

The Context Bible

Life Group Lesson 7

John 3:31-4:26

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

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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JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (John 4:1-26)

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is one that clearly has undertones from outside of the words recorded in John. The readers of the day, and certainly the people surrounding the events, *knew* things, and had certain views and perspectives that, once we recover, enhance our understanding of the encounter and John's write-up. Unfortunately the Old Testament has some of the roots of the Samaritan story, but it doesn't explain those roots. It simply presents them. Furthermore, things are complicated because more of the important Samaritan history is found in the time period between the testaments. So we begin the contextual readings by setting out Old Testament passages that provide the roots of our New Testament story.

Samaria (John 4:1-6)

The first set of readings gives us background to Samaria.

2 Kings 17:24-41

These events take place after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom (sometimes called "Israel" and sometimes called "Samaria" after its capital city). Immigrants from other Assyrian conquests were sent into Samaria to resettle the lands after the Israelites were removed. Because these people did not know or fear YHWH¹, God sent lions to plague them. The king of Assyria heard about the lion problem and deduced that it was because of religious transgressions of the local god (not understanding YHWH as the universal God). So the king sent a priest back to teach the newcomers how to fear YHWH. The people simply added the worship of YHWH to their pantheon of gods. These people also interbred with the remaining Israelites and became the Samaritans of the New Testament heritage, a sacrilege to "true Jews."

Nehemiah 1-4

In Nehemiah we shift several hundred years to the Southern Kingdom Jews returning from their Babylonian exile. One of them named Nehemiah had become a government official. The king allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city, a monumental moment in Judah's history. While Nehemiah and his team worked on the project, they met opposition from a group headed up by a Samaritan named Sanballat. Sanballat organized the Samaritan army to oppose Nehemiah and the Jews. We read this in a handful of verses, but this was real history. It lasted for some period of

¹ Sometimes we use "YHWH" in these lessons to emphasize that the Hebrew uses that word. Where the original Hebrew does so, it is translated by most every Bible version as "LORD" using large and small upper case letters. This is to reflect the name of God as delivered to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13-15).

time, and was a course of antagonism that threatened the safety and existence of the Jewish nation.

The Jewish historian Josephus (AD37-100) gives some additional detail. Sanballat was the governor (“satrap”) of Samaria who at first sought to forge a good alliance with the returning Jews. Sanballat gave his daughter in marriage to a Jew named Manasseh, brother to the high priest Jaddua. Manasseh participated in the priestly duties. The elders in Jerusalem were concerned that Manasseh had intermarried with a non-Jew. They instructed him to either divorce his wife, or cease serving as a priest.

Sanballat had a better offer. Sanballat told his son-in-law to come north, and Sanballat built the altar at Mt. Gerizim setting up Manasseh as high priest. Many other priests left with Manasseh and began serving at Mt Gerizim among the Samaritans.² Nehemiah does not name Manasseh but states simply,

Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?” And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites (Neh. 13:27-29).

In tomorrow’s reading we see how the intermarriage issue became severe at that time.

This was one of many actions that engendered further hard feelings between the two groups.

Samaritans (John 4:1-15)

As described above, the Samaritans were *persona non grata* as fake Israelites, and opposing forces in fights between Judah and the northern countryside. By the time of Jesus, good Jews would not touch, talk to, or deal with Samaritans. They were considered dogs.

Ezra 8-10

This Ezra writing begins with genealogy of the returning Jews from exile. It shows how seriously the Jews took blood purity, adding to the distinctiveness they maintained from the interbred Samaritans. While Ezra was overseeing things post-exile, there was a contingency of Jews who decided to intermarry like the Israelites had done. Ezra went

² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.8.2-4.

into deep mourning and repentance, and the people did as well. The names of those who had failed genetic purity were listed. Purity of the line of Abraham was at stake.

Jesus the Living Water (John 4:7-15)

As Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman at the well, he ventured into a discussion with echoes of God's provision for the Israelites over a thousand years earlier. The core story comes from the book of Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch (or first five books of the Old Testament). The Pentateuch was the Scriptures³ used by the Samaritan Jews, so the illustration Jesus made should not have gone unnoticed.

Exodus 17

This story finds the Israelites wandering through the dry wilderness. They were tired, thirsty, and quarrelsome. Moses sought the Lord's direction and was told to strike a rock in the presence of the people. He did so, and water gushed out. God met the water need of the people.

Numbers 19:1-20:13

In this passage, we have first the rules of cleanness set out, followed by another time where God gave direction to Moses to provide water for the people. This time, Moses was not to strike the rock, but simply to speak to it. Moses faith faltered, and he didn't see how God would bring forth water by speaking. So instead, he struck the rock. Water did come forth, but the disobedience was not lost on God. Moses received a discipline that prohibited him from bringing the Israelites into the Promised Land. Obedience is important, even in the face of God's holy water!

Isaiah 12

This Isaiah passage should have spoken to the Samaritan woman, although we have no indication she would have known it. Isaiah was a main prophet who spoke to the Northern Kingdom of Israel speaking to their coming destruction by the Assyrians. In these few verses, Isaiah prophetically promised of a time when God would turn his anger away, becoming the salvation for the people. We know Jesus readily turned to Isaiah when speaking about his own ministry (Lk 4:16-20), and there can be little doubt this prophecy was on his mind as he spoke with the woman at the well:

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted (Isa. 12:3).

³ Their version had slight differences and is appropriately called the "Samaritan Pentateuch."

The following verse adds another layer to the conversation Jesus has with the woman. The woman turns the discussion to a debate over *where* one should worship. Jesus directs her away from the place of worship to the heart of worship. This flows well with the Isaiah passage that promised God's name and glorious deeds were to be proclaimed "in all the earth," not in one particular place (Isa. 12:5).

Jeremiah 2:4-37

This is an extended discussion about the way Israel forsook the Lord. In the discussion, the key for our context of John 4 is found in Jeremiah 2:13.

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

God likens himself to a fountain of "living waters," the very thing Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman. Instead of relying upon the Lord as such, the Israelites were guilty of hewing out their own broken cisterns. Cisterns were routinely made in the arid areas of Israel where rain needed to be stored for later use. In areas where there was flowing (i.e., "living") water, they did not need the cisterns, but in areas without a ready water supply they did.

God was always there to be relied upon by his people. The problem was the self-sufficiency of those who did not rely upon the Lord!

Jeremiah 17

Jeremiah here challenges Judah for a similar sin to Israel. Judah trusts in man, rather than the Lord (Jer. 17:5). Those that live accordingly are dwelling in "parched places of the wilderness." In Judah, those are places where people live by collecting water in cisterns. They are contrasted to the people who trust in the Lord. People who trust in the Lord are like trees planted by streams of water (Jer. 17:8). Jeremiah doesn't leave the point there. He reemphasizes that those who forsake God, forsake the "fountain of living water" (Jer. 17:13).

Zechariah 14

Living waters were also deeply embedded in the Jewish teaching of the Day of the Lord. Zechariah noted that the Day of the Lord would be recognized by several amazing events, including "living waters" flowing forth from Jerusalem. The waters would flow each direction and without ceasing, and on that day,

The Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day the Lord will be one and his name one.”

True Worship (John 4:16-26)

Jesus’ discussion moved from water to true worship.

Zephaniah 1:1-6, 2:1-3:20

Zephaniah 1:1-6 announces a coming judgment that will sweep over the earth. It is rooted in the people’s refusal to worship the Lord in truth. They bow down, but look to other gods for real life. Their worship is a formality, not a true recognition of the Lord as God.

This is a judgment against all nations, not just Judah or Israel. People are urged to get right with God to escape the judgment. Zeph. 2:3 notes,

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility.

Through God’s work among the nations, a time would come where people will bow down in worship, but the worship is not in Jerusalem at the temple. It is wherever the people are living.

The LORD will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations (Zeph. 2:11).

This will be worship from the heart, not from the arrogance of location or heredity:

On that day you shall not be put to shame because of the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain. But I will leave in your midst people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD (Zeph. 3:11-12).

Malachi 1:1, 6-14

The Old Testament prophet Malachi also spoke of the failure of the people to offer true worship in their sacrifices. They brought shoddy animals rather than their best. God would rather not have any sacrifices than be given the insult of castaway sacrifices (the residue good for nothing else).

In contrast, Malachi also spoke of a coming time where things would be different. There would be a time when people sacrificed and worshipped in truth everywhere, not simply on one mountain or another.

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts (Mal. 1:11).

Romans 12:1-2

Paul spoke of genuine worship in the post-crucifixion era where animal sacrifices were now pointless. The real sacrifices people are to bring to God are our own bodies. Our lives given to God are acts of spiritual worship.

Psalms 150

Psalms 150 is one of the great worship psalms in the Bible. It calls people to praise God with everything they have – voice, talent, instruments, and life. We praise God because of who he is and what he has done in our world and our lives.

Deuteronomy 11-12

As mentioned earlier, the Samaritans used a version of the Pentateuch as their Scriptures. Deuteronomy 11 is a chapter where the Samaritan Pentateuch has an alternate reading to our Hebrew manuscripts. The Samaritan Pentateuch emphasized the references to Mt. Gerizim in this and other passages. It is the mountain that the Samaritans up to today use as their central locus of worship. They claim it predated any placement of worship at the site in Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 27

This was another passage used by the Samaritans to justify their worship at Mt. Gerizim.

Psalms 122

This is a worship psalm for the Jews, setting out the decree that Jerusalem was the place for God's people to worship. Of course, the Samaritans would have argued that the psalm is later than the writings of Moses and that Moses trumped the psalms and later calls promoting Jerusalem.

Jesus does not descend into a debate over where the right place of worship was. He focuses attention instead on the attitude of worship. Whether one worshipped at Gerizim, at Jerusalem, in Babylon, Egypt, or Houston, Texas, the question was whether one worship truly and with sincerity.

QUESTIONS FOR WEEK 7

1. Why did keeping a pure genetic line from Abraham matter, at least until the birth of Jesus?
2. In what ways do you and I fail to rely upon the Lord, thinking that the cisterns we have created are more reliable? How does this fail to worship and acknowledge Jesus as living water?
3. What makes worship something done “in spirit and in truth”?

Week Eight Readings

2Feb. 17 Jesus' Food

Jn. 4:27-38

Context: Everyone eats. That makes food a marvelous illustration throughout Scripture, including those adding context today.

Job 23
Hab 3
Ps 63
Isa 55

Jesus – Savior of the World

Jn. 4:39-42

Context: Many have sought salvation from God. It is a consistent hope of the Old Testament.

Job 26
Ps 20
Isa 31
Ps 44

Feb. 19-23 Jesus in Galilee

Jn. 4:43-45 (The Sermon on Mount Insert)

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.

2/19

Mt 5:1-3
Ps 37
Mt 5:4
Isa. 61:2
Mt 5:5
Isa. 61:1
Mt 5:6
Prov. 13:25
Ps 42
Mt 5:7
2 Tim. 1:15-18
Prov. 19:17
Mt 5:8
2 Tim. 2:22
Mt 5:9
James 3:18
1 Jn. 2:28-3:3
Prov. 20:3

2/20

Mt 5:10
James 5:7-11
Job 1-2
Job 42:7-17
Lk 6:20-26
Amos 6

2/21

Mt 5:11-12
Jer. 20
Jer. 37-39
1 Pt. 4:12-16
Neh. 9

2/22

Mt 5:13-14
Prov. 13:9(?)
Eph. 5:1-21
Prov. 20:1
Col. 4:5-6
Prov. 18:4, 20
Prov. 16:23-24
Prov. 6:16-19
Mt 5:15
Lk 8:16-18
Mk 4:21-25
Mt 5:16-19
Ex 31:18
Lev 1-3

23 Off
