

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 24

June 9-15, 2014

Acts 7:45

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

Week Twenty-four Readings

6/9 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45	6/11 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45	6/13 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45
1 Sam 4:7:2 1 Sam 7:5-7:17 6/10 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Sam 10:17-14:52 Prov 21:27 Prov 19:19	1 Sam 15-17 6/12 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Sam 18 Prov 21:1-21:2 Prov 27:19-27:20 1 Sam 19 1 Sam 22 Prov 19:12, 23 Prov 20:19	1 Sam 23-25 6/14 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Sam 26-30 <i>6/15 Off</i>

STEPHEN'S SPEECH (Acts 7:45)

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 gave a synopsis in Acts. We give the greater storyline through the contextual readings.

READING PURPOSE: For the Jews, the “golden age” of faith was centered on the reign of King David. Yet even that reign had doubters and was filled with hatred and blood. While the Jews confronting Stephen were concerned with the temple, and were charging Stephen with teaching of a Jesus that undermined the temple, Stephen moved from the time of judges to the time of David, the great king who wanted to build the temple, but was not allowed. Yet David was not *without* God and God’s presence. This is because God was *never* limited to a building or place. We see the presence and faithfulness of God in David’s life as we unfold this week’s contextual readings.

June 9 1 Samuel 4:1-7:2; 7:5-17

The last judge of Israel was the prophet Samuel. Samuel also transitioned Israel from a time of judges as administrators and leaders to a monarchy with a king as leader. The contextual readings this day focus on experiences with the ark of the covenant.

With all due respect to Indiana Jones, the ark was never a magic box. It did not contain some magical power that held sway over those in its immediate environment. That is not to say that some superstitious people of the day didn’t consider it magical. But the Bible never portrays it as such, at least if read carefully.

This day’s reading is set in the time of the priest Eli, who is blind from old age and is basically in retirement. His sons, the “worthless” Hophni and Phinehas were acting on behalf of the people. At this point it is important to remember the verses from last week about these sons, especially 1 Samuel 2:12 that clarified,

Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.

Knowledge of the LORD was needed by Israel, but was lacking. Israel was steeped in the idolatry of its neighbors, trotting out the LORD as one of many gods they worshipped.

The Philistines and Israelites were fighting each other for control of the “Shephelah,” the foothills that transitioned from the Philistine controlled coast to the mountains of Judah. This was fertile ground useful for farming. It also contained north/south trade routes that provided significant financial opportunities. For Israel, this area also served as a last line of defense for its towns and cities in the hills of Judea.

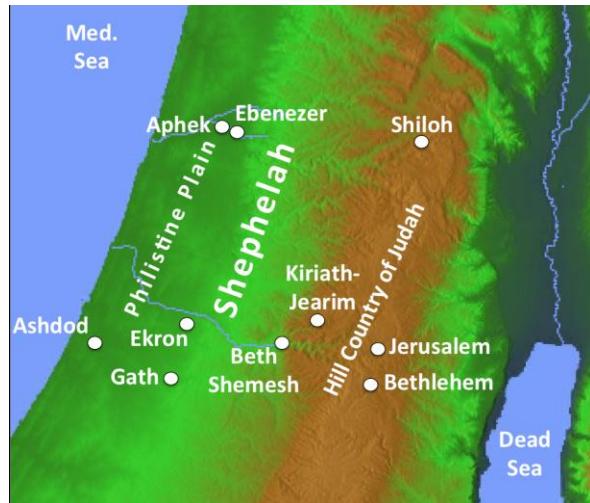
The Philistine forces encamped at Aphek while the Israelites were at Ebenezer. Israel lost the first engagement and the elders decided it was because the ark of the covenant was not taken into battle. The Israelites sent for the ark from Shiloh. Along with the ark came the “worthless” sons of Eli.

When the ark arrived in the camp, the Israelite soldiers were hyped up, shouting exuberantly. At first, the Philistines were afraid. Both sides seemed to think there was something magical about the ark. But the ark was not magic, the accompanying sons of Eli were not holy, and the Philistines again defeated the Israelites, this time capturing the ark. Both sons were killed and when news of their deaths reached Eli, he died also.

The Philistines took the ark the 35 miles from Ebenezer to Ashdod, one of their five major cities. They put the ark in their temple to Dagon (a fish-god), symbolically claiming that YHWH, the God of Israel had abandoned his people and was now properly in the Philistine pantheon. God reversed that message rather quickly, as the idol of Dagon was mysteriously thrown down losing its head and hands. The people of Ashdod (“Ashdodians”?) knew the ark should not stay there. SO they sent it to eh Philistine city of Gath.

Once the ark arrived in Gath, a disease broke out. Many modern scholars believe the results are the first documented records of a bubonic plague outbreak. A number of Philistines suffer from “inguinal buboes” prior to dying from the disease. The English Standard Version and the New International Version translates these buboes as “tumors” (I Sam. 5:6, 9, 11-12, etc.). “Buboes” are swellings and are the key symptom of the bubonic plague, which gets its name “bubonic” from the “buboes.” This plague is typically spread from the fleas that live and breed on infected rats. In the Samuel account, we read not only of the people dying from the plague, but also of the Philistines associating the plague with rats (I Sam. 6:4ff).

From Gath, the ark was sent to Ekron. Looking at the map gives a suggestion of what the Philistines were doing. Gods were considered territorial among most cultures of that day. Gods had a place where they “lived” and were “empowered.” YHWH was deemed to be Israel’s God, and as such was deemed to “live” in Israel. Seeing YHWH upset deep in Philistine territory, it looks as if the Philistines were moving YHWH back toward the Judean hills, getting as close as the Philistines could while still maintaining control.



Like the game “hot potato,” the Philistine towns passed the ark one to another getting ever closer to the hills. Finally the decision is made to send the ark back to Israel, including with it, gifts to appease YHWH. They managed to get the ark to Beth Shemesh where the Israelites took it back, with much rejoicing.

Those in Beth Shemesh learned the hard way that God was not to be trifled with, nor was the ark of his covenant. The ark was now given into the oversight of Samuel, who told the people to destroy their other gods and worship YHWH alone. Samuel set up his own “stone of help” as a monument to God’s help, naming it appropriately. In Hebrew, “stone of help” is *ebenezer*.

June 10 1 Samuel 10:17-14:52; Proverbs 21:27; 19:19

The people decided that they were in need of a king, and were no longer content to live under the oversight of God’s judges. Samuel warned the people of the inherent problems that came with a monarchy, but the people wanted a king regardless. In 1 Samuel 10, we read of Samuel calling the people together and anointing Saul king.

The people were to honor God as king, and their request for an earthly king was a direct affront to and rejection of God (1 Sam. 10:19). The people felt a need to have an earthly king take them into battle. They were not satisfied to trust God to supply their needs as they arose.

The process by which Saul was chosen king almost seems laughable. It shows the absurdity of the people’s desire to have almost anything in place of trust of the unseen YHWH. Samuel gathered representatives of the tribes together and cast lots to see which one was the “king tribe.” The lot fell to the tribe of Benjamin. Lots were then cast to see which clan from the Benjaminites and the Matrite clan was chosen. A third lot selected Saul from that clan, but he could not be located because he was scared and in hiding. Once found, the people saw Saul, who was one of the tallest Israelites, as reassuring.

Consider the absurdity – Israel would rather follow a tall, scared fellow picked by a roll of the dice than trust in the God who had saved them from Pharaoh, led them into the Promised Land, and delivered them over and over from their enemies. We might laugh if we weren’t often similar!

In the northeast of Israel, the Ammonites laid siege to the town of Jabesh-Gilead. Surrender would have come at the price of eyes being gouged out, so the townsfolk sent for help against the Ammonites. When Saul heard of the problems, the Spirit of God rushed upon him and he was incited to anger, setting out plans to rescue the town. Gathering Israelites, Saul went forth and defeated the Ammonites.

The people should have glorified YHWH, for it was his Spirit that worked through Saul. Instead, they were convinced they had made the right decision choosing a king, and celebrated, renewing the covenant with Saul and challenging his detractors. Samuel gave them an object lesson in the process of renewing Saul's appointment as king.

Samuel warned the people of potential downfalls associated with having a king, and then chided them for not understanding the true king over Israel, YHWH, even during the battle with the Ammonites (1 Sam. 12:12-13). Samuel gave the people direct, godly advice:

Do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty (1 Sam 12:20-21).

The storyline continues with Saul winning battles, but also failing to follow instructions about waiting for the LORD and his timing. This Saul did, all the while “sacrificing” as if he was appeasing God. God declared that Saul’s failures are moral failures that reflect his errant heart. As Proverbs 21:27 teaches, a sacrifice is only as good as the obedience and purity of the heart offering it. God declared that Israel’s next king would not simply be the tallest or the one selected by lot. The next king would be one after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).

In a foreshadowing of what is to come, Saul continues to rule, but his son Jonathan also begins to defeat troops of Philistines. In the process, we read of Saul making rash and senseless vows, including one Jonathan unknowingly violated (eating honey). This becomes a point of discord showing a lack of respect Jonathan had for his father. It also shows brashness and the jealousy of Saul for those close to him who were successful in battle. This is a sin that will entrap Saul over and over, as taught by Proverbs 19:19.

June 11-14 1 Samuel 15:1-19:24; 22:1-30:31

David's Anointing

Vision—what registers in our brain after processed by our eyes—is one of our senses we rely upon for more than navigating a street. This reliance can sometimes deceive us; there are “optical illusions.” In fact, by avoiding the optical illusion, sometimes those who are blind can see better than those with 20/20 vision! We witness the deception of sight in 1 Samuel where David is anointed as king.

Samuel was mourning the rejection of Saul as king over Israel when the LORD told Samuel to go anoint a new man as king. Although Samuel feared Saul’s reaction, he followed the LORD’s instructions:

Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons (1 Sam. 16:1).

The LORD further told Samuel that God would show him both what to do and declare whom he should anoint as king.

Once in Bethlehem, Samuel consecrated Jesse and invited Jesse and his sons to join his sacrifice to the LORD. This gave Samuel a chance to see the sons for himself. When Samuel saw Jesse's oldest son Eliab, he thought that surely he would be the one. Evidently Eliab was a tall fellow, as was Saul. The LORD then said to Samuel,

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

As the scene progressed, each of the seven available sons of Jesse passed before Samuel, but none were the LORD's choice. Samuel asked Jesse if these were all his sons and Jesse replied that the youngest was still out in the fields tending the sheep.

The youngest boy, David, then came before Samuel and Samuel laid eyes on him. David was "ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome." The LORD told Samuel to anoint David, and Samuel did so. David was the man "after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), a trait God had specified he would use after noting the failings of Saul. As David was anointed, the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, staying from that day forward.

This story prominently features a Hebrew word *r'h* meaning "to see." The passage directly illustrates the difference between what God sees and what man sees – even when that man is Samuel, a "seer" (1 Sam. 9:9).

The first time the verb "to see" is used is in verse one. The translation in the ESV reads, "for I have provided (*r'h*) for myself a king among his sons." A more literal translation might be "for *I have seen* for myself a king among his sons." God had seen among Jesse's sons one who would be king. Samuel was to go find that son.

The Hebrew of the story unfolds with the same verb "to see" used repeatedly as Samuel works to identify the right son. In verse six, Samuel "sees" (*r'h*) Eliab (translated as "looked") and thinks he has seen what God has seen!

Surely the LORD's anointed is before him (1 Sam. 16:6).

But Samuel's vision was off! The LORD explained to Samuel that he was gazing on *what he could see* (*r'h*). It is translated "do not look on his appearance." The word

“look” means to gaze or stare intently; it is the word “appearance” that is our same Hebrew word *r’h* used again. God then tells Samuel,

The LORD sees (*r’h*) not as man sees (*r’h*): man looks (*r’h*) on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks (*r’h*) in the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Man sees, literally, “as far as the eyes.” God, however, sees “as far as the heart.” Working with God’s vision, Samuel then lets each son pass before finally discerning David as the LORD’s choice. David is then anointed.

David and Goliath (Practical Tips for Fighting Giants)

Here please excuse me while I indulge in a personal story.

I was getting ready to try the first Vioxx case in the nation. The stakes were high. National and international media were in attendance trying to figure out the truth about this blockbuster drug, the health concerns, and the actions of the international company that developed and marketed the drug. The FDA had reported an unnecessary 88,000 to 120,000 heart attacks due to this drug, which meant our suit was the first one among thousands and thousands.

The drug company had dozens of lawyers from the biggest international firms, well known from all over the globe, for this two-month long fight in the courtroom in Angleton, Texas. My team was small, but we knew each other and had fought together in courtrooms before.

A New York lawyer who had a number of Vioxx cases came down to watch our case. This lawyer had a measure of success in New York, and as an older and more experienced lawyer, thought it his job to tell me what to do and how to do it. I remember before opening statement, which follows jury selection and signals the start of the trial, this lawyer telling me to “throw away your PowerPoint!” “Speak from the gut,” he told me. After I had politely ignored him, he then went to my team to enlist their support in persuading me to do things “his way.”

I sat this lawyer down and told him that while I was fine with his presence at the trial, I needed to have a heart-to-heart discussion with him. I said, “Let me tell you the story of David and Goliath.”

Here is the story I told him:

The Philistines had drawn up for battle against the Israelites. Each side did not dare charge the other side. Instead, the Philistines would daily send out a challenge. The giant name “Goliath” who hailed from the Philistine city of Gath would come out and

taunt the Israelites. “Don’t bother with the armies,” he would shout. “I will fight for my people, you send out your champion. Winner takes all!”

The Israelites cowered in fear from the giant. No one, not even the Israelite king, would accept the challenge. Then one day, the shepherd boy David was tending sheep when his father called him. David’s father sent him to the Israelite fighting camp with some food for David’s older brothers.

David happened to be on site when the Goliath came out and issued his daily taunt. While the Israelite army was “much afraid,” David’s reaction was 180 degrees different. David did not see it a personal taunt against him and his brothers. He understood that Goliath was really taunting God! David was stunned that Goliath was so stupid! You can see David elbowing his brothers as he asked, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

Word got back to King Saul that David wanted to fight the Philistine so Saul had David brought before him. Saul pointed out the obvious – how was young, little David going to fight the giant Philistine man of war? David replied that David had fought lions and bears by the strength of God, the uncircumcised Philistines would have even less chance, having taunted God!

Saul decided to let David go into the battle with his blessing. Saul himself was a fearsome warrior, and he had the best armor of Israel. Saul then took his armor and put it on David so that David could go into battle with the same tools as the king of Israel. David tried on Saul’s armor, his helmet, his mail-coat, and even his sword. But David couldn’t even walk well!

David then took the armor off and politely declined wearing it. He explained to Saul, “I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.” David then went down to the brook, chose five smooth stones, and the rest is history!¹

Having recounted the story, I then moved into commentary. “Ben,” I said, “You may not believe this story. But that does not matter. I believe it, and it has an effect on the way I practice. So I ask you to listen while I explain how.”

¹ We must add to this story something I left out when speaking to the lawyer. There was some tremendous trash talking between Goliath and David. As David went out, Goliath cursed David asking, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” Goliath was likely referencing David’s staff he had taken into battle. David responds profoundly, “You come to me with a sword and a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied” (1 Sam. 17:43-45).

A second interesting note is the blasphemy of Goliath and his curses were subject to one penalty in the Law of Moses: “Whoever blasphemers the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him” (Lev. 24:16). David had yet another reason to hurl the stone!

I continued, “I appreciate that you have good battle experience. I also appreciate that I am going into a battle that the odds say I will lose. I understand that losing has implications for you and all others involved in this war. But Ben, I have fought before. And I do not go into this battle without believing I have truth on my side. By the grace of God, I will go into this battle with the weapons I have used before, weapons that work for me, weapons that I have tested (including PowerPoint!) with a team whose counsel I value and trust. By the grace of God, these weapons have sustained me in my battles before, and if I am to win this battle, they will sustain me here.”

I then told him that he was there to watch, and that I was glad to have his advice, but once I made my decision, he needed to accept it.

After we won that case, I was put on a speaker’s circuit to go around the nation and teach lawyers what we did and “how we won.” All around the country I got to tell thousands of lawyers the story of David and Goliath. I explained the importance of going into battle with the weapons that are tested (first and foremost being the Lord!). Our wars may not make the Bible, or even the news, but our giants are no less real, and our weapons no less strong.

Saul and David

What drives you? What are the motivations for your actions? As we look at our past, we can typically see a variety of motivations behind our actions, some good, others not.

The 20th century psychologist Abraham Maslow rose to fame for setting a pyramid model to explain peoples’ motivations. The base of the pyramid set out the most basic and fundamental needs of breathing, sleep, water, and food. Maslow theorized that only after those needs were met could people then seek to fulfill higher level needs like security, rules to guide actions, and the need for order. Beyond that level (going up the pyramid) there were needs of love, affection, belongingness and freedom from fear. If all those needs are met, people can live out of a higher position on the ladder, self-respect and esteem of others. After all these needs are met, people can reach the top of the pyramid and live out of motivations of fulfilling their abilities and other self-actualization needs.



I am not certain that Maslow’s pyramid is accurate for the Spirit-filled Christian, but I have seen a good bit of support for it in the basic unregenerate nature of man. Why we

do what we do is a pertinent question when we examine the relationship of Saul and David.

The relationship begins with Saul out of his mind, and David playing his harp to bring a measure of solace to Saul. Needing relief from pain and lack of sleep (Maslow's lowest most basic level - physical needs) keeps Saul from being worried of much else. It was a basic need that God met through David, and life was fine. Saul trusted and enjoyed David's presence in his life (I Sam. 16:14-23).

Working up the pyramid, we see Saul's "physical needs" met, but his "security needs" endangered. The Philistines are waging a war and their giant has struck fear into the hearts of Saul and his army. Saul offers a great reward to anyone who can meet this security need. Saul offers a daughter in marriage to the man who can resolve this second level problem.

Enter David. Just as David met Saul's first level Physical Needs, so he meets Saul's second level Security Needs. David kills Goliath and, true to Maslow's pyramid, resolution of Saul's security needs just bumps Saul's motivation up the ladder to his social needs.

Saul doesn't let David return home after the Goliath encounter. Saul keeps David around as part of his family, still using David for military missions to keep the security problems at bay. David becomes a brother to Saul's son Jonathan, eats at the king's table, and found success at all the chores Saul set before him.

With Saul's Physical Needs, Security Needs, and Social Needs met, Maslow's insight indicates that the unregenerate man will then address his Esteem Needs. This need of respect and esteem from others is an area where David never could help Saul. David would fight the Philistines and return. The success was David's, however, not Saul's.

As David returned from one battle engagement, women began dancing in the street in celebration singing,

Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands (1 Sam. 18:6).

This enraged Saul. Rather than meet Saul's esteem needs, David was hindering them. Saul was determined and motivated to meet these needs, so his jealous anger did not go dormant. Instead, it stoked into a fire of destruction. Saul sought to kill David in an effort to be more secure and esteemed.

Multiple times Saul sought to kill David. He threw spears, he sent David on military missions that should not have succeeded, and he tried to have David accosted, but each effort failed. David was saved by good reactions, by Saul's daughter (David's wife

Michal), and even by Jonathan, Saul's son. Saul never resolves the problems with David; they plagued him till he died.

The motivations of Saul stand in the storyline in stark opposition to the motivations of David. David, filled with God's Spirit, does not act at all in accord with Maslow's pyramid. Over and over David sacrificed personal safety in an effort to live as he perceived right before God. David had reason and Maslow-ian motivation to kill Saul. The opportunity presented itself many times. David was not safe as long as Saul was alive. Samuel had already anointed David king. David had a military following. Yet, in spite of all this David left Saul unharmed, explaining to Saul and those within earshot:

Some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, "I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed...I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it (1 Sam. 24:10-11).

The motivation that guided David was walking right before God. It trumped his safety, his security, and his home life. David was truly a man after God's heart, not his own selfishness.

The end of the story is well known. Every effort Saul made against the will of the Lord just backfired. David's actions, meanwhile, simply met God's will in God's timing. Saul eventually left the earth and David's kingship came into its own.

David and Jonathan – A Story of Close Friendship

The story of David and Jonathan is a story of friendship without equal.

From the beginning, David and Jonathan connected on a personal level. This was not simply a friendship of convenience where they enjoyed doing things together. After David was brought into Saul's household upon Goliath's death we read that,

The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul (1 Sam. 18:1).

As one cloth was sewn to another, so Jonathan's soul was attached to David. Reading the stories gives good reasons why this might be so. Both David and Jonathan were devout and faithful. They both waged war out of a deep conviction that God was behind them. Jonathan was not jealous of David's achievements, but sought to build David up even higher. Jonathan continually looked out for David's good, even when Jonathan's father Saul sought to destroy David.

This friendship manifested itself over and over. When Saul told Jonathan and others to kill David, Jonathan went to David and told him of the conspiracy (1 Sam. 19:1-2).

Jonathan tried to facilitate reconciliation between David and Saul. While the reconciliation worked for a time, Saul soon returned to his murderous schemes.

David fled Saul, but always felt comfortable coming to Jonathan to ask for help or information. David saw that Saul was concerned over the relationship and was likely hiding his murderous plans from Jonathan. David was comfortable telling these concerns to Jonathan who, instead of denying it, listened to David with a willingness to “check it out!”

As the two tried to figure out the relationship in the midst of the treachery of Saul, David promised Jonathan that he would maintain love for Jonathan’s house, even if something happened to Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:14).

At one point, Saul got so angry over Jonathan’s allegiance to David that Saul threw a spear at Jonathan! (1 Sam. 20:33). Jonathan fled his father in fierce anger and reported the depth of Saul’s horrible hatred and planned evil for David. It was a visit of tears and renewed oaths for the love and protection of each other and each other’s offspring. It was the last time we know of them seeing each other.

Over a year later, Saul and Jonathan warred against the Philistines near Mount Gilboa. The battle did not go well. Jonathan and his brothers were slain, and Saul was badly wounded by an arrow. Out of fear of what the Philistines would do if Saul were overtaken still alive, he fell upon his own sword, committing suicide (1 Sam. 31:1-6).

Looking ahead to next week’s readings, we read that when David found out about the deaths, he wept, fasted and mourned. David then wrote and sang a song of lamentation over Jonathan and Saul, with special verses for Jonathan, set out in 2 Samuel 1:25-27:

*How the mighty have fallen in battle!
Jonathan lies slain on your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
Very pleasant you have been to me; your love to me was extraordinary,
Surpassing the love of women.
How the mighty have fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!*

While the people then anointed David king of Israel, Saul’s general (Abner) instead made Saul’s 40-year old remaining son Ish-bosheth, king. Other than Ish-bosheth, a survivor from Saul’s household was a crippled son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 4:4-5). A nurse took this son into hiding upon the death of Saul and Jonathan.

This started a civil war that lasted some time. There were betrayals back and forth and a number of deaths on both sides. Eventually many key supporters of Saul’s son Ish-bosheth abandoned the cause. Two brothers “sons of Rimmon” then planned and

assassinated Ish-bosheth, bringing the civil war to an end, and at the age of 30, David began his full reign over Israel.

Years later, David found out that his friend Jonathan had a surviving son who was crippled. David asked the people to bring him forward. Mephibosheth was five when his father was killed, and we do not know his age when he was brought to David, but David remembered well his oath with Jonathan:

Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.” And he paid homage and said, “What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?” (2 Sam. 9:7-8).

David and Jonathan’s friendship was kept even through death.

Proverbs 21:1-2; 27:19-20; 19:12, 23; 20:19

A number of proverbs speak to kings and those in authority. They recognize that those who hold power and sway over others are both in a position of greater responsibility (think of Jesus’ lesson that to whom much is given, much is expected) and in a position where the power can go to one’s head. Proverbs provide good warning and insight to those so positioned. While not many of us become kings today, it does not change the lessons and values we can learn from these proverbs.

David knew firsthand that a king’s wrath was fearsome while his favor was delightful (Prov. 19:12).

These proverbs were selected as ones that key off David being a man “after God’s heart” in contrast to Saul who wasn’t.

Proverbs 21:1 speaks of the ways of kings being trumped by the decisions of God. Though a king may think himself the top of the heap, God is always greater. In Proverbs 21:2 we have the added thought that the ways of all people, not only kings, may seem to be the ways that are right in each person’s eyes, but still God trumps those ways. God is the ultimate arbiter of right as well.

Proverbs 27:19-20 teach that the heart is the essence of the person. We are not measuring ourselves by our IQ’s, education, or head knowledge. Our hearts reflect who we truly are – compassionate or uncaring, courageous or cowarding, faithful or faithless, at peace or unsatisfied. Proverbs 19:23 teaches the importance of fearing the Lord in life. It actually “satisfies” because we hold in awe the one to whom we have given control!

An added proverb speaks to a key for friendship. Proverb 20:19 lays a foundation for trust between people teaching the importance of keeping confidence over being an untrustworthy babbler.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 24

These lessons open up many areas for discussion. We list a few questions to start the discussions.

1. Do you ever want or expect God to be a magic God? Is there some way or place where you think God is obligated to act on your behalf? Where can we confidently say God *will* or *has* acted on our behalf?
2. How is your patience with God? Do you force your own solutions to your problems without first seeking God and his solution? If you know what God would have you do, do you ever choose to go about the problem with your own solutions anyway?
3. What areas of your life are you living out of what you see versus what God sees? How does faith get involved in this “vision issue”?
4. Tools for battle – David had his both tried and tested. Do you have yours? Are they tools of faith? Many live their lives without seeking or relying on God in day-to-day affairs, and then when an earth-shattering event happens, when a scary illness or other tragedy looms, they seek God, but have no real experience with God to fall back on. What are your experiences that will sustain you on stormy days ahead?

AN ALTERNATE TEACHING LESSON

READING PURPOSE: Because multiple teachers in multiple classes are using this material, we offer a teaching option outside of simply working through the narrative vis-à-vis the David option. Many are familiar with the stories of David, especially that of Goliath, and yet they come across secular material produced and endorsed by some contemporary academicians that challenge the Biblical authenticity. We change the approach of the lesson for the David stories to consider them in this light, seeing that the challenge of some is not some indisputable truth denied only by those willing to leave logic and research outside of some blind faith.

Our goal in studying these issues needs to be one of faith and intellectual integrity. I believe the two go hand in hand. Several years ago, I received an unusual email from a man who visited our class through the Internet. He suggested that we should not spend time examining the archaeological record because it would lead us opposite of our faith. This is not because he thinks our faith is wrong. This is because he thinks God has

purposely allowed archaeology to develop in ways that mislead people so that people will make decisions on faith rather than evidence!

I strongly disagreed with the gentleman. I explained to him that our God is at work revealing himself, not playing a game of “gotcha!” I added that archaeology is not the tool we should use to “prove the Bible.” It is a tool for better understanding the Bible. The obverse is also true, however. Archaeology cannot be characterized as disproving the Bible. For try as people might, archaeology does not disprove Scripture. It might disprove some peoples’ interpretations of Scripture, but that is a different thing altogether.

This is more and more apparent as one spends time reading the sensational headlines of some who seem more bent on flashy stories of Biblical denial than on real scholarship. There is pseudo-scholarship in most every field, where people pronounce edicts to read their names in the headlines when they truly do not know what they are talking about.

A case in point—some time ago, I was reading the news on the Internet and I came across a piece written by Bart Ehrman.² The piece was entitled, “Who Wrote the Bible and Why it Matters.” Ehrman began his piece with an opinion stated as an obvious fact:

Apart from the most rabid fundamentalists among us, nearly everyone admits that the Bible might contain errors -- a faulty creation story here, a historical mistake there, a contradiction or two in some other place.

Ehrman then goes on to suggest that the “problem is worse than that.” He asserts the Bible is “full of lies.”

Now one might fairly ask, why is this a big deal? Who cares what Bart Ehrman says? In response, we should note that Ehrman is a professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He teaches religion, and reportedly has hundreds of students each semester in his Introduction to the New Testament class.³ He is also a well-published author who constantly writes books on the subject. These are not what I would call scholastic books, but generally more of an effort to publish popular books that parade as academia.⁴ A prime example is his newest book entitled, *Forged: Writing in the Name*

² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bart-d-ehrman/the-bible-telling-lies-to_b_840301.html.

³ http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/living/2014637335_web_bibles31.html.

⁴ There is an ironic humor in Ehrman’s assertion that those who do not agree with him are scholastic lightweights. “Look at their credentials. None of them teaches at state universities, Ivy League schools or prominent four-year liberal-arts colleges. People with those views would never get a job at UNC.” (http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/living/2014637335_web_bibles31.html). In reply, one might suggest Ehrman listen to the lecture given by Dr. Peter Williams at the Lanier Theological Library and posted on the website www.LanierTheologicalLibrary.org. Williams directly refutes Ehrman’s views on

*of God — Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are.*⁵ Ehrman also teaches Christianity and Bible in “The Great Courses” series.

Ehrman’s views are built on personal readings of the Bible, which are not necessarily fair readings of the text. He and others frequently assert as “fact” what are really “personal interpretations” of archaeology. Our goal should be to try and find fair readings of both the Biblical text and archaeology. One can read the Bible in a way that contradicts archaeological findings, or one can read the Bible fairly and find it consistent with archaeology. One can also interpret archaeological finds in a way that is inconsistent with one’s reading of Scripture, or one can interpret them in ways that are consistent with a fair reading of Scripture.

Our goal and approach, then, is to first make sure we are reasonable with Scripture, understanding it for what it says as opposed to what others say it says! In this section, we will then consider some key archaeological finds relevant to our study.

In this study of archaeology and the early monarchy, our focus narrows most carefully on King David. (In Hebrew, “king” is *mlk* – מלך and pronounced “melek.”).

The December 2010 National Geographic cover story pictures David and Goliath and introduces the article entitled “Kings of Controversy.” The subtitle to the article asks:

Was the kingdom of David and Solomon a glorious empire—or just a little cow town? It depends on which archaeologist you ask.⁶

The article notes that the “old-school proposition … that the Bible’s description of the empire established under David and continued by his son Solomon is historically accurate”⁷ has been under assault for the last 25 years. The critics of the Bible consistently point out that “despite decades of searching, archaeologists had found no solid evidence that David or Solomon ever built anything.”⁸

The article pits the views of Eilat Mazar against Israel Finkelstein, noting, “In no other part of the world does archaeology so closely resemble a contact sport.” The article

Biblical authorship. Williams also teaches Biblical Hebrew at Cambridge University—a far cry from UNC!

⁵ Ehrman, Bart, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God — Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*, (Harper 2011).

⁶ Girard, Greg, “Kings of Controversy,” *National Geographic*, (Dec. 2010) at 67.

⁷ *Ibid.* at 72-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

highlights disputes among scholars about whether or not there was a King David and if so what kind of king he may have been. Finkelstein considers him,

A raggedy upstart akin to Pancho Villa, and his legion of followers more like ‘500 people with sticks in their hands shouting and cursing and spitting—not the stuff of great armies of chariots described in the text.’⁹

Among the issues probed by the article is a discovery relevant in light of the famous David and Goliath story of the Bible. It is not the finding of huge bones. (Every year or so, an internet hoax circulates claiming to have found giant bones like goliath. Those “photos” are really the result of a “Photoshop” contest rather than real photos.) It centers on a simple reference to a city named “Shaaraim,” referenced in 1 Samuel 17:52 where, after David defeated Saul in the Valley of Elah we read,

And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron.

Earlier in the chapter, the battle is placed in clear geographic terms.

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle. And they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes-dammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered, and encamped in the Valley of Elah, and drew up in line of battle against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them (1 Sam. 17:1-3).

Today, scholars can easily locate most every place mentioned. In fact, a quick tour in Israel under the care of Hal Ronning (greatest tour guide/biblical scholar east of the Atlantic!) will have one picking up rocks from the streambed between the mountains.¹⁰ The exception to knowing the locales in the Goliath story is the town of Shaaraim. Its location and existence has befuddled scholars for a long time.

Recently deceased Professor Anson Rainey was the principal author of the leading Atlas locating sites like these.¹¹ Rainey was Professor of Historical Geography at Bar-Ilan

⁹ Ibid., at 73, 75.

¹⁰ Hal fairly warns those he guides that many of the rocks being picked up from the streambed are brought in by truck for tourists! While there are natural rocks that would arise geologically there, the number of tourists would quickly dilute the number of rocks!

¹¹ Rainey, Anson and Notley, R. Steven, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World*, (Carta 2006), at 12. This atlas is a first rate scholastic production by first-rate scholars. It is thoroughly footnoted and was brought up to date in 2006, timely in light of Rainey passing away February 2011.

University in Israel. Walking through the geographical details of the account with thorough explanations of *how* we know what we know, Rainey wrote,

...the geographical details of the narrative...reflect a first-hand knowledge of the terrain.¹²

As to the identification and location of Shaaraim, however, Rainey's 2006 publication notes,

Shaaraim has not been identified but according to the list of towns in the northern Shephelah district (Josh 15:33-36), which has been shown to run clockwise, it comes after Azekah and is most likely somewhere between Azekah and Beth-shemesh.¹³

One other insight we get from the Biblical reading is the name of Shaaraim. The name is the dual form of the noun meaning "gate." In this form, the meaning of the name itself is "two gates."

There is scant Biblical reference to Shaaraim. None of the passages seem to make any theological difference, absent some early church Alexandrian-esque allegorical reading. Yet from a "is the Bible authentic and reliable history?" perspective, the location provides ready fodder for the Biblical critic; hence, its inclusion in the National Geographic article.

From the perspective of the "minimalist" critic (a term assigned to academics who find minimal truth in historical accuracy of the Old Testament accounts), Shaaraim produces a number of arguments against Scripture. Consider these arguments:

- There is no evidence of a town called Shaaraim.
- For that matter, there are no Judean towns anywhere in that region or time period that even had two gates (the meaning of "Shaaraim").
- At most David was warlord, never "king." He kept a rag tag band of followers who could not and did not have substantial towns or fortresses. Israelites were mountain villagers at best during the early Iron Age (1000BC).
- Writing was not common enough among the settling nomads now called "Israelites" to secure any type of record that would adequately convey accurate memories for later inclusion in a "Bible."

¹² *Ibid.* at 147.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Armed with this Biblical understanding and the assertions of critics, we look now to the archaeological evidence.

As stated earlier, Rainey noted that as of 2006, scholars were not able to identify Shaaraim among any ruins in Israel, especially in the region assigned to it by the David and Goliath story. That situation changed in 2008.

In 2008, at a site called “Khirbet Qeiyafa,” archaeologist Yosef Garfinkel conducted a limited six-week dig sponsored by the Institute of Archaeology at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This site has since revealed a great deal of evidence supporting the conclusion of Garfinkel and a number of other scholars that the ruins are those of the Biblical Shaaraim.¹⁴

There are multiple reasons for scholars to assign this ruin as Biblical Shaaraim. The evidence uncovered so far from the dig includes:

- The location is 2 kilometers east of the Biblical town Azekah and 2.5 kilometers northwest of Biblical Socoh. This is the area that would be expected for Shaaraim.
- The town has a gate that is “the most massive gate ever found in any biblical city to date.”¹⁵ It is certainly one noteworthy feature of the town.
- The town has a second gate, and by definition is a town of “shaaraim” (“two gates”). This is unique. Garfinkel notes that this is “the only site in the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel with two gates. Even cities three or four times its size, such as Lachish and Megiddo, have only a single gate.”¹⁶
- The ruins do not reflect many layers of settlement like Jericho and other such sites. This site reflects only a very limited single layer settlement from the Iron Age along with a brief thin layer of settlement dating much later in the Hellenistic (Greek) age. The Iron Age settlement is on bedrock, so it was not built upon an earlier site. Garfinkel notes this indicates “a single phase of Iron Age settlement lasting for a short period of time, probably not more than 20 years.”¹⁷

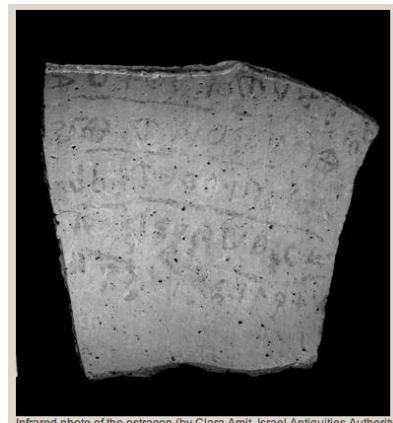
¹⁴ Garfinkel, Yosef and Ganor, Saar, “Khirbet Qeiyafa: Sha’arayim,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, Vol. 8, art. 22 (2008).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* at 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, at 2.

- There were four burnt olive pits that were sent to Oxford for radiocarbon dating. Those samples show it more likely than not that the settlement time for the site was between 1000 and 969 BC. Those dates fit into the time of King David, but are too early for King Solomon (who assumed the throne around 965 BC.)
- The pottery found on location also dates the site to the same time era (early Iron Age IIA).
- A most amazing find, which garnered a great deal of attention in the press, is the discovery of a pottery shard with writing in ink. The five-line writing is in an early Canaanite script, but the language is Hebrew, making this the earliest Hebrew inscription ever found.¹⁸ Scholars differ over the exact translation of the five lines, but the mere presence of Hebrew writing at this early stage has radical implications for those who dismiss the idea of accurate Biblical reporting from that era.
- A “massive casemate city wall” made of megalithic stones surrounded the town (700 meters long and 4 meters wide). These stones frequently weighed four to five tons each, and the eastern gate has stones weighing ten tons each. “It was clearly a fortified town rather than a rural settlement.”¹⁹ Garfinkel opines that,



Infrared photo of the ostraca (by Clara Amit, Israel Antiquities Authority).

The 4th line contains the Hebrew letters *m-l-k*. It is the word “king.”

The massive construction of the Khirbet Qeiyafa city wall, which required 200,000 tons of stone, and the massive eastern gate of the city with two stones of ca. 10 tons each, proclaim the power and authority of a centralized political organization, namely a state.²⁰

Biblical Archaeology Review’s Editor Hershel Shanks offers a more biting assessment:

The circular casemate wall around the hilltop fort required more than 200,000 tons of boulders. Some of the megalithic ashlar in the city’s carefully designed four-chambered gates weigh almost 5 tons. Try lifting these. It took a well-organized, technologically proficient state society to

¹⁸ See, Shanks, Hershel, “Oldest Hebrew Inscription Discovered in Israelite Fort on Philistine Border,” *Biblical Archaeological Review*, March/April 2010 at 51ff.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* at 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

construct something like this. This fort was not built by some tribal chiefdom. Qeiyafa is thus a powerful antidote to scholars like Tel Aviv University's Israel Finkelstein, who claims that Judah never existed as a state in the tenth century and that the "kingdom" of David and Solomon was a tribal chiefdom at most.²¹

Garfinkel offers a compelling conclusion to his findings, asserting that contrary to the Biblical cynics:

The biblical text, the single-phase city at Khirbet Qeiyafa, and the radiometric dates each stand alone as significant evidence clearly indicating that the biblical tradition does bear authentic geographical memories from the 10th century BCE Elah Valley. There is no ground for the assumption that these traditions were fabricated in the late 7th century BCE or in the Hellenistic period.

Furthermore, the five-line inscription uncovered at Khirbet Qeiyafa clearly indicates that writing was practiced in this region. Thus, historical memory could have been passed down for generations, until finally being summarized as the biblical text.²²

Assessment

If these ruins are in fact remnants of a Judean Fortress/town, whether they are Shaaraim or not, it denies the theory of Finkelstein and others. Finkelstein would have the world believe that in the tenth century BC there was no Judean civilization or culture advanced and organized enough to build such a structure. Finkelstein argues vociferously against the identification of this structure as Judean or Israelite, whether Shaaraim or not.

Finkelstein's defensiveness is readily apparent in the interview he gave to the National Geographic writer. The writer notes Finkelstein response with words like "venom," "mocking," and "snickering." The writer adds that Finkelstein's "many rebuttal papers and his sarcastic tone reflect that defensiveness, and his arguments at times seem a bit desperate."²³

Setting his tone aside, we should still address Finkelstein's arguments. He asserts that Khirbet Qeiyafa was not Judean but reflects Philistine presence. Finkelstein presents no positive evidence from the dig to support his argument. He merely tries to refute the evidence contrary to his assertion. Garfinkel takes on Finkelstein with direct evidence:

²¹ *BAR* at 51.

²² *Ibid.*, at 6.

²³ Girard at 87.

- The arrangement of the walls with the abutment of private houses is not seen in Philistine society.
- There are hundreds of bones present reflecting the food of the community. The bones are all from cattle, goats, sheep, and fish (they are all *kosher*.) There are no remains from pigs, which was a staple of the Philistine diet, and are typically found in all Philistine excavations. In fact, this is typically the sign the dig *is* of a Philistine ruin.
- The pottery piece has writing that uses Semitic verbs in a way that is not found outside the Hebrew language.

Finkelstein admits that the absence of pig bones is “a gun, but not a smoking gun.”²⁴ Finkelstein claims that the inscription must be from Gath (with no apparent explanation about why the inscription is using exclusively Hebrew verbs.) Finkelstein is particularly defensive about the carbon 14 dating telling the National Geographic writer,

Look, you’ll never catch me saying, ‘I’ve found one olive pit at a stratum at Megiddo [a site where Finkelstein digs], and this olive pit—which goes against hundreds of carbon-14 determinations—is going to decide the fate of Western civilization.

Of course, one can readily see that Finkelstein is arguing for effect here rather than accuracy. On a factual level, his statement borders on nonsense. There were not “one olive pit,” there were four. Each one gives the same basic range of age for the site. Furthermore the aging is simply confirmation of what the pottery has indicated (which is the typical way for dating such finds). Also, the site was occupied only a short time, so we are not trying to decide if the olive pits came during one age of occupation or another. Still more, there are not “hundreds” of other carbon-14 results that argue against Garfinkel’s opinions. In fact, there are no other carbon-14 dates from this site even relevant to the issue. One cannot help but believe if these four findings tested out to *support* Finkelstein, he would be trumpeting their reliability from the highest rooftops.

In light of this we ask, are the ruins of Khirbet Qeiyafa the ruins of Biblical Shaaraim? We cannot know for certain at this point. But the current state of evidence certainly makes it more likely than not. Furthermore, the argument that there was no Hebrew literacy at the time of David, and that there was no adequate civilization and community for state-like construction of fortresses are simply not valid in light of the clearly dated affirmative findings of the City of Two Gates!

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Week Twenty-five Readings

6/16 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Sam 31 1 Chron 9:35-10:14 2 Sam 1-2	6/18 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 2 Sam 7-10 6/19 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Chron 11-13 6/20 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Chron 14-15 1 Chron 17-18	6/21 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 1 Chron 19-20 2 Sam 11-12 Prov 19:22, 25 Im 51 <i>6/22 Off</i>
6/17 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:45 2 Sam 3-6		