

Leader's Guide: Context is the Key

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Looking at the Forest

These leader's guides are designed to help stimulate our thinking in terms of how we can get the most out of the material and help others to fish out insights that perhaps are not so apparent to them. These documents are living papers and will be updated regularly. Feel free to add your own discussion topics!

We will list the section and page number(s) from *The Ezra 7¹⁰ Plan Book 1– First Love: A Heart to Understand* for easy referencing.

Biographical Context

Pages 147 – 150

- ➊ Ask the group if they have any questions about the information in this section.
- ➋ Review the homework on pages 149 and 150. The following are some suggested answers to the biographical homework.

- How has the Apostle John changed over the years? Compare Mk 3:17, Lu 9:54, 1Jn 2:1, and 3Jn 4.

Mark 3:17 *and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder");*

Luke 9:54 *When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?'*

1John 2:1 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;*

3John 4 *I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.*

We can see from the Gospels that the Apostle John's (and his brother James) early life was characterized by unmitigated zeal, as he is called a *Son of Thunder*. Also when a Samaritan does not receive them because they are going to Jerusalem, John asks Jesus if he could send down fire on the person. Ouch! Yet when we see John in his later years writing his epistles we see him regard Jesus' followers as children. His perspective has undoubtedly changed from striking people down for the slightest thing to a desire to build people up one step at a time. How did the Lord keep John's fire burning yet direct him in such a way that he would build people up and not tear them down? Hmm...

- Matt 23:35 - Who was Zechariah and why is he listed?

Matthew 23:29-35 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.*

unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar — As there is no record of any fresh murder answering to this description, probably the allusion is not to any recent murder, but to 2Ch 24:20–22, as the *last recorded* and most suitable case for illustration. And as Zacharias' last words were, "The Lord *require it*," so they are here warned that of that generation it should be *required*.

The above is from *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. (Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.)

2Chronicles 24:20-22 *Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, 'Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you.' So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the Lord. Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which his father Jehoiada had shown him, but he murdered his son. And as he died he said, 'May the Lord see and avenge!'*

We should note that in the Jews order of the Old Testament, 2 Chronicles was the last book. Thus the mention of Abel in Genesis (the first book) and Zechariah (Zacharias) is a good way for Jesus to say that from the first book to the last book you hypocrites have been killing the righteous.

Also from *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament* (Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.)

The Zechariah murdered in the temple was son of Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron 24:22), not Zechariah son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), who lived much later in Israel's history. But Matthew uses the Jewish interpretive technique of combining key words to coalesce two Zechariahs, referring to one and alluding to the other, as he did with Amon/Amos and Asa/Asaph in his genealogy in chapter one.

➤ Heb 11:32 - Who was Jephthah?

Personal name meaning “he will open.” One of Israel’s judges about 1100 b.c. (Judg. 11:1–12:7). A Gileadite, he was driven from his home because he was “the son of a harlot” (Judg. 11:1). He lived and raided in the land of Tob with a band of outlaws, becoming known as a “mighty warrior.” When the Ammonites moved against Israel, Jephthah’s people asked him to return and lead them. His victory over the Ammonites came about after a vow he made to offer as a burnt offering the first living thing he saw upon his return from the battle. Although it was his daughter who greeted him, Jephthah did fulfill his vow. Considered as one of Yahweh’s “chief” deliverers of His people (1 Sam. 12:11), Jephthah is hailed by the author of Hebrews as a hero of faith (Heb. 11:32).

The above is from the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., Butler, T. C., & Latta, B. (2003). *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.)

➤ Jude 1:9 - Who is the archangel Michael?

Archangel who served as the guardian of the nation of Israel (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1). Together with Gabriel, Michael fought for Israel against the prince (angelic patron) of Persia. This angelic Michael figures in much extra biblical literature in the intertestamental period. In Rev. 12:7 Michael commands the forces of God against the forces of the dragon in a war in heaven. Jude 9 refers to a dispute between the devil and Michael over Moses’ body.

The above is from the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Brand, C., Draper, C., England, A., Bond, S., Clendenen, E. R., Butler, T. C., & Latta, B. (2003). *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.)

- How has Solomon changed over the years? Compare 1Kg 3:6-9, 1Kg 6:1, 38 - 7:1, Prov 1:7, 1Kg 9:1-13, 1Kg 10:14-29, 1Kg 11:1-13, 1Kg 11:28-40, Book of Ecclesiastes, and Eccl 12:13, 14.

Little Solomon starts out by sending to the Lord a very pleasing request in 1 Kings 3, *Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?*

The Lord responds with a promise to fulfill Solomon's request, and also provides a promise of future blessing couched in an admonition.

1Kings 3:10-14 *It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, 'Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, or have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.'*

Solomon finishes building the House of the Lord in 7 years, in his 4th through 11th year of his reign and dedicates it. But he also is building a huge house for himself as well as other massive buildings (thirteen years in construction). All seems well, but after Solomon's initial glut of building finishes after 20 years, it is interesting that the Lord speaks again to Solomon after this in a more grave tone.

1Kings 9:3-9 *The Lord said to him, 'I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, 'You shall*

not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' And they will say, 'Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the Lord has brought all this adversity on them.'

Wow! So what is happening? More than likely Solomon and his sons are indeed starting to forsake the Lord in small steps. The Lord is trying to get Solomon to recommit himself to the Lord anew, to change his worldly ways that have crept in to his character.

Unfortunately Solomon continues to amass great quantities of gold and silver and build expensive decorations for all of his houses, which are basically like museums. He starts to gather huge quantities of chariots and horsemen.

During this time he also falls in love with many of the women of the surrounding pagan nations. Then because he wants to please his wives more than please the Lord, he starts building temples for all the gods of his wives. This was the last straw for the Lord.

1Kings 11:9-13 Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded. So the Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.'

The Lord begins to send adversaries against Solomon as a chastisement. Finally, the Lord, through the prophet Ahijah, anoints Jeroboam who Solomon had actually enlisted in his service, as the new King over the ten northern tribes of Israel. When Solomon

finds this out, instead of truly being repentant and realizing what is happening, he tries to have Jeroboam killed. Jeroboam however flees to Egypt until the death of Solomon. Perhaps as we read Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes we see some remorse for living the way he did. He concludes what may have been his last written words by saying:

Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Now, did Solomon's son, who took over the rule of Judah heed these warnings? Well...unfortunately ...you will have to read the Bible for the rest of that story!

- How did Saul change over the years? Compare the following: 1Sam9:2-21, 1Sam10:18-27, 1Sam 11:5-15, 1Sam 13:11-14, 1Sam 14:24, 1Sam15:10- 31, 1Sam 17:11, 1Sam 18:6-17, 1Sam 22:7-18, 1Sam 28:3-25, and 1Sam 31:1-5.

We first encounter Saul, from the (small and notoriously reckless) tribe of Benjamin, as a good son tracking down some lost donkeys for his father. He is described as *a choice and handsome man, and there was not a more handsome person than he among the sons of Israel; from his shoulders and up he was taller than any of the people*. In search of the donkeys, Saul and his servant decide to seek out the prophet Samuel to help them find the donkeys. This chance meeting was completely the work of God, and Samuel is clearly told by the Lord to anoint Saul as King of the nation of Israel.

Saul is understandably nervous and doubtful about this impromptu coronation. Later at Mizpah as Samuel gathers the entire nation for the actual anointing of Saul as King, we find Saul, all of thirty years old, hiding in the baggage area as he is really unsure about this whole King thing. Most of the people say, *Long live the King*, although there are some that say, *How can this one deliver us?* These people despise Saul and low and behold they do not even bring him a present as the new King. How rude. There are always some like that...

Saul gets his first chance to protect Israel when the Ammonites come to threaten Jabesh-Gilead.

1Samuel 11:1-3 *Now Nahash the Ammonite came up and besieged Jabesh-gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, 'Make a covenant with us and we will serve you.' But Nahash the Ammonite said to them, 'I will make it with you on this condition, that I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you, thus I will make it a reproach on all Israel.' The elders of Jabesh said to him, 'Let us alone for seven days, that we may send messengers throughout the territory of Israel. Then, if there is no one to deliver us, we will come out to you.'*

When Saul hears this news the Bible says that the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily and he became angry and then: (1Samuel 11:7) *He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.' Then the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man.*

So Saul reaps a big victory and all Israel gathers at Gilgal and they make Saul king (again) but this time it is probably more unanimous, since in fact Saul just delivered Israel. Those ruffians, who despised Saul earlier, were about to be put to death for their previous insolence, but Saul spares them.

So Saul begins to fight the battles at age 30. Now for the sake of a rough timeline let us assume that he had his son Jonathan when he was 20, and that Jonathan began to fight with his father in the army when he was 20. So we can fast forward 10 years, with Saul now being around 40 years old: *Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment.*

Now we find a young Jonathan defeating a Philistines garrison which leads to a full scale war with the Philistines. Saul is waiting at Gilgal for Samuel, while the people start to tremble in fear of the Philistines. Saul foolishly refuses to wait for Samuel and offers sacrifices on the altar there himself. Samuel arrives and says that the kingdom led by Saul will not endure.

1Samuel 13:11-14 *But Samuel said, 'What have you done?' And Saul said, 'Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.' Samuel said*

to Saul, 'You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.'

So while the Philistines plot their attack we find Saul just staying in the outskirts of Gibeah doing nothing. Jonathan makes a daring raid on a small Philistine garrison with just his armor bearer. That raid, plus an earthquake (good timing!) makes the Philistines run for it. Saul's watchmen see the Philistines running and then they and all the Israelites who had been afraid or hiding suddenly appear and start chasing the Philistines.

Although this is a good thing, Saul has compounded this blessing by making his men take a foolish vow and it costs him. 1Sam 14:24 *Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food.*

When the people do overrun the Philistines and their provisions of livestock, they are so hungry that they literally start eating the meat of the animals before it is even cooked (i.e., with the blood, which is forbidden in the Law).

1Samuel 14:33-35 *Then they told Saul, saying, 'Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood.' And he said, 'You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today.' Saul said, 'Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Each one of you bring me his ox or his sheep, and slaughter it here and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.' ' So all the people that night brought each one his ox with him and slaughtered it there. And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD.*

Some time before that display of gluttony Jonathan who was not there when the vow was taken sees some honey and eats it. It is discovered and Saul claims that Jonathan must die for breaking this vow (which he never even knew about). However, the people side with Jonathan and Saul does not kill him after all. 1Samuel 14:45 *But the people said to Saul, "Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground,*

for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan and he did not die.

Sometime later, Samuel (and the Lord) appears to give Saul one more chance...but he does not follow all of the commands of the Lord. And yet he sets up a monument to himself...provides excuses when asked why he did not fully follow God's command and then Samuel says that Saul will indeed lose the reigns of his kingdom.

1Samuel 15:1-3 Then Samuel said to Saul, 'The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has...''

1Samuel 15: 13-26 Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, 'Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD.' But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.' Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Wait, and let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.' And he said to him, 'Speak!' Samuel said, 'Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel, and the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are exterminated.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD, but rushed upon the spoil and did what was evil in the sight of the LORD?' Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took some of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the choicest of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.' Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.' Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD. But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have

rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.'

The handwriting is now on the wall, and things really go downhill for the remaining 15-20 years of Saul's reign and life.

- ❖ Saul never sees Samuel alive again
 - ❖ Samuel anoints a young David as the new successor to Saul
 - ❖ Goliath defeated by David
 - ❖ Jonathan and David establish a close friendship
 - ❖ David prospers above Saul
 - ❖ Saul turns against David and tries to kill him multiple times
 - ❖ Saul tries to kill Jonathan for helping David
 - ❖ Saul kills Priests for helping David
 - ❖ Saul seeks out a medium (fortune teller)
 - ❖ Saul dies in battle
-