

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 9

John 4:43-4:45

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

Week Nine Readings

<p>Feb. 24-March 2 Jesus in Galilee Jn 4:43-4:45 (The Sermon on Mount Insert Cont’d) Context: John does not tell the story of the Sermon on the Mount. It is inserted here where John simply references Jesus teaching in Galilee. The passages adjoining each reading are the Old Testament sources that define much of what Jesus taught.</p> <p>24 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 5:17-5:20 Lev 6-9 Lev 19:19-19:37 Lev 20 Deut 5:17</p> <p>25 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45 Matt 5:21-26 1 Jn 3:4-18</p>	<p>25 (Cont’d) Matt 5:27 Ex 22:16-22:17 Deut 5:18 Matt 5:28-5:30 Job 31:1-31:4 Matt 5:31-5:32 Deut 24:1-24:4 Matt 5:33 Num 30 Lev 19:12 Matt 5:34-5:36 Jas 5:12 Matt 5:37 Prov 10:19 Prov 17:18 Prov 20:25 Matt 5:38 Deut 19:1-19:14 Deut 19:21 Lev 24:17-24:23 Ex 22:1-22:15 Num 5:5-5:10</p>	<p>26 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 5:39 Rm 12:9-12:21 Isa 50 Lam 3 Matt 5:40-5:42 Ex 22:25-27 1 Pet 2:13-2:25 Matt 5:43-5:48 Luk 10:25-10:31 Lev 21:1-22:16 Luk 10:32 Num 3-4 Num 8:5-8:26 Luk 10:32-10:37 Job 31:5-31:40</p> <p>27 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 6:1-6:2 Ex 22:21-22:24 Matt 6:3-6:18</p>	<p>27 (Cont’d) Eccles 5:1-5:7 Luk 11:1-11:4 Pslm 103 Dan 4 Prov 30:7-30:9 Jas 1:9-1:15 Jas 2:8-2:13 Matt 6:19-6:21 Eccles 5:8-6:12 Prov 28:11 1 Tim 6:6-6:10 Prov 13:7-13:8, 13:10-13:23 Prov 17:8 Prov 18:10-18:11; 18:23 1 Tim 6:17-6:21 Heb 13:5-13:6 Jas 1:5-1:8 Prov 17:16</p> <p>28 Sermon on Mount Matt 6:22-6:24 Ezek 45 Matt 6:25-6:34</p>	<p>28 (Cont’d) Luk 16 Prov 20:14-20:16; 20:21 Jas 4 Isa 26:1-26:15 Luk 11:33-11:36</p> <p>Mar. 1 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 6:25-6:34 1 Kgs 1-4 Prov 20:26 Prov 29:14</p> <p>Mar. 2 Off</p>
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JESUS IN GALILEE (John 4:43-4:45) - THE SERMON ON MOUNT INSERT

John does not tell the story of the Sermon on the Mount. For the next several weeks, the Sermon on the Mount will be inserted here, where John simply references Jesus teaching in Galilee. The passages adjoining each reading are the Old Testament sources that define much of what Jesus taught.

Matthew 5:17-20

Here Jesus explained he had not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. The ESV properly capitalizes both the “Law” and the “Prophets” because they are understood as titles, not simply our modern concept of law or prophet. This was a designation for what we call the Old Testament. The Law (Hebrew *Torah*) was the five books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy (also known as the “Pentateuch”). The Prophets were the remaining writings, which Jews understood to have been inspired and recorded by prophets speaking the words of God.

We see this same vocabulary in other places in the New Testament (Matt 7:12; 22:40; perhaps Luk 24:27; Acts 24:14; 28:23; Rom 3:21). We also see it in Jewish writings from the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament (see the apocryphal books of 2 Macc. 15:9 And 4 Macc. 18:11). It seems the New Testament was also a transition time where the Jews were beginning to separate out the prophets into two sections.

At some point around the time of Christ, some began referring to the Old Testament scrolls in three categories. The Law/*Torah* was always the same. But, some divided “the prophets” into “the prophets” and “the other writings.”¹ This division culled out from the prophets those writings that we call Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, the *Megilloth* (a scroll containing the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther), Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah (one book in the Hebrew) and Chronicles.² If one were to buy a Jewish copy of scriptures today, it is called the “*Tenakh*.” This word stands for each of the three sections of scripture. The “T” is for the *Torah* (the Law). The “N” is from the Hebrew word *Neviyim*, which means “Prophets.” The “K” (or “KH”) is from the

¹Some scholars see this tripartite division in Jesus’ comment in Luke 24:44, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

²Some believe Jesus referenced the Old Testament in these three divisions in Luke 24:44 where he said, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” The reference to the Psalms is seen as the third category of Old Testament scriptures.

Hebrew word *Ketuvim*, which means “writings.” Put them together, add some vowels to help with pronunciation, and voilà – you have the *Tenakh*, or Hebrew Old Testament.

This passage has a dual punch. In the days Jesus taught, we know from the gospels that he received harsh criticism for failing to follow the Law on the Sabbath, as understood by many. This was a likely source of Jesus’ teaching that he was not abolishing the Law or Prophets. The second layer of emphasis comes from the time of Matthew writing his gospel. The early church carried a reputation for ignoring or being antagonistic to the Law. It is something that we see reflected in the writings of Paul (*e.g.*, Rom 6) and the accounts about Paul’s work (Acts 21:28). To the contrary, we read Jesus was not abolishing the Law, but doing something much greater.

The Greek Matthew used for “abolish” is *kataluo* (καταλύω). It means to dismantle or take apart. It is the same word in Matthew used in Matthew 24:2 where speaking of the temple we read,

But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down [from καταλύω].”

Rather than dismantle the Law, and Prophets, Jesus was “fulfilling” them. The Greek word *pleroo* (πληρόω) means “to fill up.” We can relate the idea to road signs. Road signs point one to a destination, but they are not the destination. Once one arrives at the destination, the arrival point doesn’t destroy the signs that pointed to it. It is the fulfillment or end point of those signs.

With that background, Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount the Law, but with an eye towards its fullness. Not because the Law is suddenly irrelevant. To keep with the road sign analogy, much of the Law that pointed to Jesus as the destination are no longer providing directions (for example, laws of sacrifice). But many of the signs that enforce important driving rules are still relevant. Jesus discusses those in his sermon.

Leviticus 6-9; 19:19-19:37; 20:27; Deuteronomy 5:17

These are marvelous passages that both illustrate the laws that Jesus fulfilled by perfect obedience as well as the laws he fulfilled by being the destination the laws pointed to. Consider in this way Leviticus 6. We read the importance of treating our neighbors with honesty. We aren’t to deceive to our own gain, and if we find something that was lost (even the ancient Israelites stumbled across the occasional wondering goat or missing piece of jewelry), we are not to tell people it is our own. If someone does, he or she is to return the item, adding a fifth to it (a type of interest). That is still an ethic we are to abide by today. It is one Jesus fulfilled in the sense of following it, but not one abolished by his fulfillment.

Leviticus 6 then details the atoning sacrifice such a sinner should offer *after* making restitution. The sin offering is a ram without blemish. This is a portion of the law that Jesus fulfilled in the sense of our road sign example. The blood of the ram never had the inherent value to truly be justice for one's sins. It pointed to another sacrifice that would be adequate and just – the sacrifice of Christ. Christ did not abolish this law; he fulfilled it. It is senseless for one to follow now that the destination is reached.

Likewise the sacrificial laws that bring Lev 6 to a close going through chapter 9 are ones that have no sense to believers in Christ. All of those involve procedures to make one clean as a foreshadowing of the cleanliness given by the High Priest Jesus and his sacrifice.

Once we reach Leviticus 19:19-19:37, we read some laws that are not so clear. The first (Lev 19:19) speaks against interbreeding cattle, cultivating multiple seed types together, or interweaving types of yarn. There are laws relevant to slavery and marital customs (Lev 19:20-19:22), planting (Lev 19:23-19:25), fortune telling (Lev 19:26), shaving (Lev 19:27), tattoos (Lev 19:28), and more. The question is fairly asked, which of these are binding and which are not?

One of my favorite approaches to classifying the laws is a Hebrew system based on the reason for the laws. Those laws that are rational with easily understood reasons are called *mishpatim*. A second category includes those laws that commemorate or represent something (like eating unleavened bread on Passover) called *edot*. Then, there is a third classification for those laws that make no rational sense at all. These are called *chukim*. This system recognizes that a number of Hebrew laws come with explanations, either in the text, or obvious on their own. However, there are a good number of laws that come with no explanation whatsoever. To some, the *chukim* are not as important to follow since they seem irrational. To others, that makes the *chukim* the most important ones to follow because you are doing it simply out of obedience, with no other reason attached.

When comparing the laws of Moses to those of contemporary cultures, a unique factor stands out. Only in Israel do we find deity giving the law.³ This radically changes the effect of transgressing the law. Instead of being a “civil law breaker,” one who breaks the law God gave is not simply a “law breaker;” that person is a sinner! It is this aspect of the law that brings out the importance of the questions about whether the law is binding today, and if it is, what parts.

A classic example of *chukim* laws are those that speak of wearing clothes of mixed fibers. The first century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that this instruction was for the

³ *Anchor Bible Dictionary* at 245.

laity only. Knowing that the priests wore such garments, this was seen as a mark of distinction that set apart the priests.

“Let none of you wear raiment woven of wool and linen; for that is reserved for the priests alone.”⁴

We get additional insight into these laws and their effects today through our study not only of Christ, but also of Paul and the New Testament church. There were clear lines drawn recognizing that much of the ceremonial law was for the Jews, not the Gentiles.

The law was part of a covenant between Israel and God. God reached out to Israel and offered a covenant of grace. After God’s rescue from slavery in Egypt, Israel was offered the choice of following God or not. Israel made the choice to follow God and live by the instructions (law) he gave as part of the covenant. Even still, the covenant instructions were never designed, nor placed as a means to make Israel right with God in an eternal sense. These instructions were to guide Israel in its relationship with God. The sin of Israel would always need a real sacrifice to redeem it into a new life. This is Paul’s point in Romans, that God put forward Christ “as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because *in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins*” (Rom 3:25).

We ended the day’s readings with Deuteronomy 5:17, repeating the commandment not to murder. This exemplifies a moral law that is not built around ceremony or the Sinai covenant. It is a universal moral code that Jesus used in his sermon on the mount, explaining it more fully.

Interestingly, Jesus did not use this sermon teaching to expound on *chukim* laws, but rather on the moral laws that we can easily see applicable to all, Jew and Gentile alike. That is seen more fully in the readings to come.

Matthew 5:21-5:26 and 1 John 3:4-3:18

Jesus reminded the people of the “You shall not murder” command read in the previous day’s reading (Deut 5:17), but then adds teaching about the importance of how one treats another. It is not to be with hatred or verbal abuse. It is not to be one where you seek to take advantage. John takes it further explaining in 1 John 3:4-3:18 that sinning is from the devil, not God. We are to treat one another with love. Hating another is akin to murdering. It is not the attitude or heart the child of God is to have.

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.208, translation by Thackeray and Marcus, Loeb Classical Library edition.

Matthew 5:27; Exodus 22:16-22:17; Deuteronomy 5:18

In Matt 5:27ff, Jesus gives the motives and heart behind the sinful actions of adultery. The believer is to seek not only to control her/his actions, but also to purify one's heart. The Old Testament gave the prohibition against adultery (Deut 5:18), but also admonitions against sexuality wholly outside of marriage (Ex 22:16-22:17). The law as such set up important rules for the Israelite society to live by. As mentioned earlier, however, God gave the Israelite law in covenant. Therefore, it dealt with more than society's needed guideposts. It also involved the heart and sin before God. That is what many were missing, and the impetus for Jesus' teaching. It is not simply the letter of the law that is important, but how we seek to be people who embody the spirit of the law as well.

Matthew 5:28-5:30; Job 31:1-31:4

As Jesus continues the last thought on adultery, he expounded on the values we are to maintain. The heart is so important, it trumps the physical, be it the arm or the eye. Jesus taught people to guard what they see and touch, because it can lead to ideas that are unholy. Job understood the concept saying he had made a "covenant with my eyes" not to be gazing lustfully upon women. It is not godly; it doesn't feed the heart godliness.

Matthew 5:31-5:32 and Deuteronomy 24:1-24:4

Here Jesus speaks of the all too common practice of divorce, referencing the Deuteronomy 24 passage in what scholars call, "an interpretative paraphrase."⁵ In the Matthew passage we read of divorce being misused in such a way that it is basically a publicly sanctioned tool of adultery. The Deuteronomy passage speaks of divorce as appropriate when the husband has "found some indecency in her." The Hebrew for "some indecency" is *'rwt dbr* (ערוות דבר) and literally might be translated "a word of nakedness." Scholars debate the nuance of expression but generally recognize it as meaning much the same as "sexual immorality" used by Matthew in his passage.

Matthew 5:33-5:37, Numbers 30, Leviticus 19:12, James 5:12 and Proverbs 10:19; 17:18; 20:25

In Matthew 5:33, Jesus echoed Numbers 30 and Leviticus 19:12 when he introduced his teaching on oaths. Numbers 30 set out the importance of taking oaths before God as well as before people. There are even extra details provided in the event the oath of a woman required modification after marriage. Leviticus 19:12 has a rather simple

⁵ Nolland, John, *The Gospel of Matthew, A Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, (Eerdmans 2005), at 243.

instruction to not swear falsely by the name of the Lord. The explanation in the Leviticus passage bears directly on the point made earlier in this lesson. To do so is not simply a public wrong with societal implications, but it is a reproach to God, a profaning of his name, and therefore a sin.

Jesus continued his teaching telling his followers not to swear at all. An oath should not be necessary from the mouths of those who walk in integrity. As Jesus' earthly brother James emphasized later in his epistle, "yes" should mean "yes," and "no" should mean "no." Word games are not a way to cloak dishonesty.

Matthew 5:38-5:42; Deuteronomy 19:1-19:14, 21; Leviticus 24:17-24:23; Exodus 22:1-22:15, Numbers 5:5-5:10; Romans 12:9-12:21; Isaiah 50; Lamentations 3; Exodus 22:25-22:27; and 1 Peter 2:13-2:25

This section of Jesus' sermon speaks of retaliation, how we are to react when we are wronged. At first blush, it seems the teachings of Jesus are diametrically opposed to those of the Old Testament, and these are passages that have bothered many critics of the faith dating back to the earliest days of the church (e.g., Marcion).

In the Deuteronomy 19 passages, we read the "eye for an eye" adage Jesus referred to, but in the context of cities of refuge, places where justice is allowed to first be considered. Leviticus 24 gave the same assessed penalty of an eye for an eye. In Exodus 15 and Numbers 5, the laws of restitution for wrongs give greater detail on how to handle thievery and more complicated issues of damage and wrongdoing. It allowed for punitive damages, often paying in excess of the simple harm done.

It is worth noting an important difference in the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. First, the Old Testament covenant was not simply a list of rights and wrongs. There were societal laws that were set up to govern a nation, much like the legal code we have in America and elsewhere today. In fact, the cities of refuge set out in Deuteronomy 19 indicate the need for societal order and justice. In the day of Jesus, however, the Roman Empire set the law of the land and oversaw the control of crime and punishment. Jesus was not setting up national policy to make society more habitable. Jesus was speaking of personal interaction between people. People are not to be vigilantes, taking the law into their own hands. They are to live lives of peaceful service.

In the Romans 12 passage, Paul takes the teaching of Christ and explains it in greater detail. The goal of the believer is not to be "justice" for oneself. We live the life of those who have been saved by one who willingly suffered unjustly at the hands of others in order to bring about God's greater good and kingdom. We who follow Christ should have no less devotion to Christ's cause! We should care for those who we could rightly hate, pray for those who are mean and abusive, and look to the Lord to make things right

in his time and in his way. Our goal should not be anyone's misery, no matter how they deserve it. Our goal needs to be the salvation of all.

Isaiah 50 gives a prophetic pronouncement that reflects much the heart and teaching of Paul in Romans 50. There are times where persecution wrongly falls upon people, often simply because those people are following God's instructions. In each event, however, the faithful can rest upon the knowledge that God is in control, and nothing happens without his oversight and ultimate justice.

Lamentations 3 affirms this faithfulness of God. To a people who had experienced devastation on a personal and national level, this passage of mourning, written like a funeral dirge, confirms the believer's proclamation that God's faithfulness is great and knows no bounds. The goal of the believer is not to seek the justice that should be meted to others. Rather the believer is to check her/his own way to walk carefully in the sight of the Lord.

This is not a foreign concept in the Old Testament law as we see in the Exodus 22:25-22:27 passage ordering one who takes another's cloak in pledge to return it when it is needed, whether the return is justified or not.

The context for this section ended in 1 Peter 2, where Peter also tied this response of love over justice is tied to the actions of Jesus, who willingly suffered unjustly so others would be saved.

Matthew 5:43-5:48; Luke 10:25-10:31; Leviticus 21:1-22:16; Luke 10:32; Numbers 3-4; 8:5-8:26; Luke 10:32-10:37; and Job 31:5-31:40

Following the flow of thought on retaliation, we have Jesus teaching his followers to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors. This brings out in context the story of the lawyer coming to Jesus in Luke 10:25ff.

In Luke 10, a specialist in the Law wanted to know what he could do to inherit eternal life. Jesus explained the man should follow the law, giving a snapshot of it in two commands, to love God fully and to love his neighbor as he did himself. The lawyer, in what one might term typical legal fashion, tried to tie Jesus down on the details of which people Jesus included as his "neighbors." Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, explaining your "neighbor" to be loved included those you loathe!

Interspersed in the reading of the Good Samaritan story are the Old Testament passages that spoke of the priests to stay pure, likewise those of the Levites and their purity. Jesus did not randomly select a priest and a Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan. He selected those who had personal "devotional" reasons not to show love and compassion,

noting that their roles likely simply justified rationalization of a blatant failure to keep the greater law of love and compassion.

The context reading concludes with the Job passage where Job recognized the importance of showing love and compassion to those around him.

Matthew 6:1-6:18; Exodus 22:21-22:24; Ecclesiastes 5:1-5:7; Luke 11:1-11:4; Psalm 103; Daniel 4; Proverbs 30:7-30:9 and James 1:9-1:15; 2:8-2:13

This section of the Sermon on the Mount teaches one the reason for piety (giving alms and fasting) as well as the principles of prayer. The thrust is that these things are done because of one's relationship with God, not to be seen by others. Our drive should never be to please others, but rather to walk in a holy relationship with our holy God.

In context we have the Exodus 22 passage that instructed people to treat strangers and others with respect and fairness. To do otherwise is not simply poor manners, it is an outrage to God. The focus here, like in Jesus' teachings is that our actions are dictated not by show or personal reward but by recognition of what is right before God.

The Lord's Prayer from the Matthew passage is striking in its brevity. Although it is quite short, it certainly is not missing in substance. This is an interesting prayer in light of the Ecclesiastes passage that speaks of the holiness and reverence with which we are to approach God. We are not talking to him to hear ourselves talk, we are engaging in a holy and intimate conversation with the Creator of all things. Similarly as Luke recited the Lord's Prayer, he did so with an even more condensed prayer.

That is not to say that words need be few. Psalm 103 is a psalm of praise that shows great value in heaping up blessing upon the Lord and his name, expounding on the first part of the Lord's Prayer. While Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "hallowed" or "blessed" be the name of the Lord, Psalm 103 shows an expansion of that simple phrase.

The insertion of Daniel 4 into the reading of the Prayer provides a contrast between living life focused on God's kingdom and will as against living in pride and self-centered praise of one's own kingdom or accomplishments. We are to seek his kingdom and will, not never our own.

Before leaving the Lord's Prayer we note the Proverb 30:7-30:9 passage. Here we have a prayer that echoes the idea of receiving our daily bread. The writer prays that God would provide enough food to keep him from the need to steal, but not so much food that life can be lived without reliance on God.

James provides a different lens on the same idea urging his readers to realize this life is just temporary, and the rich should not take pride in their riches any more than the lowly

should fail to take pride in the greatness that comes from the Lord. The James passage ties into the end of the Lord's Prayer to avoid temptation, seeking deliverance from evil. Sin is a real thing, and even under grace, it is a damaging, destructive enemy to the soul.

Matthew 6:19-6:24; Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12; Proverbs 28:11; 1 Timothy 6:6-6:10, 6:17-6:21; Proverbs 13:7-13:8, 13:10-13:23; 17:8; 18:10-18:11, 18:23; Hebrews 13:5-13:6; James 1:5-1:8; Proverbs 17:16; and Ezekiel 45

The Bible speaks a lot about materialism and Matthew 6:19-6:21 sets the stage with a very important spiritual law. Wherever one spends one's time, energy, and resources (i.e., where one invests one's treasure), one is going to find an emotional tie there.

Ecclesiastes points to the vanity of one seeking money as the goal in life. Money never satisfies. It keeps one up at night worrying, it is easily lost through poor decisions, and it can deprive one of the deep joy from a hard day's work. Hence the proverbs make fun of one who is rich and wise in his own eyes, while in fact he has less on the ball than someone who has less, but lives life diligently and with understanding.

Paul instructed Timothy to teach those who had wealth to see it clearly for what it is. It is not the trusted companion that will always take care of the rich. Rather, it is a tool that people have so that they can do good with it. People are called to generosity and sharing, whether they have a little or a lot, but especially if they have a lot. Those who love money are often ensnared and led away from the faith, to their own pain and detriment. People are not to desire riches, but holiness.

Proverbs 13 spends a number of verses talking about wise attitudes toward money and possessions. Some are not always what they seem in that regard; one can't go by appearances (7-8). There is a warning against get rich quick schemes (11). In a litany of verses, people are encouraged to seek wisdom, understanding, and righteousness. With those things come positive things including money that serves good purposes and lasts.

Proverbs 17:8 speaks of the power of a "bribe." In the 21st century American life, bribery is a taboo that is often even criminal. We need to shed some 21st century thinking when reading this proverb. It speaks to the idea that a gift⁶, whether it is one that obligates the receiver to do something or not, has a powerful affect on the receiver. This is a simple truth of life. How one receives this "gift" should never be to pervert justice (see Prov. 17:23).

Proverbs 18:10-18:11 provides a sobering warning about money. While a righteous person has the Lord as the place of refuge, rich people often seek refuge in their money. This deprives one of the intimacy and reliance upon God. It is also foolish in its illusory

⁶ The Hebrew for "bribe" is *shachad* (שָׁחַד), which can also mean "gift."

power to rescue. Money can also affect how we treat people. Unfortunately, the rich are often harsh to others, while the poor treat people with greater deference and respect (18:23).

These passages are put into perspective by the writer of Hebrews who taught much like Paul that the right life is lived free of the love of money, finding contentment in what one has. This is the life where one rests confidently in the Lord and his provision. James instructed his readers to seek wisdom rather than riches. Wisdom is something a fool can never buy! (Prov. 17:16).

In this exchange, Ezekiel 45 might seem out of context, but with some insight into the history behind the passage, its placement comes into focus. Ezekiel prophesied during the Babylonian captivity, a time of punishment where many of the Jews were forcibly taken from the Holy Land and resettled in Babylon. Part of the reason laid at the feet of the people was the evil of the kings, who lived and sought their own pleasure and advanced their own riches and interests. Ezekiel prophetically spoke of a restored kingdom of Judah with a restored temple. In his vision, Ezekiel explained that the prince's portion would be fair and be set out with clarity. The prince was not to have an excessive amount, satisfying his greed by evicting people from their lands.

Matthew 6:25-6:34; Luke 16; Proverbs 20:14-20:16, 20:21; James 4; Isaiah 26:1-26:15 and Luke 11:33-11:36

In this Matthew passage, Jesus instructed his followers not to spend their energy worried about life. People need to spend their energy serving God, seeking holiness and wisdom, working with what they have as good stewards, and other deeds of holiness as we read in the passages provided for context.

Luke 16 is a good dissertation on the sermon teaching. In Luke 16, Jesus taught the people the importance of stewardship with the parable of the dishonest manager. The manager of the wealthy man's money was wasting it rather than administering it with care and diligence. Hearing that the master was about to come to the manager in judgment, the manager shifted gears working hard to minimize the damage he had done. The master did come, but was surprised by the frenetic work the manager had done to rectify bad earlier decisions. The owner commended the manager. Jesus made the point that people need to live responsibly with what they have. He added that those who are responsible with little will be faithful in a lot. The opposite is also true.

Certain Pharisees who loved money were listening and ridiculed Jesus for his teaching. Jesus confronted them and Luke ended the chapter telling the story of Lazarus and the rich man. This parable presents a stunning contrast between eternity for those who live by their wealth rather than by God's righteousness.

As an aside, this is the only parable where Jesus assigned a name to one of the characters, calling the poor man Lazarus. In the parable, the rich man having died, calls on Abraham to send the dead man Lazarus back to earth to warn the rich man's brothers about their coming fate. Abraham responds to the rich man that sending Lazarus back from the grave would do no good for,

If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead (Luk 16:31).

In the church, this story must have taken on huge significance in light of the man Lazarus being raised dead right before the crucifixion (Jn. 11).

Many of the Proverbs speak to wise and shrewd business managers. Prov. 20:14-20:16 and 20:21 are good examples setting forth common ordinary shrewdness and the value of hard work in acquiring wealth.

James 4 echoes much of Jesus' teaching about the problems that stem from worldliness and the need to live day by day in the Lord's will rather than focused simply on worldly gain. It is right and fitting to trust in the Lord, a point Isaiah makes in Isaiah 26:1-15. Isaiah assures the people that God will make the path level for the righteous, and he will meet the needs of the needy. Those who keep their minds on God will stay "in perfect peace" (Isa. 26:3), while the lofty will be brought down and humbled (Isa. 26:5).

We closed the context section by looking at the affirmation in Luke 11:33-11:36 that harkens back to the warning Jesus put into the Matthew passage (Matt 6:22-6:23). The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is bad, your body will be full of darkness. This passage can be taken in a number of ways, but the insertion by Jesus into a litany of discussion on money and treasures sets the point into this arena. Put into modern economic-speak, we might say, "We see things we want. We see things that we seek after. We should be on our guard in that resolve, for we should be seeking the things that work toward God and his kingdom, not our own fancy. Working to our own pleasure and fancy brings darkness in life. Working and investing in the kingdom brings freedom, light, and blessing.

1 Kings 1-4 and Proverbs 20:26; 29:14

Before leaving the Matthew passage, we spent a day's contextual reading picking up on the story of Solomon. Jesus referenced Solomon as one who, in all his glory, was not arrayed as beautiful as the lilies in the field.

1 Kings 1-4 tells the story of Solomon and his riches. They did not come about because Solomon sought them. The story of Solomon's wealth is set within the context of Solomon's rise to power. Before the story, Solomon had his adversaries and challengers

to the throne killed. Solomon has also commenced his political reign by marrying the daughter of Pharaoh. The text notes Solomon's love for the LORD, and places him in Gibeon, where he has gone to offer God sacrifices.

God asked Solomon for what he wished from the Lord and Solomon chose "an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil." God was pleased the Solomon did not ask for riches or long life and promised those if Solomon would live and rule right by the gifts God would give him.

As we consider the story, we note several significant items. First, God is not a genie. He does not promise to give Solomon a wish, nor does he promise to grant a request. God simply instructs Solomon to ask for what Solomon would have God give to him. One can easily see that if Solomon had asked for something outrageous, God could have simply said, "No! What is more, because you asked for *abc*, which is something outrageous, I will also deny you *xyz*!" Scripture never portrays God as someone who can be bound to the will of man.

This should caution people who have a temptation to declare God *must* do one thing or another, as if by his or her own actions they have bound God contrary to God's will. God's actions proceed from his character, not from our will. This is one reason it is important to *know* God, and not simply know about God.

Another important point in this text is the reply and request of Solomon. If one were to ask ten regular church attenders, without the story immediately before any of them, "what did Solomon ask for?" a good percentage would likely answer, "wisdom." The Wikipedia entry on "wisdom" says the same thing:

In the [Christian Bible](#) and [Jewish](#) scripture, wisdom is represented by the sense of justice of the lawful and wise king [Solomon](#), who asks God for wisdom in [1 Kings 3](#).

Close examination of the 1 Kings text, however, reveals that Solomon himself did not use that word. Solomon asked God for,

...an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil.

God is the one who in reply said he was giving Solomon a "wise and discerning mind."

Solomon's actual request is in the context of his predicament. Most scholars believe he was likely around twenty years old,⁷ and he was now sole ruler over Israel. Solomon was bright enough to know he was in over his head! This was not a job that Solomon got on his own accord. It was a job that God gave him. Solomon knew as much and confessed it:

O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father.

While God placed Solomon in the job of king, Solomon was not qualified to adequately do that job! As Solomon said,

I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.

Of course, the age of 20 was not "a little child." Solomon's expression was one of humility. In essence he was saying, "Lord, you have made me king, but I am a baby! I am way too young to know how to do this!" Solomon adds that sentiment with the phrase, "I do not know how to go out or come in." Solomon knew he was missing the necessary skills of leadership.⁸

As related in 1 Kings, Solomon's prayer to God was not simply, "Please give me wisdom." What Solomon said was, "God, you have set me in a task that I do not have the ability to do. Please give me what I need so I can do what you have called me to do!"

Since Solomon's direct request was for:

1. an "understanding mind" (literally a "listening heart") to govern God's people,
2. an ability to "discern between good and evil" also to aid him in governing⁹,

⁷ See, e.g., Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F., *Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 3, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles*, (Hendrickson edition 2006) at 31.

⁸ The phrase, "go out and come in" was a Hebrew expression used many times in the Bible as a reference to "knowing what was going on and being able to lead in that regard." As Moses was informed he would no longer lead Israel, he asked God to appoint one who would, "go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in" (Num. 27:17). Moses explained his lack of ability to lead the people using the same phrase: "'I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.'" (Deut 31:2). When Saul made David a leader and commander, the phrase was used: "So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people" (2 Sam 18:13).

⁹ This might be seen as one request, with the discernment between good and evil being what Solomon meant by an understanding mind.

and since God replied that he would give Solomon a wise mind, then perhaps one might think that wisdom is the equivalent to the two things Solomon sought, an understanding mind and an ability to discern between good and evil. This idea might be further reinforced by the parallel account provided in the narrative of 2 Chronicles. As 2 Chronicles 1:10 reads, Solomon asked,

Give me now wisdom and knowledge to go out and come in before this people, for who can govern this people of yours, which is so great.

We are leaving aside for another lesson the relationship between the accounts in Kings and in Chronicles. Our focus right now turns on the word and idea of “wisdom” as that term is used in this passage and beyond. For us to more fairly understand what wisdom is and what Solomon sought, a further word study is added for those interested in understanding the word more fully. (In other words, this is extra credit to the lesson!)

WISDOM IN SCRIPTURE (a word study)

As we study a word in Scripture, there are many great tools and resources available both online and at your favorite neighborhood theological library! Operating simply at home, one can use a concordance or go online to a website like www.BibleGateway.com and enter a word for a search. Entering “wisdom” in the English Standard Version of the search box for the BibleGateway site produces 211 verses with the word “wisdom” in them. Reading each of these verses would give a good thorough idea of the different ways “wisdom” is used in Scripture.

If we were to take the search in BibleGateway and change to the New International Version, the number of places where “wisdom” occurs jumps to 219! The additional 8 verses certainly clues one in that something is going on. That something is relatively simple. “Wisdom” is used to translate different words in the Bible. Further complicating the picture, we can add that “wisdom” is not the only word used to translate some of the words in question.

To more thoroughly study “wisdom” in the Bible, we can go to several other resources. One resource is a good Bible dictionary. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, for example is a six-volume work that has an eleven-page entry on “Wisdom in the Old Testament.”¹⁰ This entry breaks down “wisdom” into an organized structure with footnotes and references. The entry does not assume knowledge of the original Hebrew (or Greek in

¹⁰ Freedman, David Noel, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992), V. 6.

the New Testament), but does assume a basic understanding of Old Testament studies. Another well-regarded work is the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.¹¹ Aside from the resources which require only English, there are a number of useful books that thoroughly dissect “wisdom” using the original languages. Books like Jenni and Westermann’s *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*¹² and Botterweck and Ringgren’s *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*¹³ both give solid entries that trace the use of the core Hebrew word for wisdom (חכמה- *chokhmah*) in the Old Testament, as well as in the other related languages outside the Bible.

A thorough word study on wisdom would look at not only these references, but also works which dedicate all or a part of their analysis to the term. An established treatise on this subject is James Crenshaw’s *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*.¹⁴

A study into “wisdom” in the Old Testament produces several matters worth noting in this abbreviated word study:

- **“Wisdom” was a concern in contemporary societies outside of Israel**

Archaeology has uncovered tablets that indicate wisdom was a concern among the Egyptians south of Israel as well as Mesopotamian societies north of Israel. The Egyptians had teaching texts that were directed at training people in order, justice and truth. Among the proverbs and precepts of ancient Egypt are the Instruction Texts of Pharaoh Amen-em-ope. Most scholars date the initial production of these texts prior to the time of Solomon.¹⁵ A portion of this Egyptian work is often noted as closely related and perhaps a source material for some of Proverbs 22:17-23:14.¹⁶

¹¹ Bromily, Geoffrey, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (Eerdmans 1997), V. 4.

¹² Jenni, Ernst and Westermann, Claus, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Hendrickson 1997), V. 1.

¹³ Botterweck, G. J. and Ringgren, Helmer, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (Eerdmans 1983), V. 4.

¹⁴ Crenshaw, James L., *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 3d. ed., (Westminster John Knox 2010).

¹⁵ Toronto Egyptologist Ronald Williams dates the text as 1200-1100 BC. See “The Sage in Egyptian Literature” in Gammie, John and Perdue, Leo, *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, (Eisenbrauns 1990), at 23.

¹⁶ Some evangelicals initially recoil over the idea that some portions of the Old Testament might have as a source material writings from other cultures. Such is not surprising really. Solomon took a princess of Egypt as a wife. Israel lived in and among the Egyptians for hundreds of years. There is nothing surprising that Solomon or other Israelites would have learned the wisdom of others. Similarly, it does not invalidate the premise of inspiration for God to have used such literature selectively in Scripture. Egyptologist James Hoffmeier teaches his students that 1 Kgs 4:30 (“so that Solomon’s wisdom

Compare, for example, these passages from The Instruction of Amen-em-opet¹⁷ with the similar Proverbs passages:

The

The Instruction of Amen-em-opet	Proverbs
Give thy ears, hear what is said, Give thy heart to understand them. To put them in thy heart is worth while. (1:9-11)	Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge, for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you. (22:17-18)
Guard thyself against robbing the oppressed And against overbearing the disabled. (2:1-2)	Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate. (22:22)
Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of the arable land (6:1)	Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set. (22:28)

ideas of seeking and wanting wisdom, even if known as simple instructions in justice and truth are ideas that Solomon would have seen in other cultures and other leaders.

- **The most common Hebrew word for “wisdom” has a broad and diverse meaning.**

Proverbs 8 and 2 Chronicles 1:10 use the same Hebrew word for wisdom, *chokhmah* (חכמה). In both cases, the word seems well translated as our English word “wisdom.” We easily understand the passages that speak of wisdom in a special divine or spiritual sense. For example, Proverbs 30:3 equates wisdom with “knowledge of the Holy One.” Proverbs 9 is built around the contrast of wisdom with folly:

The Way of Wisdom

Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.

surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt”) implies that Solomon had access to and knew of Egyptian Wisdom, perhaps through his marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter. Reader Steve Taylor adds, “God has manifested himself to mankind through nature and the conscience he placed in every man so that we might seek him out and know him. He has also set certain principles into place that govern the way the universe exists. For man to recognize some of those does not mean that man is the originator of the concept – he simply recognized what God had chosen to reveal. That God wants an orderly universe with principles that apply to all creatures should not surprise us. In fact, it should comfort us that God has done so much to help whet our appetite to know him.”

¹⁷ Pritchard, James B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, (Princeton 1969), at 421ff.

She has sent out her young women to call
from the highest places in the town,
"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"
To him who lacks sense she says,
"Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Leave your simple ways, and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

...

The Way of Folly

The woman Folly is loud;
she is seductive and knows nothing.
She sits at the door of her house;
she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,
calling to those who pass by,
who are going straight on their way,
"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"
And to him who lacks sense she says,
"Stolen water is sweet,
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
But he does not know that the dead are there,
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Solomon's wisdom was also linked to his learning and knowledge. In this sense, his wisdom was a part of his knowledge of "3,000 proverbs" and "1,005 songs" (1 Kgs 4:32). Solomon learned about animals, reptiles, fish, and horticulture (1 Kgs 4:29-4:34). These passages all make sense of wisdom/*chokhmah* as special divine insight. A careful word study, however, shows that the Hebrew term wisdom/*chokhmah*, carries a much more diverse meaning than we would normally assume as divine insight. Consider its use in these passages:

- "You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill (*chokhmah*), that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood" (Ex 28:3).
- "All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill (*chokhmah*) spun the goats' hair" (Ex 35:26).
- "They reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end [literally, "and all their skill/wisdom (*chokhmah*) was thoroughly confused]" (Pslm 107:27).

We see in Biblical passages like these a fuller idea of wisdom that seems consistent with wisdom among Israel's neighbors as Old Testament scholar Gerald Sheppard noted, At a minimum, this internationally recognized wisdom would have comprised technical skills, a general knowledge of the world, and a great facility in the use of proverbs and riddles.¹⁸

The Old Testament word wisdom/*chokhmah* carries this broad idea as it is translated variously "wisdom," "skill," or even "wits."

It is interesting to go back to the wisdom/*chokhmah* of the tailoring work on Aaron's garments mentioned in Exodus 28:3 above. This skill at sewing was one that was from God. The passage says that God filled the workers with that skill (wisdom/*chokhmah*). Solomon's wisdom is immediately manifested in the passage as his fixing the problem of the two prostitutes each claiming the same child. This was a divine skill, not simply divine insight into the mysteries of life.

As noted earlier, in Scripture, there is a distinction between divine and earthly wisdom, but this difference is not that one is "spiritual" while the other is mundane. It is a question of whether the skill, the judgment, the insight is one that is proceeding from God and being used in his honor or whether it is proceeding from human selfishness or self-interest. In this sense, it can be said that whether answering the riddles of life or using the skills of listening (or sewing in Ex 28:3),

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Pslm 111:10).

In the Old Testament sense, Godly wisdom is not simply a particular insight into a deep mystery. It is living God's purposes out in God's strength and from God's provisions. It includes understanding how to live, how to treat others, and how to function in the roles God has prepared.

Even for Solomon, wisdom was linked to living right before God. The Lord told Solomon that he would give Solomon a wise and discerning mind, as well as the things not asked for (riches and honor). Then there is an important add by God,

And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days (1 Kgs 3:14).

Solomon used his wisdom to effectuate justice between the two prostitutes. Solomon's reputation for wisdom and understanding prompted a visit by the Queen of Sheba. But all the wise ideas and all the just rulings in the world could not be considered Godly wisdom absent an obedient heart.

¹⁸ Bromily, V. 4 at 1074.

We see wisdom as the cause behind Solomon’s diplomacy and personal interaction with King Hiram that resulted in peace between the countries:

And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him. And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty (1 Kgs 5:12).

Wisdom without obedience might be “knowledge,” but it is also folly. Wisdom in an obedient life is Godly wisdom. This was Solomon’s real prayer. Solomon did not really ask for “wisdom” (*chokhmah*) by name. Solomon was faced with a task from the Lord that he could not do on his own. Solomon’s prayer was, “You made me to do this, but I do not know how. Please give me what I need to do what you made me to do.” That prayer – net net – is a prayer for wisdom! “God, give me what I need to live the life you want me to lead!”

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 9

1. Many people think that the Old Testament seems to convey a different image of God than the New Testament. What are the implications for Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount on that issue?
2. How does the Scriptural teaching of money fit with our 21st century capitalism? How does working hard and seeking to use resources for good purposes make for good stewardship?
3. If God asked you what you most wanted or needed from him, what would you say? Why?

Week Ten Readings

<p>March 3-7 Jesus in Galilee Jn 4:43-4:45 (The Sermon on Mount Insert Cont’d) Context: John does not tell the story of the Sermon on the Mount. It is inserted here where John simply references Jesus teaching in Galilee. The passages adjoining each reading are the Old Testament sources that define much of what Jesus taught.</p> <p>3 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:1-7:5 Ezek 35 Luk 6:37-6:45 Matt 7:6 Prov 9 Prov 23:9 Phil 3:1-3:11 Matt 7:7-7:11 Luk 11:5-11:13 1 Jn 3:19-3:24 1 Jn 5:13-5:15 2 Chron 14-16</p>	<p>4 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:12 Luk 6:27-6:36 Matt 7:13-7:14 Ezek 46 Luk 13:1-13:28 Luk 13:30-13:35 Pslm 16 Prov 28</p> <p>5 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:15-7:20 Deut 13 Jer 14-16</p> <p>6 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:15-7:20 2 Chron 17-20</p>	<p>7 Sermon on Mount Jn 4:43-4:45</p> <p>Matt 7:21-7:23 Jer 35 2 Kgs 16:1-17:5 Isa 14:24-15:9 Hos 4-5 Hos 8-9 2 Kgs 17:6-17:23 Matt 7:24-7:28 Luk 6:46-6:49</p> <p>8 Jesus Heals Through Intercession Jn 4:46-4:54</p> <p>Gen 20 Ex 15:22-15:27 Num 12</p>
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