. In 1955, Famed Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin began a five-year excavation of Hazor. Yadin's work not only corroborated the Biblical account that T-P "captured" Hazor, but also confirmed T-P's rendering that he "leveled" the city. Yadin found:

...a thoroughly destroyed level covered by thick layers of ashes and pottery ascribing it to the latter part of the eighth century.¹⁶

Commenting upon the find, Yadin noted:

The Bible (II Kings 15:29) describes this tragedy very laconically: "In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and captured ... Hazor..." It is only through the archaeological excavations that we now know the meaning of the words, "Came and captured". Tiglath-Pileser razed to the very ground the city of Hazor, once a key stronghold of the northern kingdom of Israel. The site we encountered...is worse than any I can remember in archaeological excavations. The entire area was covered by a layer of ashes 1 meter thick and still black! Everything in sight was broken and scattered on the floors of the houses. We could visualize the Assyrian soldiers roaming about the houses, looting whatever they could and destroying the rest. The fire was so violent that even the stones were black...¹⁷

This is the memory Stephen stirred in the minds of his listeners. For the next nine years, Hoshea reigned in Samaria as a vassal state of Assyria (2 Kgs 17:1). Then came the later full fall of Israel. Judah outlasted Israel, but it too fell due to rebellion and idolatry (2 Kings 21; 24).

2 Kings 21; 24; Jeremiah 36

Judah outlasted Israel, but it too fell due to rebellion and idolatry (2 Kings 21, 24). Judah had its warning before its fall to Babylon, but the king insolently had the warning burned, showing utter disregard for God's prophetic word (Jer 36).

Exodus 26:27; 30:11-30:38

¹⁶ Yadin, Yigael, *Hazor, The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible*, (Random House 1975), at 147.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, at 175-176.

After hinting at the results of Israel and Judah's rebellion by quoting Amos, Stephen returned to the account of Israel's exodus, referencing the tent/tabernacle built in the wilderness to the precise instructions of God.

The tabernacle's importance to Israel cannot be overstressed. It was the meeting place for God and his people. It was the place of sacrifice and service by the priests. It was considered the dwelling or palace of God on earth among his people. As God instructed Moses,

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst (Ex 25:8).

In the tabernacle, we see the paradoxical expressions: that God is holy (meaning "set apart") from all humanity, yet God was also in the midst of the Israelite people.

In setting out the construction of the tabernacle, God gave Moses very specific instructions. As the tabernacle was the tented palace for God the King, it was to be made to God's exacting specifications!

Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and all of its furniture, so you shall make it (Ex 25:9).

With such exactness, and with pages of instructions to Moses on the construction, one might think that we could easily redraw the tabernacle and see it in its wonder today. Unfortunately, that is not true! While we can find drawings of the tabernacle (on page 186 in the ESV Study Bible for example¹⁸), we must recognize that such drawings involve a great deal of interpretation. There are extensive instructions in Exodus, but those instructions are not complete. No doubt this is part of the significance that Moses make it as God *showed* him.

Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain (Ex 26:30).¹⁹

We join with Orthodox scholar Georges Barrois who wrote,

The technical terms of uncertain or unknown etymology in the Hebrew text and their renderings in the versions make nigh hopeless all attempts as figuring out what the tabernacle looked like; a large measure of skepticism regarding most of the reconstructions found in Biblical handbooks and encyclopedias is advisable.²⁰

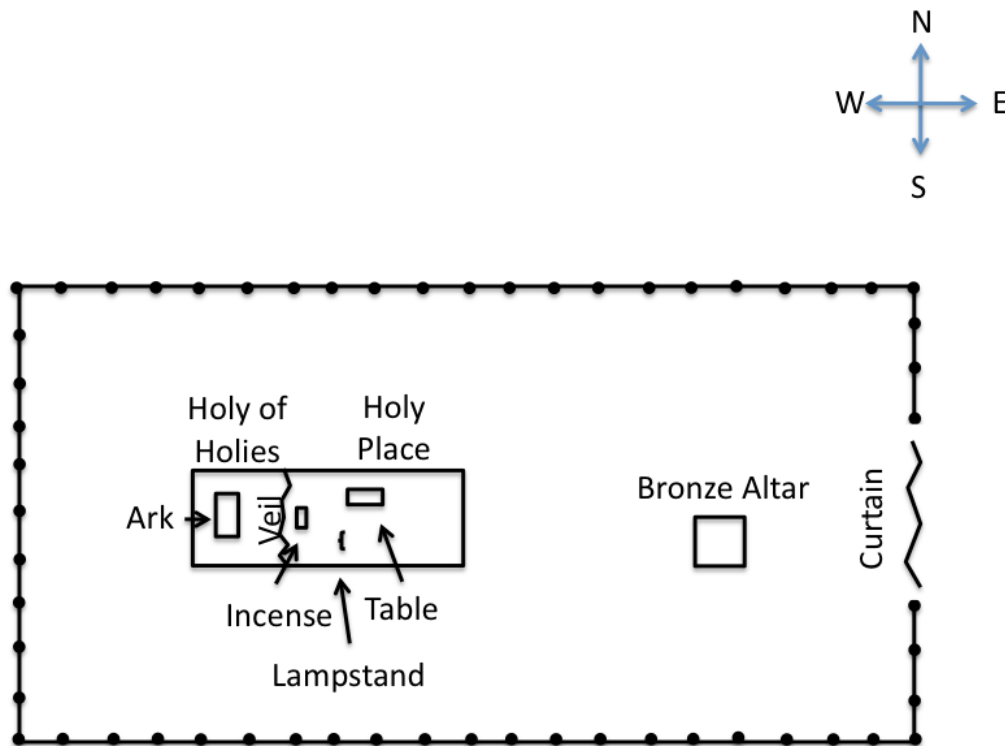
¹⁸ *ESV Study Bible*, (Crossways Bibles 2008).

¹⁹ See also Ex 25:9, 40; 27:8; Num 8:4.

²⁰ Barrois, Georges A., *Jesus Christ and the Temple*, (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1980) at 33. A related issue exists on some stark differences between the Hebrew text of Exodus passages on

Still those drawings serve a good purpose of helping to orient us to the basic shapes, placements, and even relevant sizes of the constituent parts of the tabernacle. In other words, do not hesitate to look at them, just recognize them for what they are!

Scripture did not preserve us a drawing, it preserved certain instructions by God. Those instructions give us the data we need to better understand the message God delivers through the tabernacle. With that warning, we now produce a basic drawing of the Tabernacle!



The Layout

The tabernacle itself was a tent that was constructed of poles, layered coverings, and curtains. The tent was not what you would buy today at a camping supply store. It had poles, but they were made of wood, rather than modern plastic. The coverings and curtains/walls were made from different materials (linen, tanned rams' skins, and goats hair) (Ex 26:7, 14, 31, 36). The tent was about 45 feet long and 15 feet high.²¹

constructing the Tabernacle with the same passages in the Greek Septuagint. For a discussion of these issues, see, Gooding, D. W., *The Account of the Tabernacle*, (Cambridge 1959).

²¹ We do not know the precise measurements because the Scripture uses the Hebrew term "cubit." The cubit was originally thought to be a measurement of the elbow to the fingertip. Of course, that varied

The tent was constructed in a courtyard surrounded by a fence. The courtyard was about 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was also built to God's exacting instructions (Ex 27:9-19; 38:9-17). In the confines of the courtyard, but not in the tabernacle/tent, was the bronze altar for the sacrifices of the people.

The Tabernacle/tent area was divided into two sections: the Holy Place and the Holiest Place (also called the "Holy of Holies" or the "Most Holy Place"). The Holy Place was the first 30 feet of the Tabernacle/tent and in it was the "Table of Presence," an "altar of incense," and a "golden lampstand."

The Holiest Place was the back 15 feet of the tabernacle/tent. It was separated from the Holy Place by a curtain built and embroidered specially for that purpose. This Holiest Place held the Ark of the Covenant. We will consider each of these furnishings starting in the Holiest Place and working outward into the Holy Place and then the courtyard.

The Ark of the Covenant

Anyone who has seen the Indiana Jones movie has some idea of what the Ark of the Covenant may have looked like. Let us set aside the movie as we consider the genuine Ark and its role in the dwelling place of God.

The Ark was about 3 foot 9 inches long, 2 foot 3 inches high, and 2 foot 3 inches wide. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid inside and out with pure gold. Moses was instructed to place the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments inside the Ark. A seat was made to go on top of the Ark. This seat served as God's throne. It was made of pure gold overlaying acacia wood. There were two cherubim on each side of the seat's saddle, perhaps like armrests. The seat's saddle seems to have been the wings of the cherubim spread forth over the top of the lid. The seat/lid itself was called a "mercy seat." Above this mercy seat, atop the cherubim wings, God would meet Moses.

There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you... (Ex 25:22).

The Ark itself was holy as God's throne.²² As 1 Samuel 4:4 notes, the "LORD of hosts...is enthroned on the cherubim." The Ark was not to be touched by human hands, but had rings and poles for carrying and moving it. Even these poles were used under specific instructions.

from person to person, and some scholars think the cubit itself varied between two different sizes. The figures above, however, are fair approximations based on a cubit as roughly 1 ½ feet.

²² Mackie points out, "The OT virtually equates the ark of the covenant, and especially its lid, the mercy seat, with the throne of God." Mackie, Scott D., *Eschatology and Exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Mohr Siebeck 2007) at 166. He cites the 4Q Targum of Leviticus as replacing the Hebrew word for "mercy seat" with "throne."

The Table of Presence

Exodus 25:23 gives the instructions for the construction of the Table of Presence that was found in the holy area, just in front of the Holy of Holies. This table was about 3 feet long, 1 foot 6 inches wide, and 2 foot 3 inches high. It was also made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. The plates and dishes that went with it were pure gold as well.

This table received weekly twelve loaves of bread (as set out in Lev 24:5-24:9). These loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel. In the midst of the awe and beauty of the tabernacle and its altars, this table was a constant visual reminder that the people of God were continually before his presence.

The Altar of Incense

God instructed that the Israelites make an altar of incense of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. It was about 3 feet high and 1 foot 6 inches square in width. This altar stood in the Holy Place with incense burned before the presence of God and the Holiest Place. The High Priest was to burn special incense dedicated to God each morning and evening as he tended the lamps in the lampstand.

The Golden Lampstand

The Holy Place also held a golden lampstand. The lampstand was made with a central trunk and six “branches,” three out each side. The lampstand itself was a model of an almond tree in bloom. The cups were even made to look like almond blossoms.

The Tabernacle/Tent Curtains

The Tabernacle/tent had a front curtain as it was placed in the courtyard. This curtain served as the door or gate. It also blocked off the Holy Place from the general courtyard. God set out another curtain (also called a veil) to keep separate the Holiest Place from the Holy Place. The curtains that separated the Tabernacle/tent from the rest of the courtyard were embroidered with Cherubim.

The whole appearance and substance of the Tabernacle/Tent gives strong reminders of the Garden of Eden. The cherubim sat watch and guarded the entrance to the tabernacle (embroidered as they were on the curtain) much like the cherubim were set to guard the entrance to Eden, lest Adam and Eve sought to return and eat of the tree. The Cherubim guarded Eden from the East, as would these Cherubim when the tabernacle/tent was properly constructed facing east.²³ Eden itself was a place noted for its location to Havilah, a source of gold (Gen 2:11-2:12). Of course, all furnishings of the Holy Place and the Holiest Place were overlaid with gold. The two trees in Eden were the tree of

²³ The front of the Courtyard/Tabernacle/tent faced east according to Ex 27:13.

life, which many scholars see echoed in the construction of the lampstand as a fruiting almond tree, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This tree of knowledge of good and evil many scholars see echoed in the Ten Commandments placed within the Ark.

Whether the tabernacle is seen as a step to restore Eden, or as a reminder of Eden, or simply as a place where God would again speak with man, God set out the fixtures with precision.

Other Furnishings and Accoutrements

God instructed the Israelites to construct a bronze altar for the general courtyard. This was the altar where most sacrifices were made. While the fixtures in the holy areas of the tabernacle/tent were made of gold, as the distance from the throne increased, and as the proximity to the common people increased, the value of the materials used in construction moved from the rarer materials to the more common (gold closest to God, then silver and bronze).

God also instructed construction of a bronze basin for washing of the priests. There were other bronze tools constructed for use in the sacrifices.

God gave these most holy instructions to Moses while Moses was on the mountain. God showed Moses how these things should look. God called by name Oholiab and Bezalel as two Israelites in whom he had placed the skills to oversee and do this exacting work. God set this out with care to note the incredibly holy nature and the need for precision that should evoke great awe in the people.

During this same time, the people decided to make a god of their imagination (a calf) and had Aaron construct the idol in gold. With great partying and revelry, the people in an appalling, tawdry, self-devised fashion, created their idea of God and his worship that could not have been further from the holiness of what God was revealing to Moses.

Even as I type this, I wonder how often I substitute my own decisions about God, his character, his plans, and how I fit into them. May God have mercy upon us and upon the irreverence of our impetuosity, our self-centeredness, and our ignorance!

Hebrews 9:1-9:10; Hebrews 9:15-9:28

We turn now to the New Testament, and especially the book of Hebrews, to see insight into God's design given to Moses and the truth that lay behind the model. Scott Mackie correctly noted,

The Heavenly Sanctuary dominates the symbolic landscape of Hebrews.²⁴

²⁴ Mackie, at 155.

A study of Hebrews readily shows reasons for God's instruction that the Tabernacle/tent be built *exactly* as shown. Over and over Hebrews builds upon the earthly Tabernacle to explain and show the intercessory work of Christ as sacrifice and priest. The earthly Tabernacle/tent also provides the image for understanding the Heavenly Sanctuary as the actual throne of God.

This is a reason why God was so specific in his instructions to Moses:

[Those serving in the Tabernacle/Temple] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain" (Heb 8:5).

Hebrews goes on to explain that while the tabernacle was an earthly model of the LORD's true throne room, the Levitical priests that serviced that earthly model were only types of priests compared to Christ. Christ administered his new covenant as High Priest in the true throne room. Hebrews 9:24 explains,

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

So Christ is,

a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb 2:17);

as well as,

the high priest of our confession who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house (Heb 3:1).

While Jesus was faithful as was Moses, Christ is "worthy of more glory than Moses" as is fitting for the builder/owner of the house rather than simply a servant of the house (Heb 3:6).

Christ actually performed the true actions that were symbolized by the actions of the priests in the tabernacle (and subsequent temple) services. Christ did these in every way superior to the earthly forms that were under the Mosaic covenant.

Moses' covenant produced the tabernacle/tent that held the precious items of the lamp stand, and the table with the bread of the presence. These were holy items in a holy place (Heb 9:2). Behind a second curtain was a Most Holy Place that had the Ark with the tablets of covenant (the Ten Commandments), an urn with manna, Aaron's staff, the covering of the cherubim of glory above the mercy seat and immediately before the

curtain separating the Most Holy Place was a golden altar of incense.²⁵ But with all the holiness that was in these items and places, they were still representations, not the actual dwelling place of God. Christ served in the true presence of God and in this sense, Christ served in

...the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) (Heb 9:11).

Because Christ was in a greater and more perfect tent, it did not need the ritual sacrificial cleansing of the earthly Tabernacle/tent:

Thus it was necessary for the copy of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb 9:23-24).

Christ passed right through, not as a High Priest from Aaron's lineage, but a greater High Priest, one called by God for all time. Christ entered as a High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek. Christ did not pass through the image that was the earthly temple/tabernacle/tent. Christ passed through the actual heavens into the presence of God (Heb 4:14).

What does this mean for the person in Christ? Hebrews teaches several impacts on the believer. First, we have peace with God. Christ went as a forerunner on our behalf to make true intercession. Hebrews 7:25 explains:

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

This intercession is full and complete. Christ entered into the real throne room, and upon finishing his work,

He sat down at the right hand of God (Heb 10:12).

²⁵ This was actually the edge of the curtain, but in the holy place rather than the most holy place. See the discussion on the language of Hebrews at Koester, Craig R., *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*, The Catholic Bible Association of America (1989) at 175; Ellingworth, Paul, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Eerdmans 1993) at 425-427; Gheorghita, Radu, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews: An Investigation of its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2:3-4 in Heb 10:37-38* (Mohr Siebeck 2003) at 88-89. Gheorgita did his work cited here at Tyndale House, the place spoken of in the introduction to this lesson.

This gives the believer a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul (Heb 6:19). We have confidence to enter the true holy places ourselves by the blood of Jesus, with the assurance of faith and a conscience made clean. This allows us:

1. To draw near to God,
2. To hold fast our confession of hope without wavering, and
3. To stir one another up to good works as we assemble together in worship (Heb 10:19-25).

A second implication involves the new covenant established. Hebrews teaches that Christ exceeded the priest system in place through Moses, exceeded the sacrifices of that system, and served in the real sanctuary as opposed to the representative one given through Moses. In like manner, the covenant that Jesus brought forth exceeds and replaces the covenant of Moses.

Quoting Jeremiah 31:33 Hebrews explains,

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds (Heb 10:16).

Moses took the Israelites to the Promised Land, but the people were rebellious and, as God swore, never entered into his rest:

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’” (Heb 3:7-3:11).

This new covenant is a covenant of rest. This theme is repeated in Hebrews:

We who have believed enter that rest (Heb 4:3).

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his (Heb 4:8-4:10).

Hebrews expressed Stephen’s concern that the people of God, in the covenant relationship made possible through the work of Christ, not miss God’s rest like the Israelites did as they wandered through the wilderness for forty years. We have a compelling reason to “rest” in God. We can and should enjoy the peace in knowing God and being found in him with his righteousness.

Moses constructed, at God’s instructions, a place where the holy God would come into the midst of his people. Jesus has fulfilled the situation. He has now made us a holy people who can dwell in the midst of God!

Deuteronomy 3:21-3:29; 31:1-31:13; 33; 34

Moses passed away, unable to enter the Promised Land, but the people continued in the care of Joshua. They went into the land, taking the tabernacle with them. This is where Stephen next took his narrative as we will read in the next week’s lesson.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 21

1. Have you had people treat you rottenly, and seen God work through that either to make you who you need to be or to place you where you need to be?
2. Have you had an encounter with God and his holiness so great that you felt a need to remove your shoes in his presence? If not that, have you at least been shaken by a greater revelation of his awesomeness?
3. Idolatry! Not the kind where clay Barbie dolls are held in reverence, but the simple placement of something – anything – before God in your life. Have you found where you place idols?
4. Do you see Jesus as your deliverance not only from the bondage of sin, but deliverance into a life of promise? Are you willing to walk in obedience to experience that promise and the victorious life that goes with it?

Week Twenty-two Readings

<p>5/26 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 5-8</p>	<p>5/29 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 17-20</p>	<p>5/31 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 1-4 Prov 21:7-21:8</p>
<p>5/27 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 9-12</p>	<p>5/29 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 21-24 Num 32</p>	<p>6/01 Off</p>
<p>5/28 Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Josh 13-16</p>	<p>5/30-Stephen’s Speech Acts 7:45</p> <p>Judg 1-4</p>	