

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 6

John 3:1-3:36

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

Week Six Readings

Feb. 3-5 Jesus & Nicodemus
Jn 3:1-21

2/3

Jn. 3:1-6

Context: Jews were well versed in physical birth and genealogy. They also had indications in the Old Testament of something more. Contrast the first two context readings with the third.

1 Chron 3
Ex. 22:29-30
Ezek 36

Jn. 3:7-8

Context: Jesus' words readily echo Old Testament passages. Look for the echo in these.

Eccle 11:5
Prov 30:4
Prov 20:12
Ps 139

2/4

Jn 3:9-15

Context: Jewish knowledge of the Old Testament would inform Nicodemus and others of the dread of God's wrath.

Jer 5
Isa 30
Isa 52
Nm 21

2/5

Jn. 3:16-21

Context: While sin and disobedience brings wrath and death, Jesus brings salvation.

Rom 5
Hb 2:1-2
Dt 23:2-14, 19-25
Dt 24:4-25:4
Dt 25:11-19
Hb 2:3-4
Rm 1:16-17

Feb. 6-7 John models humility
Jn. 3:22-30

Context: We see in this passage of John the Baptist a model of humility. The Old Testament had much to say about the value of humility and the harms of pride.

2/6

Jn. 3:22-30

Ps 18
Ps 25
Ps 147
2 Chron 6-7

2/7

Jn. 3:22-30

1 Pt 5
1 Chron 21
Isa 23
Prov 16:19
Prov 21:4
Ezek 28:1-10

Feb. 8-10 The Prophetic Ministry and Salvation from Wrath
Jn 3:31-36

2/8

Jn 3:31-36

Context: The "wrath" of the Lord was a real concept deeply experienced and taught in Jewish history

2 Chr 34
2 Chrn 36:1-15
Jer 13
2 Chrn 36:16-21
Lam 1-2

2/9

off

JESUS AND NICODEMUS (John 3:1-21)

This well-known story of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus has what is likely the most memorized verse in the Bible, John 3:16. The contextual overlays for the passage give three days of material that help give back ground, but also provide different lenses through which the Nicodemus story gives meaning.

Contrast of 1 Chronicles 3 and Exodus 22:29-30 with Ezekiel 36

1 Chronicles 3 is simply a list of the descendants of King David. There is no magic in the list, but it is put here to emphasize two things. First, the Jews were very careful about genealogy. Lineage was important. It is what made a Jew a Jew, the chosen people of God. It also separated the Jews into tribes, something that could affect vocation as well as inheritance rights. Birth order was also important as first born sons were specially dedicated to the Lord (Ex. 22:29-30).

Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel. When Nicodemus thought of birth events, he thought in these terms. Genealogies, inheritance, God's chosen people, all of these ideas were pregnant in the birthing concept. This is the way Nicodemus thought. So when Jesus said someone must be born anew (or "from above"), Nicodemus kept thinking in his terms of biology. Jesus chided Nicodemus that as a teacher of Israel, he should know better. He should know there is a spiritual perspective that exceeds the earthly one. That comes from passages like Ezekiel 36.

Ezekiel 36 is prophetic to a time when the Jews would return from their exile in Babylon, discussed last week in the issues relevant to the rebuilding of the temple. In the first third of Ezekiel 36, we read that God will re-inhabit Judah and its villages with Jews. The second third speaks of God's motivation – that he will do this NOT because the Jews were worthy. They weren't. They had dishonored God and his holy name time after time after time. Yet it was the FACT of God and his holy name, that would cause God to bring the Jews back. In a sense, God because of God's character, was going to rebirth the Jews into their lands.

Here the last third of Ezekiel 36 comes to bear. God would do this, not simply as a physical matter. God was going to provide a spiritual rebirth. God was going to "sprinkle clean" the Jews and give them "a new heart" and a "new spirit" ((Eze. 36:25-27). God was going to cleanse his people and give them this new start and new life.

Ecclesiastes 11:5

Jesus' comment that Nicodemus should not marvel, but should realize that as he didn't know where and how the wind was blowing, so he didn't know where and how God's

Spirit was working. This comment is linked specifically to matters of birth in the Ecclesiastes passage which links our lack of understanding of the spirit coming to a child in the womb to a lack of understanding of God at work. That is the key to Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus. God was at work. All of us need the work of God in our lives. That is being born "from above" or "again."

Proverbs 30:4; 20:12

Jesus furthered his discussion with Nicodemus by noting that no one had ascended into heaven, and descended *from* heaven except "the Son of Man." Again this should not have been alien language to a teacher of the Jews. From their wisdom literature we have the words of Proverbs 30:4 asking the very question, "Who has ascended to heaven and come down? This passage is particularly relevant because the answer is inherent in each succeeding question, "Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name?" The answer, of course, is "YHWH God." Yet notice the follow-up to "what is his name?" in the proverb. "What is *his son's* name?" Jesus notes it to be the Son of Man, a title Jesus used frequently for himself.

Proverbs 20:12 just echoes the obvious: God made the eyes and the ears; he made all of man. God knows how man is born, *and how man is born again*. Both are by the power and might of God!

Psalm 139

This remarkable and oft-referenced Psalm speaks of God's intimate knowledge of people. He knows our every thought. He knows our words, even before we do. This is a function of God's Spirit. There is no place where God is not present or where his Spirit is not active and working. We cannot understand these facts, but they are nonetheless true. The question for Nicodemus was whether he was willing to submit to the Spirit and be born into the life and work of the Spirit.

Jeremiah 5

As Jesus moved his dialogue with Nicodemus onto matters of judgment, wrath, and salvation, so does our contextual reading move to such. In Jeremiah 5, we read the prophetic charge delivered over the people immediately prior to the Babylonian conquest and captivity. Jeremiah proclaims God's recognition that the people are not only unholy, but the people refuse to repent or take correction. This was true for rich and poor alike. The people thought God would do nothing, and were quite happy reveling in their sin and false security.

Because of this, the Lord through Jeremiah, proclaimed his judgment. God was bringing Babylon from the north to discipline and judge the people. It was the right and just thing to do to a wicked unrepentant people who refused to change.

Isaiah 30 and 52

Isaiah prophesied during an earlier time than Jeremiah. The people of Isaiah's day (8th century BC) were faced with an invading Assyrian empire. The Lord was using the invaders for the same purpose, however. They were executing God's judgment on an unrepentant people.¹

Seeing the forthcoming judgment, many of the Jews sought refuge in Egypt. Isaiah the prophet was clear, however, that Egypt was not the refuge. God should have been the refuge to which the people should turn and trust. With the Isaiah passage, we are also provided insight into God's plans to work and to keep his promise to those who would trust him.

Isaiah 52 picks up the same theme, but with a strongly prophetic promise of God's coming work. This chapter is recognized as Messianic in its promises. It sets out the condition of the people oppressed by Assyria and hiding in Egypt. But it promised that there was going to be "good news." While Isaiah is in Hebrew, this Jews translated this into Greek several centuries before Jesus in a set of scrolls we call the "Septuagint." The Jewish Greek translation uses the Greek *euangellizo* (εὐαγγελίζω), the noun form of which is readily translated as "gospel." Isaiah proclaims as beautiful the feet of those who bring the gospel. Although not used here, this echoes Paul's language in Ephesians 6:15 that the believer is to wear on his feet the gospel of peace.

Isaiah 52 then adds the information about God's coming servant Messiah as one who would be "high and lifted up," even as he was "marred" in his appearance. Jesus seizes on the language of "lifted up" in his dialogue with Nicodemus, and does so in a way that ties in Numbers 21.

Numbers 21

In Numbers 21 we read of God using the Israelites to destroy pagan kings. We also read that the Israelites responded with whining and complaining, even indicting God for failing to give them the kind of trip to which they believed themselves entitled. God sent snakes in among the people as judgment, and many died. Coming to their sense, the people repented and sought God's forgiveness and rescue. It came in the form of a bronze serpent Moses had fashioned and placed on a pole. Moses held the serpent high, and those who looked upon it were saved. This is the prophetic image Jesus used with

¹ Some historical context might be helpful.

Nicodemus with the promise that Jesus would be lifted high (Calvary), and that the repentant souls seeking God's salvation who looked upon Jesus in faith, would be saved.

Romans 5

The Romans five passage returns us to the overarching theme of John 3. That the physical birth is one that leads to sin, as we are inheriting a sin nature from Adam, but that the life in Christ is a walk of faith that produces reconciliation, peace, forgiveness, and righteousness. As Jesus said, "everlasting life."

Hebrews 2:1-4, Deuteronomy 23:2-14, 19-25; 24:4-25:4; 25:11-19; Romans 1:16-17

In these final wrap up passages contextualizing John 3:1-21, we have the question asked in Hebrews: if it is true, as we have in the Law ("the message declared by angels" to Moses), that sin brings death, then how should any of us be okay before God if we do not chose the righteousness made available by faith in Christ?

The Deuteronomy passages detail a number of laws showing how precise life would have to be to be perfect. It is simply not achievable, even if one were to look at actions alone and ignore the requirements of purity in one's heart.

It moves Paul to proclaim his theme for the Romans letter. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel (the "good news" echoing Isaiah 52), for it is God's power to save EVERYONE who has faith in Jesus.

JOHN MODELS HUMILITY (John 3:22-30)

In this amazing insight into John the Baptist's character, we see him as one who was about God's mission. For John, it was not about John even in the least. John was genuinely excited about Jesus getting the attention he should, even at John's expense. John took joy in the fact that "he must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30). Humility is a trait we read about both positively (an encouragement to humility) and negatively (a warning against pride).

Psalm 18, 25, 147

Psalm 18 is traditionally associated with David while on the run from King Saul. The psalm speaks to one in trouble. Through no fault of his own, he faced deadly circumstances. His solution? To cry out to God for help! And that help came. It came from on high and rescued the psalmist from those who hated him and wanted his ruin.

Now the psalmist does not take credit for the rescue. He gives all the credit to the Lord. Yet he does recognize that God is there showing himself merciful to the merciful. In a weird way, people see in God what and who they are. People who are pure, see God's purity. Yet people who are crooked, see God as "tortuous." Now the ESV uses tortuous because it seems a bit wrong to translate the Hebrew verb the way it is normally. The word is from the Hebrew root *ftl* (פתל) which means "twisted." So the crooked see God as twisted, even while the blameless see God as blameless.

In this sense, the psalmist speaks of humility and pride. The humble people are saved by God, but the haughty are brought down. Again, we see God dealing with people as people live and set their own course. To the humble, there is God who:

- Lights the darkness
- Gives strength for life's challenges
- Is a shield
- Secures their feet
- Trains and equips for life's struggles
- Deals gently
- Makes victorious

As one considers that, it makes John's attitude of humility the only sensible one for any of us to have! We should never see ourselves too highly, for we then lose track of the greatness of the one God.

Psalm 25, echoes the principles of Psalm 18. The Psalmist pleads for God to forgive his sins, and have mercy. Not because the psalmist is worthy, but because God is that good! In true humility, the psalmist understands his own sinfulness, as well as his need for God's steadfast love. Out of this love, the Psalmist knows that God will "lead the humble in what is right" and "teach the humble his way."

Psalm 147 also speaks of God's healing the brokenhearted and lifting up the humble. It moved the psalmist to sing songs of praise to the one who "takes pleasure in those who fear him" (Ps. 147:11). This Psalm actually is a good tool for understanding much of what the Hebrew means when it speaks of the "fear of the Lord." Fear (Hebrew *yr'* - ירא) is rooted in humility and in understanding the greatness of God. Hebrew "fear" is an "awe" or respect of someone that so exceeds who we are. It places us in our place, and Him in his!

2 Chronicles 6-7

2 Chronicles 6 and 7 give us a direct example of one who walked in humility and fear of the Lord (at least as a young king. He seemed to lose that as he aged!) Solomon has

finished the temple, and he pronounces a blessing on the people. Solomon then prays a dedicatory prayer, emphasizing that God is too great to really dwell in some house that humans made. The pagans thought they could capture gods in the forms of idols or in certain holy locations, but God Solomon knew was neither that small, nor were humans that great. After the dedication, God appeared to Solomon with a promise centered on humility:

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

1 Peter 5

In this closing chapter to Peter's first epistle, we see the reflections of a man who has had a very storied career with the faith! Peter was the "rock" and was given the keys to the kingdom. He walked with Jesus and was privy to some of the most important moments. He walked on water, briefly, and healed the sick. He was first among the apostles to affirm to Jesus that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (Mt 16). Peter raised his sword to defend the Lord, cutting off the ear from the servant of the high priest. Peter inaugurated the church with the sermon at Pentecost, and brought the faith to the first Gentiles (Cornelius and family). Peter had been incarcerated for the church and was miraculously released. He toured the world doing mission work. Yet Peter also had the scar of denying the Lord three times, something he never thought he would do.

One would think that the decades of stellar All-Star achievements by Peter would have instilled a certain degree of ego or pride. Yet in this man's latter days he wrote to his readers about the importance of humility.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you (1 Pet. 5:5-6).

Peter warns his readers to be extra careful because Satan prowls like a roaring lion, seeking those he might devour. One of Satan's best tools is pride, as we see in the next selection, 1 Chronicles 21.

1 Chronicles 21

We find in this 1 Chronicles passage an illustration of the lack of humility. We have not gone to a wicked or ungodly person for this example, but the David himself, a man ordinarily "after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). The prophetic voice writing

Chronicles expressed that a time came when “Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel” (1 Chron. 21:1).

Now a census may not seem a bad thing to us, for we have them every ten years in the United States. And in truth, it wasn't a census itself that was the inherent evil. It is what the census stood for. It stood for pride, as the numbers reflected the extent of a strong kingship. It stood for faith in armies rather than the God of Hosts. It was an attitude that was rooted not in humility but in arrogance and self-sufficiency.

From this we see the hand of God in judgment, moving David to a fearful repentance.

Isaiah 23

In this prophetic passage, we return to the 8th century BC, where the Assyrian army is forecasted as coming to execute God's judgment. The chapter contains the prophetic word about Tyre, a sea capital north of Israel built on a rock 600 yards offshore. The king of Tyre, and its people, thought itself impenetrable, and history showed that more often than not to be true.

Yet Isaiah saw the Lord using Assyria to destroy and conquer Tyre. This was not because God had an economic interest in Tyre. Nor did God need the rock! God was sending Assyria to conquer Tyre “to defile the pompous pride” of the people (Isa. 23:9). This would not only be consistent with God's character, but would also serve as a prophetic warning to Israel. When Israel saw Tyre fall, they sensibly should get their own house in order! It should move them to humility and fear of the Lord! Unfortunately, it didn't.

Proverbs 16:19 and 21:4

In these two proverbs, we have wisdom statements that magnify the virtue of humility while condemning the sin of pride. Proverbs 16:19 holds it a higher priority and virtue to be humble (a “lowly spirit”) sharing the possessions of the poor than to get a cut of the rich people who are proud. Proverbs 21:4 teaches that haughty eyes and a proud heart are the lamp of the wicked. In other words, sin.

Ezekiel 28:1-10

We end the contextualizing of John's humility with Ezekiel 28:1-10, another prophecy against the prince of Tyre, but this one over a hundred years after Isaiah's. Again Tyre exemplifies arrogance and self-aggrandizement. The prince of Tyre is so “proud” in heart that he thinks himself godlike. There is neither power nor anyone strong enough to take down this prince, or so he thinks. The God who opposes the proud, however, has

other plans. Foreigners are again coming to Tyre and will destroy the arrogant prince, showing who *really is God*.

THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY AND SALVATION FROM WRATH (John 3:31-36)

In these concluding verses the John's dramatic third chapter, we read that Jesus was instilled with authority from God who is above. The testimony of Jesus is true, and verified by God's own Spirit. The Son speaking has been given all things by the Father, and belief in him brings eternal life, while those who do not respond to him remain under God's wrath.

2 Chronicles 34 and 36:1-21

In these chapters, we read of the moral decay in Judah leading to the judgment of God expressed in the Babylonian captivity. 2 Chronicles 34 uses the term "the wrath of the Lord," calling it the "great wrath" poured out because of the peoples' unholiness and disobedience (2 Chron. 34:21). The judgment was abated during the reign of Josiah because he was a king that sought the Lord in holiness and humility (2 Chron. 34:27).

After the death of Josiah, the kingship returned to its debasement, doing "evil in the sight of the Lord" under his son, Jehoiakim (2 Chron 36:5). As a result, Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled his prophetic role as God's arm of justice and carried the king off in chains, captured and deported the majority of residents, and burned and pillaged the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple.

Every Jew in the time of Nicodemus would have full awareness of the wrath of the Lord in its tangible everyday ramifications, even if they failed to grasp the eternal significance.

Jeremiah 13

In this chapter we have one of Jeremiah's prophecies about Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon, and the judgment of the wrath of the Lord. The prophecy came in words, but was preceded by a visual demonstration. The demonstration contrasts to the humility of Josiah spoken of in 2 Chronicles 34:27 with the pride of Judah and Jerusalem that would lead to judgment. Pursuant to God's instructions, Jeremiah wore a linen belt/skirt (a "loincloth") about on his waste for an unspecified time. Then the Lord told him to take the loincloth off and bury it by the Euphrates (a river to the far north where the Mesopotamian empires arose, including Assyria, which captured the northern kingdom and Babylon, set to capture Judah. See map earlier in this lesson.) After a time passed, Jeremiah dug up the cloth and found it ruined. The point of this was to tell the people that as long as they clung closely to the Lord (Jeremiah wearing the loincloth), their existence was secure. Once, however, they pulled away from the Lord, something

Jeremiah tied to their “pride” thinking themselves self-sufficient, then they were good for nothing and destined to rot.

Humility over self-righteousness was the message of John the Baptist, the message of the Gospel of John, and the message of Jesus. People who in humility cling to God have life. People who arrogantly go their own way, are under wrath and destined for destruction. This is the declared prophecy that follows in Jeremiah 13. From the north (the Euphrates) would come judgment.

Lamentations 1 -2

If the accounts in 2 Kings and Chronicles give the facts behind the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, and if Jeremiah and Ezekiel give the theology behind the fall, then we can go to Lamentations to read the emotions of the fall. Lamentations is a short book of five chapters, each separate chapter being an individual poem that expresses a lament over the pain, misery, and despair experienced after Judah’s fall. These poems of anguish also expound on the hope for the future, although even that hope at times is cloaked in language of despair.

If we were studying the poems as written in their Hebrew language, we would immediately notice several things that we miss in our English translations. First, the first four poems (chapter one through four) are each acrostics. Their acrostic form follows the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Scholars debate the exact reason for the acrostic, some believing it a part of the artistic touch. One prominent suggestion is that it puts a beginning and ending to the expressed grief that otherwise might ramble on and on. It is as if each poem expresses its measure of grief thoroughly, from A to Z.²

A second noticeable feature in the Hebrew that gets lost in translation is the pattern of the verses. For most of the poems, the first stanza has three Hebrew words (with three accents), while the following stanza has two Hebrew words (with two accents). This produces a pattern when said out loud where the second stanza “seems, as it were, to die away...and a plaintive, melancholy cadence is thus produced.”³

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

² See discussion in Hillers, Delbert, *The Anchor Bible: Lamentations*, (Doubleday 1972), at xxvff. One translation that tries to keep the acrostic feature is Knox, Ronald, *The Holy Bible*, Sheed & Ward 1950).

³ This cite to 19th century Hebrew scholar Karl Budde (in *Das hebraische Klaglied*, 1882) is reproduced from Grossberg, Daniel, notes to Lamentations, *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford 2004), at 1588.

the prophet (who certainly composed at least one lament for King Josiah⁴), the author(s) of Lamentations are unknown. The name of the human who wrote the laments is irrelevant in light of the subject matter of the laments!

Jews today read these poems annually on the day set aside to grieve the loss of the temple (on *Tish'ah be'av*).⁵

The first poem begins with the Hebrew word meaning “Alas,” and typically used at the start of a lament or funeral dirge. (The same word starts Lamentations two and four also, convenient in an acrostic because it begins with *alef*, the first Hebrew alphabet letter.) This word signals the great anguish and emotion associated with death. In this first lament, the word sets up the coming contrasts before what was and what is. Jerusalem used to be “full of people,” but now sits “lonely.” She was “great among the nations,” but now lives in the shadow of death like a “widow.” Once she was regal, a “princess,” but now is a “slave.”

This change in status brought “bitter weeping” in the night, with “tears on her cheek.” It was not mere bad luck or misfortune that befell Jerusalem; she brought it on herself. She had trusted other “lovers” than the Lord, and they were her downfall, so the LORD brought judgment upon her. The judgment left her enemies dancing while Jerusalem’s roads were empty and devoid of all festivities. Her children became captives of her foes.

As the lament continues, the contrast is continually brought to mind with memories of how things were, compared to how things changed:

Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering all the precious things that were hers from days of old (Lam. 1:7).

But those are mere memories, now gone forever. She has fallen and her foes “gloat.” Previously blind to her sins, Jerusalem now sees how “filthy” she had become. Her

⁴ 2 Chron. 35:25 notes,

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

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

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

“nakedness” and shame are on display for all to see, and even she now “groans” and “turns away,” unable to look at herself. In words descriptive of a sexual assault, Jerusalem and the temple were invaded as “the nations enter the sanctuary, those whom you [God] forbade to enter.”

The lament continues to circle around the misery of the now compared to the then, linking it to the hand of God in righteous judgment upon the wretched sin. This was “inflicted” by “the LORD” in his “fierce anger.” His judgment came as “fire” that burned through to the “bone,” leaving Jerusalem “stunned” and “faint.”

One particularly powerful analogy is found in Lamentations 1:14.

My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail.

One is reminded of the picture found on the tomb walls of the Egyptian Vizier Rekhmire (c. 1450 BC) where slaves are toiling the production and carrying of bricks. The picture of the slave carrying a yoke laden with bricks is particularly illustrative. This heavy yoke was a product of Jerusalem’s own sins. They became the heavy burden that crippled life. Sin has this ability “crush” one, like grapes “trodden as in a winepress.”



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This left Jerusalem in “tears.” There was no excuse any more, no rationalization. The jig was up, and the charade was over.

The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word (Lam. 1:18).

And with the groaning unceasing, the laments continue.

Chapter 2 – That Which Was High Was Brought Low

Meditating on the second lament produces an image expressed over and over in different forms. Constantly, words and images are used that project falling and being low. In the first half of the lament, the narrator speaks of the LORD having “cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel.” The strongholds are “broken down.” The kingdom and rulers are “brought down to the ground in dishonor.” The might of Israel is “cut down” as God “poured out his fury.” The walls “lay in ruins” and the gates “have sunk into the ground.” The elders “sit on the ground” with “dust on their heads.” Young women have “bowed their heads to the ground.”

As the prophetic voice begins to speak in verse 11, the theme continues. The picture is not pretty with eyes “weeping” and “stomachs churning” with vomit “poured out to the ground.” The failure of the people to hear the words that YHWH had given

prophetically in warning resulted in his judgment “thrown down without pity.” Naturally, then, the peoples tears now “stream down like a torrent” joining everything else on the ground.

The second lament ends with Jerusalem speaking, crying to YHWH to see what has happened. The young and old are dead, their bodies lying in the dust of the streets.

This constant image of the “ground” and things “broken down,” “poured out,” and “in the dust,” leaves the feeling as well as the picture of a city and people destroyed and in shambles. There is no “comfort” for a place that had lived on sin and false security from “false prophets.” The “ruin is as vast as the sea,” and the laments continue.

The study of the wrath of God and his judgment continues into the Monday reading of week seven with a group of passages from Isaiah that we consider here, since they fit well in this week’s lesson.

Isaiah 13:1-22; 9:8-21; 51:1-23; 9:1-7; 11:1-16; 32:1-20; 44:1-28

Isaiah 13 contains a judgment upon Babylon. Written well before Babylon became the dominant world power they were by the time of Jeremiah, Isaiah forecasted the judgment on the Babylonians by the Medes.⁶ This also was judgment at the hand of God. God did not limit his work to the nation of Israel. All nations and all peoples are accountable to him and subject to his righteous judgment.

Isaiah 9:8-21 is more typical of Isaiah’s prophetic word to the people of his day as Assyria was proclaimed the hand of the Lord in executing his judgment.

In Isaiah 51, we get the glimpse into God’s message to the righteous in the midst of the judgment. Isaiah’s language includes a glimpse into the Prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, as he speaks of “the cup of [God’s] wrath” (Is 51:17). The passage concludes with the assurance a day will come when God will take the “cup of staggering” from the people (Is. 51:22).

The reading shifts to Isaiah 9:1-7 for the promised good news more clearly stated. In language later echoed by John in John 1, Isaiah spoke of when the people who have walked in darkness will “see a great light.” The Messianic promise is that

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of

⁶ Although the threatening world empire at the time of Isaiah was Assyria (to the west of Babylon), Babylon was still a city and an assembled power. It was one the Assyrians had to reckon with, and one that they would periodically claim as part of their empire.

peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this (Is 9:6-7).

Isaiah 11 also gives this affirmation of the escape from wrath that will come from the hand of the Lord. In words many will recognize, but many may not know came from Isaiah we reads prophetic words of Jesus quoted freely in the New Testament. One can make great sense of these simply by reading them with the New Testament references that echo or even quote them:

Isaiah 11:1	Acts 13:22-23
Isaiah 11:2	Matt. 3:16 Mark 1:10 Luke 3:22
Isaiah 11:10	Rom. 15:12

Isaiah 32 is another Messianic Psalm holding out Jesus as “a king” who “will reign in righteousness” (Is 32:1). We best understand this if we remember it in light of the previous day’s readings in 2 Chronicles. Israel and Judah were receiving judgment and the king’s evil deeds and unrighteousness were seminal reasons given for judgment. The contrast of a king in righteousness is one that avoids the wrath of God for himself and those in his kingdom. This king (Jesus) is a “shelter from the storm” and “streams of water in a dry place.”

Isaiah 44 is the final Messianic psalm in this reading block. It is a psalm calling Israel and Judah to confidence of the time when God would “pour” out his “Spirit upon your offspring” (Isa. 44:3). In words that will be echoed in Revelation, Yahweh the Lord is not only the Redeemer and Lord of Hosts, but is “the first and the last” (Isa. 44:7). This is the promised redemption that Jesus was directing Nicodemus to in early John 3. It is the commentary of John on that interaction at the end of John 3. It is the core of the Bible, the core of history, and the core of eternity.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK SIX

1. What does humility look like in our lives? Is there a special place for humility when it comes to self-righteousness? How will people see the difference between true humility and false humility? How do we generate true humility?

2. Does the wrath of God exist in the space and time of this world, or is it simply in the world to come? How does the life of Christ impact the wrath of God that might fall on people in this world?

3. How does it change your understanding and appreciation of Scripture to see repeated prophetic promises about the Messiah that were clearly written 500 to 700 years before his birth?

Week Seven Readings

<p>Feb. 8-10 The Prophetic Ministry and Salvation from Wrath Jn 3:31-36</p> <p>2/10 Context: The “wrath” of the Lord was a real concept deeply experienced and taught in Israel’s history. So was the promise of salvation.</p> <p>Isa 13 Isa 9:8-21 Isa 51 Isa 9:1-7</p> <p>Isa 11 Isa 32 Isa 44</p> <p>Feb. 11-15 Jesus and the Samaritan Woman Jn 4:1-26</p> <p>2/11 Samaria Jn 4:1-6 Context: The contextual readings set out the roots of Samaria and discord with the Samaritans.</p> <p>2 Kg 17:24-41 Neh. 1-4</p>	<p>2/12 Samaritans Jn 4:1-15</p> <p>Ezra 8-10</p> <p>2/13 Jesus the Living Water Jn 4:7-15 Context: “Living water” was flowing water, as opposed to captured water in basins (including the “Dead Sea). The usage by Jesus has extensive Old Testament roots.</p> <p>Ex 17 Nm 19:1-20:13 Isa 12 Jer. 2:4-37 Jer 17 Zech 14</p>	<p>2/14 True Worship Jn 4:16-26 Context: These passages speak of genuine worship as something more than outward ritual.</p> <p>Zeph 1:1-6 Zeph 2-3 Mal 1:1, 6-14 Rom 12:1-2 Ps 150</p> <p>2/15 True Worship Jn 4:16-26 Context: This context gives the Old Testament Scriptures relied upon by the Samaritans for their worship.</p> <p>Dt 11-12 Dt 27 Ps 122</p> <p>16 <i>Off</i></p>
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