

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 27

June 30-July 6, 2014

Acts 7:45-9:19

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

Week Twenty-seven Readings

<p>6/30 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:47</p> <p>1 Kgs 5-7</p> <p>7/1 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:47</p> <p>1 Kgs 8 2 Chron 1 Prov 23:15-23:18 2 Chron 8</p> <p>7/2 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:47</p> <p>1 Kgs 9-11</p>	<p>7/3 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:48-7:53</p> <p>2 Kgs 10-13 Prov 19:16, 29</p> <p>7/4 Stephen's Speech Acts 7:53</p> <p>2 Kgs 14</p> <p>The Stoning of Stephen Acts 7:54-7:60</p> <p>Mrk 14:53-15:32</p>	<p>7/5 Saul Persecutes the Church Acts 8:1-8:3</p> <p>2 Pet 1:1-1:15</p> <p>Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria Acts 8:4-8:8</p> <p>Simon the Magician Believes Acts 8:9-8:25</p> <p>Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch Acts 8:26-8:40</p> <p>Deut 23:1</p> <p>Saul's Conversion Acts 9:1-9:19</p> <p>Pslm 144 Prov 30:1-30:3, 30:5-30:6</p> <p><i>7/6 Off</i></p>
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STEPHEN'S SPEECH (Acts 7:45-9:19)

This week, we end 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. Luke's detailing of Stephen's message shows no immediate conversions among the audience; however, as the story of Stephen's stoning unfolds, we learn of one Saul/Paul who was present. Saul/Paul will become a key figure of the book of Acts as he comes to faith in the Messiah whom he so vehemently opposed.

READING PURPOSE: The Jews trying Stephen were concerned about his threat to their temple and all it represented. In his defense, Stephen mentioned that the temple was not built by David, but by Solomon. Jesus was also indicted for speaking of destroying the temple. The Jews saw that, albeit wrongly, as blasphemy. The goal of the readings is to both show *why* the Jews thought so, and to show *why* they were wrong! The focus of God was always upon the hearts of the people, not upon a magical location of a man-made building.

1 Kings 5-11; 2 Chronicles 1 and 8; Proverbs 23:15-18

יְהוָה (BEYT YAHWEH) "HOUSE OF YHWH"

In 1 Kings 6:1, we read that Solomon began building the temple in the fourth year of his reign:

...in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel... he began to build the house of the LORD.

LORD is written in upper case letters because it is a specific translation of a Hebrew word that does not mean "Lord" in any normal sense. The Hebrew word is made up of four letters:

יהוה

These letters (read right to left) are *yodh*, *hey*, *vav*, and *hey*. The *yodh* sounds like a "y" and so we have the sounds/letters of Yhvh. Do you recognize it? We typically see it written as "Yhwh." This is because that *vav* letter is often written as a German "w," yet it is properly pronounced as the English "v." Even though we read and now often call the word "Yahweh," it is more properly pronounced as "Yahveh."

Solomon started construction on the temple as *beyt Yhvh*, the house of the LORD. This phrase is used over and over in reference to the temple, not simply by Solomon, but by

others in the Old Testament as well. The phrase is best understood if we study *Yhwh* a bit more carefully.

These four letters carry special meaning in the Old Testament. For centuries and for countless people, they form the most holy word in human speech. The word is so holy that even today, many people refuse to say it out loud.

When I was studying Hebrew under a rather devout Jew, he taught us that when we reached the word *Yhwh*, we were not to try and say it. Rather, we were to say “*ha-shem*” instead. *Ha-shem* is the Hebrew word that means “the name.” This was one of two principal ways that practicing Jews today find acceptable as a substitute for the name that must not be named!

What is it about these four letters that merits such reverence? The key is found in the Old Testament. In Exodus, the word surfaces with an explanation in the account of Moses before the burning bush. God identified himself to Moses as the God of his father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob (Ex 3:6). In each of these phrases, the Hebrew word for “God” is the Hebrew “*Elohim*.” That word means “God” when speaking of the Lord God, but it could also mean lower case “gods.” It does not speak only of the one true God.

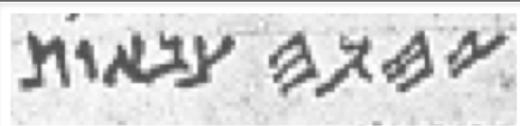
Moses then asks God how he should answer if the people of Israel should ask the “name” of the God that sent Moses. God answered in Ex 3:14-15.

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

Without detailing in this lesson the forms used and translated as “I AM” in the ESV,¹ we limit our focus to God’s statement, “The LORD, the God of your fathers....” Here, we have the word *Yhwh*.

From this point, the name *Yhwh* takes center stage in the Exodus and among the Israelites. In Exodus 6:2-3, God speaks to Moses again emphasizing the new nature of this revelation to the Israelites:

¹ The Hebrew words translated “I AM” are variant forms of *Yhwh* (*'hvh*). Scholars for centuries have debated over exactly how this form should be vocalized and understood. Most scholars accept it as “I AM,” the present tense of the verb “to be,” if such were to exist in Hebrew. Some scholars see it as a future, “I WILL BE.” A few scholars also consider it “causative” which means it would carry the meaning, “I CAUSE TO BE.”



On the right is the name *Yhwh* written in the ancient Paleo-Hebrew script. The word on the left uses normal Aramaic letters that were typical of writing at that time. This is from the Habakkuk Commentary found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QpHab).

God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD [*Yhwh*] I did not make myself known to them.

If we go back to Genesis 17:1, for example, we see that when God revealed himself to Abram, he did so as "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai* in Hebrew), not as *Yhwh*. It is an interesting note

that prior to this time, Israelite names did not reflect the name of *Yhwh*, but after this, name after name included "*Yhwh*" in some form as a tribute.² Jo-shua, for example, begins with the abbreviation "Jo" reflective of the "name" of God (similarly the names Jo-tham, Jo-el, Jo-nathan, *etc.*) Many names also reflect an abbreviation of *Yhwh* in their ending (for example Eli-jah).

From the exodus forward, *Yhwh* was not simply a label for God, but was his most holy name. When God passed before Moses, Exodus significantly notes that God not only allowed Moses to see the trail of his glory, but *Yhwh* also spoke aloud his name:

And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you *my name 'The LORD'* (Ex 33:19).

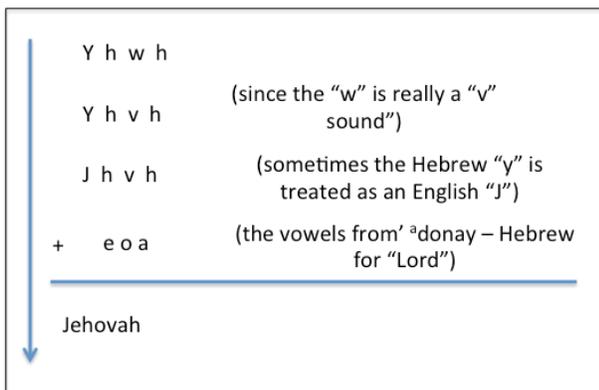
This forms the basis for observant Jews to read "the name" in place of *Yhwh* when reading the Bible today. This practice of substituting something as an alternative for *Yhwh* predates the New Testament.

When did the Jews quit pronouncing God's name? We are uncertain. Certainly sometime before the time of Christ, it was treated with a special reverence that stopped the common writing of it as well as using it in common speech. Beyond that, scholars are hesitant to try and give specifics.

We get some insight to this from the Dead Sea Scrolls. These materials discovered in the caves around Qumran and the Dead Sea in the mid-20th century opened a great door of light into the practices of Jews during the inter-testamental times when they were written.

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find writings of Scripture as well as other significant writings of very devout Jews living in the first few centuries before Christ. In this time between the Old and New Testament, we see the Holy Name of God already treated differently from the rest of Scripture in some, but not all of the texts. In the Habakkuk Commentary, for example, where *Yhwh* should be in the text, the writers did not write it

² Some point to Jochabed, the mother of Moses as holding a form of God's name. Most scholars readily explain why her name is not using the divine name in any way, but there is still debate on this issue.



Starting from the top we see the progression from the Hebrew name for God (*Yhwh*) to the English name "Jehovah."

in the Aramaic script we are learning (which was the written script for the rest of the scroll). Instead, they used the Hebrew letters we call "Paleo-Hebrew." It is the likely Hebrew script used early in Hebrew writing, much closer to Moses' day than to the centuries before Christ.

Another scroll that records certain rules of community behavior for this group who lived in the Qumran area used four dots in place of the holy name of God,

While we are uncertain exactly when the name was no longer in use, many scholars do agree on the reason for disuse. Most believe that people were careful to avoid possible blasphemy through an improper usage of the name. In Leviticus, the story is recounted of a woman's son who "blasphemed the Name, and cursed." The Israelites followed God's instructions and stoned the man:

Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD [*Yhwh*] shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death (Lev 24:16).

Because it was not readily pronounced, scholars are not even certain how to say it properly. Most of our Hebrew is pronounced because Jewish scholars in the first centuries after Christ began adding markings to indicate the vowel sounds and other necessary vocal inflections to allow the Hebrew words to be said properly (We remind our readers that Hebrew did not have written vowels in the sense that we think of vowels in our languages today).

When writing these vowel sounds, however, the Jewish scribes did not add vowel sounds to *Yhwh*, for that name was not to be said anyway! Over time, more modern scholars have attempted to add some vowel sounds, but the early additions were not meant to accurately convey the actual pronunciation of the word.

Most scholars over time used the vowel sounds for another Hebrew word for God, *'donay*. This word means "Lord," but not only in a "God" sense. It means "Lord" also in a lower case "master" sense. This was another word that observant Jews would say in place of *Yhwh* when reading the Scriptures once the name had become too sacred to pronounce. This is the origin of the English construction "Jehovah."

The vowels for *'donay* ("d" becomes an "e", o and a) were then applied to *Yhwh*. Because the Hebrew "y" can also be an English "J," this is how the name "Jehovah" was invented. J, from the Hebrew "Y," "e" as an added vowel sound from *'donay* (the

sound of the 'A vowel), "h" for the Hebrew *hey*, "o" from 'a *donay*, "v" for the *vav*, "a" from 'a *donay*, and the final "h" from the final *hey*. In other words, the English name of Jehovah has great history in English Bibles, but no real basis as the actual Hebrew pronunciation of God's name.³

Adding "a" and "e" to Yhvh to make "Yahveh" is the current best guess of scholars on how to say what they suppose was the pronunciation of the name of God, but even that is not 100 percent certain.

More efforts are given to trying to understand the meaning of the name rather than its pronunciation. Even in that, though, scholars struggle and fail to find consensus. Scholars cannot even agree on how the word Yahweh is formed in Hebrew. The difficulties in arriving at a definitive understanding of the name's meaning, its origin beyond Sinai (if any), and even its function in the Old Testament lead scholars to many theories.

Notwithstanding, there are several areas of general agreement about the name that stand out. For one, scholars generally agree that the name of God is a verb form, rather than a noun. That itself makes the name of God stand out from other names given to gods in that time of history. Rather than being a noun of statement about size, ability, or status, God's name is one of action—a verb. God insists on his name being a verb, as he is a God known by his deeds, and not simply by a title.

In this sense, when God would pronounce his name, it was connected with action and with those aspects of his character that were action driven. Earlier when referencing God's glory passing before Moses, the pronouncing of God's name is keyed to his actions:

And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' *And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy* (Ex 33:19).

Similarly in the next chapter, when God makes the new set of tablets with the Ten Commandments, he again proclaims his own name and associates it with action:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Ex 34:5-6).

Even in the first revealing of the name to Moses in Exodus 3, it comes in the context of God as an acting God. God says, "I have seen... I have heard... I know..." It is then

³ See, Parke-Taylor, Geoffrey, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible*, (Wilfred Laurier University Press 1975), at 9.

that God acts to bring his people out of bondage. *Yhwh* is an active God; *Yhwh* is a verb!

A second outstanding point centers on scholastic agreement concerning the lack of agreement from scholars on the full and precise meaning of the name. Even though *Yhwh* is used 6,828 times in the Old Testament, the inability to tie it down fully prompted Tryggve Mettinger to write,

God remains the hidden God. The God who in the Old Testament has contacts with mortals remains, nevertheless, always God, and in sacredness God will remain unfathomable. The Old Testament knows of only one response to the divine self-revelation: the worship and fear of the Lord. Anyone seeking contact with God must be prepared to respect God's incognito.⁴

While Mettinger makes a solid point on not knowing God fully, we do know God as he has revealed himself to us, both in his actions (verb-speak) and in the life of Christ (more on that later!). We can know God to the extent he reveals himself, but we must never foolishly believe he is revealed fully to a human! Even Moses, who heard his name, could not behold his full glory. As Parke-Davis wrote,

To know God is not to dispel the mystery which belongs to deity. God is known, but not fully known.⁵

יהוה-יתב (BEYT YAHWEH)

THE CALL OF GOD'S NAME OVER THE TEMPLE

There is an unusual passage that records a statement by Solomon in dedication of the *beyt Yhwh*, the House of God. In 1 Kings 8:41 the ESV reads,

Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel...comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and *that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.*

Solomon wants all aware that the house he built (the temple) is "called by God's name." Now as translated, this passage seems to imply that *Yhwh* is to be a label for the temple. But Swedish Old Testament scholar Tryggve Mettinger makes an interesting analysis of this passage.

⁴ Mettinger, Tryggve, *In Search of God* (Fortress 1988), at 11.

⁵ Parke-Davis, at 11.

Mettinger points out the Jewish legal tradition of pronouncing a new owner's name over a property as part of the transfer of that property.

When we buy or sell property, normally the transaction in question is the object of binding written documentation. By contrast, we find instead that in ancient Israel the proclamation of the name of the new owner played an important role. For example, when a field changed hands there was a proclamation of the name in the presence of witnesses: the money changed hands and the name of the new owner was called out over the field in question, thereby completing the transaction in process.⁶

Mettinger uses this to explain a number of Old Testament passages where the translations are hard to make smooth otherwise. With this juridical language recognized, he then gives a very literal translation of the 1 Kings 8:43 passage in a way that makes good sense:

...that they may know that your name has been called over this house which I have built.

As the holy name of *Yhwh* was called out over the *beyt* built by Solomon, the *beyt* was to be understood by all as the *beyt Yhwh*, the house of the LORD.

This sense of ownership gives some explanation behind the Jewish indignation at the time of Stephen to the idea that Jesus would destroy the temple. This would be viewed as destruction of God's property!

What the Jews were missing was the other phrase that Jesus attached to his teaching of destruction of the temple. God would also "rebuild" the temple! And God would do it in three days! By this, Jesus meant the temple of his body – the church. It is in the saved people that we find the true dwelling of God on earth. We as the temple are not only his dwelling place, but as with Solomon's temple, we *belong* to him. We are HIS people – the flock of HIS pasture.

Stephen and the Christian faith were not advocating the removal of God's house. They were announcing the complete makeover!

2 Kings 10-14; 1 Chronicles 9:1-9:34; Mark 14:53-15:32

Stephen pointed out the history of Israel's past rulers' murder of countless holy men. The context reading begins with the slaughter of Ahab's children, not because those children are reckoned among the holy. But Ahab, their father, was notorious for his merciless killing of people that got in his way.

⁶ Mettinger, at 10.

Jehu, who oversaw the slaughter, was not careful to walk in God's ways. His sons after him were not careful either. The story of Israel and Judah was a story of an occasional good king, but an appalling number of evil kings. During the "days" of the original temple, there was enough evil in the land that eventually God overthrew his own people and brought down the house made for him. (1 Chronicles 9 gives the genealogy of those who returned from exile.) The temple in Stephen's day was the *second* temple on the spot. The first one was destroyed, according to the prophets, by God himself, through the hands of foreigners.

Stephen's audience should have concerned themselves with their own hearts and lives, not with the question of whether God's temple could or would be destroyed. No such destruction could ever occur without God's hand. Similarly, if God was going to see the temple destroyed, no one would stop it. The calling of God's people is to *be* God's people, in heart, soul, mind, and body.

The context readings in this area conclude with the reminder of Jesus' indictment over the idea he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, along with the reaction of the temple power structure to this idea.

SAUL PERSECUTES THE CHURCH

SAUL'S CONVERSION

In Acts 8 and 9, we read about Saul's vigorous oppression and persecution of the church. With great zeal, Saul set about to dismantle all who considered themselves believers in Jesus.

We accompany this reading with a few select passages to highlight several aspects of the text.

2 Peter 1:1-1:15

Examine this passage closely. Although written many years later toward the end of Peter's life, it shows clearly the apostolic teaching to believers. What is harsh here? Peter wants the church to be holy, and to live in grace and peace. The promise was that in Christ, there is an escape from the sinful corruption of the world.

It would be one thing if Saul/Paul, and other persecutors of the church were trying to stamp out wretched sins that unravel the fabric of society. Or if the church was a military uprising looking to supplant the powers that be with a new power structure. But that wasn't the teaching. The teaching was simple: live holy lives by the faith you have in the resurrected Jesus. God's power behind that resurrection is NOT to give you political or military clout. It is to give you power over sin!

Psalm 144

Along with Paul's conversion we have set Psalm 144. This Psalm is a marvelous one of praise to God for delivering his people, even though the people are not really that significant – just a breath, a passing shadow (Pslm 144:4). Yet God saves his people, and as the psalmist requested, God is able to teach them a new song! Just what Saul/Paul needed – the blessings of newness from Almighty God.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Deuteronomy 23:1

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is supplemented by simply one verse, but it is an important verse.

A eunuch was shunned under the Law of Moses. No eunuch was to enter into the assembly of the Lord. We see, however, no such concerns with Philip. The message of Jesus reaches beyond the physical deformity. This is before we read of Peter's encounter with Cornelius and the Gentile conversion in Acts 10. We can begin to see the old wineskins bursting under the pressure of the new wine of Jesus' resurrection and kingdom.

Questions for Discussion

Consider building questions around these passages:

1. How do you see the church as the house of God? Are you comfortable with God "owning" you? Does your life reflect that ownership?
2. YHWH, YHVH, Jehovah, God, God the Father, Lord God Almighty – what difference do these words/names/titles make to you? Sometimes is it useful to see God as someone ALMIGHTY? Other times do you need him more as a Father? Or even as a friend, a title Jesus readily claimed?
3. Have you ever done things that you *thought* were right and holy, but which time turned out to teach you might have been the exact opposite? How do you handle processing such mistakes? Where does God's mercy come into play?

Week Twenty-eight Readings

<p>7 /7 Saul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues Acts 9:19b-9:22 Matt 28:16-28:20 Pslm 148</p> <p>Saul Escapes to Jerusalem Acts 9:23-9:31 Pslm 70-71</p> <p>Healings and Restored Life Acts 9:32-9:43</p> <p>7/8 Peter and Cornelius Acts 10:1-10:8</p> <p>Peter's Vision Acts 10:9-10:33 Lev 11 Lev 17 Ex 22:31</p>	<p>7/9 Gentiles Hear the Gospel Acts 10:34-10:43 Deut 10:12-10:22</p> <p>The Holy Spirit Falls on Gentiles Acts 10:44-10:48 Eph 3 Rom 16:24-16:27 Ezek 47:13-47:23</p> <p>Peter Reports to the Church Acts 11:1-11:18 Ezr 1-2</p> <p>7/10 The Church in Antioch Acts 11:19-11:30</p> <p>The Death of James Acts 12:1-12:5 Mrk 10:32-10:45 Pslm 57</p>	<p>7/10 cont'd Peter is Rescued Acts 12:6-12:19 Pslm 123 Pslm 116 Pslm 124 Pslm 125</p> <p>7/11 The Follies of Pride & the Death of Herod Acts 12:20-12:25 Deut 16:21-17:13 Prov 15:25 Eccles 7 2 Tim 3:1-3:9 Prov 25:26 2 Chron 26 Pslm 73 Prov 17:7</p>	<p>7/12 The Follies of Pride & the Death of Herod Acts 12:20-12:25 Deut 17:14-17:20 Deut 28 Prov 11:7-11:11</p> <p>Barnabas and Paul to Cyprus Acts 13:1-13:12</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>7/13 Off</i></p>
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