

Leader's Guide: Context is the Key

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Context is the Key

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.

Introduction Pages

Pages 109 – 113

❶ Review the four important rules of interpretation on pages 112 and 113. Ask if there are any questions. The second rule should be emphasized. There are many false teachers whose doctrines are derived by allegorizing Scripture when it should be taken in its literal sense, leading to some very strange, unique and sometimes harmful teachings.

Grammatical Context

Pages 114 – 124

❶ Ask the group if they have any questions about the information in this section, and which box they checked on page 122 and why.

❷ Review the homework on pages 123 and 124. The following are some suggested answers to the grammatical homework for all twenty verses listed.

- *Leviticus 26:9 So I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm My covenant with you.*

Verse only observations: God will be on our side making us fruitful and increase our numbers and He will confirm His covenant to us.

Full grammatical context observations: Going back to at least verse one and then ahead to at least verse forty-six (basically the entire chapter), it is clear that God's blessing and the confirmation of His covenant is dependent upon our obedience to His covenant, the Ten Commandments. As we follow His commandments the blessings will follow. If we do not follow His ways then He will do everything He can to bring us back to honoring the covenant. Thus it is clear that there are both good and bad consequences that may be tied to our behavior.

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- *Joshua 24:19 Then Joshua said to the people, 'You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.'*

Verse only observations: It appears that Joshua is saying that it is impossible to serve God because He is so holy and jealous that He will never forgive people of their sins.

Full grammatical context observations: Going back to the beginning of chapter twenty-three we may observe that the time period is a few years after the nation of Israel has entered the Promised Land. God has helped them begin to clear out more powerful nations as they achieve victory over their enemies and they are at rest currently. It is clear

Joshua 24:19 continued

that Joshua is nearing the end of his life. He gathers everyone at Shechem and specifically asks the elders and officers to be there as he addresses the people. He recounts all the amazing things the Lord has done starting with Abraham. He then tells them to put away the gods which their fathers had served in Egypt. Thus it is clear that not everyone in Israel is wholly devoted to serving the Lord. He challenges them to decide who they will serve, because they cannot serve both the Lord and the gods of the surrounding nations. Joshua clearly states that he and his house will serve the one true God.

The people respond, *We will also serve the Lord, for He is our God.* Then Joshua states in verse nineteen, *You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins.* What he says in the next few verses is very revealing. It is obvious based on his warnings that follow that many of the people had already started to forsake the Lord, despite the fact that they say they will serve Him now. When Joshua says that they are witnesses to the fact that they have chosen the Lord, they agree. He then tells them to put away the foreign gods which are in their midst and to incline their hearts to the Lord. So it is clear that many of these people are only giving lip service to serving God. They have no desire to serve only God. They already have idols in their midst. And if we were to finish the Book of Joshua and read the first couple of chapters of the Book of Judges we would see very clearly that indeed many people completely stopped serving the Lord after Joshua and his generation passed away.

So what does verse nineteen really mean? Who is it truly addressing? Joshua was clearly talking to the people who had already begun their departure from serving the Lord and had immersed themselves into the immoral practices of the surrounding nations. As far as God's forgiveness goes, perhaps a more precise translation would be that God will not just continually forgive sins if we have no intention of repenting and changing our behavior. The people had perhaps deceived themselves into thinking that if they provided the correct animal sacrifice for atonement that they could then act anyway they wanted. For those people, indeed, God would not forgive their transgressions or forgive their sins since no repentance was involved. Also they could not expect to reap the blessings of a covenant that they had no intention of honoring. A good New Testament corollary to this would be found in Matthew 3:7-9 where it appears that John the Baptist is almost discouraging certain people from repenting and being baptized. But, he is really asking that they *bear fruit in keeping with repentance.*

- Proverbs 3:18 *She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast.*

Verse only observations: It is not readily apparent as to what or who *she* is, but evidently those who hold *her* fast are happy.

Full grammatical context observations: If we go back to verse thirteen we discover the identity of *her*. *Her* is wisdom and understanding. In addition to making one happy, *she* is a blessing to those who find *her*, *her* profit is better than silver and *her* gain better than fine gold, *she* is more precious than jewels, nothing we desire can be compared to *her*, *she* ensures long life, riches and honor, *she* leads to pleasant ways and paths of peace.

- Jonah 2:9 *But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.*

Verse only observations: It appears that Jonah is thankful for something, and is preparing a sacrifice of some sort. He promised to follow through on a vow and states that salvation is from the Lord. We do not know why he is happy, what he vowed or why he mentions salvation.

Full grammatical context observations: While we could only have to go back to verse one of this chapter to realize that Jonah is praying from the stomach of a fish, perhaps it is best to read from the beginning of the book to get the full story about Jonah up to this point. Jonah is asked of the Lord to go and preach to the nation of Assyria to repent of their wicked ways or face judgment. Jonah however goes a different direction on a boat sailing west. God sends a storm and the people in the boat find out that Jonah may be the reason for the storm. After a while they feel there is no choice but to agree with Jonah's suggestion to toss him into the sea. They throw him overboard which in fact calms the storm.

The Lord appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah. After three days and three nights Jonah begins a prayer which is recorded in verse two: *I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current*

Jonah 2:9 continued

engulfed me. All Your breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.' Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple. Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.

Now we can make some observations from the full context. It is interesting to note that although the people in the boat actually threw Jonah overboard, he clearly recognizes that it was the Lord who authorized it. Then Jonah discerns that after three days in the belly of a fish, and still being alive, that perhaps the Lord is giving him a second chance. He makes a curious statement: *Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness.* This perhaps is said with either a view to the Assyrians' need for salvation, or for his own unfaithfulness, or both. It is after that statement that he appears fully repentant and claims *But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.* Remember that he is on his third day being in the belly of a fish in the middle of the sea when he is saying this.

So now we see that our study verse represents an incredible turn around in Jonah's life. As an aside, this story is another amazing testimony to the wonderful depths of God's love. He never gives up on people who deep down inside (maybe very deep) truly want to serve the Lord. The Lord could have given up on Jonah, the minute he turned away from Assyria, or when he entered the boat, or when he was tossed in the water. The Lord could have even spared Jonah's life and then picked someone else to prophesy to Assyria. But no, that is not the way our God works. Praise Him!

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- *Isaiah 58:5 Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?*

Verse only observations: Isaiah appears to be condemning a fast that perhaps contains

Isaiah 58:5 *continued*

all the right rituals such as, self-deprivation, bowing down on sackcloth and ashes, but lacks true purpose or credibility. This is just a guess, because there is nothing wrong with fasting like this in general.

Full grammatical context observations: If we move back to the beginning of the chapter we see that the Lord is asking Isaiah to show the people their transgressions. Although they appear to seek Him daily and to know His ways as IF they were a nation that cared about righteousness, His Word and justice, in fact they are complaining that fasting seems to be a waste of time. But God replies that their 'fasts' are filled with pleasure, money making, strife, debating, and fist fighting. Then our verse arrives, *Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD?*

After our study verse the Lord cuts right through their false piety, by going through a whole list of godly actions that they need to be practicing. Their 'fasts' have not produced in them its intended result. They are not emptying themselves of wickedness and growing closer to God. They are just performing the ritual and expecting God to bless them. And typical of our Lord, after He rakes them over the coals, He tells them how He will bless them after they turn their lives around to follow Him. He is amazing.

- Jeremiah 29:11 *'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'*

Verse only observations: This appears to be a general statement from the Lord in order to alleviate any fear, as He states that he has plans not for calamity but for welfare that will bring hope and a sure future.

Full grammatical context observations: This is an often quoted verse and yet very few know the true context of the verse. Although a Bible Encyclopedia / Handbook will add much historical information that will add even more insight, we can glean much just from starting at the beginning of the chapter. We find that many people from Jerusalem have been taken captive (including the King, officials, princes, craftsmen, smiths, etc.)

Jeremiah 29:11 *continued*

Babylon when the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had besieged the city earlier. A letter is sent to the exiles in Babylon containing instructions from the Lord. Basically the Lord encourages the people to build houses, raise families and seek the welfare of the cities where they have been sent. In seeking the cities' welfare they will secure their own welfare. The letter also instructs them not to listen to false prophets. The Lord goes on to say that after seventy years He will bring them back to Jerusalem and thus will fulfill His Word to them. Then our study verse is stated, *'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'*

So more than just a nice sentiment, these words as we can imagine, probably provided a much needed boost to the exiles' spiritual state. If we were to peek at a Bible Encyclopedia, we would discover that 100 years earlier the northern nation of Israel had been captured by the Assyrians and exiled to Assyria, whom the Babylonians had recently conquered. So the exiles may be thinking that they were now completely disintegrated as a nation. Also it had been about 400 years since Solomon had finished the Temple of the Lord. If we put ourselves in the captive's place, we discover just how devastated they must have been. Four hundred years of temple worship at Jerusalem is ending for them and they no longer live in the Promised Land. All the judgments in the Books of Moses and the admonitions of Joshua are probably ringing in their ears. For them all hope is perhaps lost. They are depressed beyond measure, absolutely crushed under the realization that they had brought this upon themselves. How they must have felt when that letter was read to them. God was just in His punishment, but, He had not forgotten them or given up on them. We can just see the tears streaming from their eyes. Yes, they still have hope. Perhaps they start to dream of the day that their children or grandchildren will live again in the Promised Land. *Seventy years – we can do that, they think to themselves, now that we know that God will still take us back.*

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- Lamentations 3:22,23 *The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*

Verse only observations: This verse describes a number of the attributes of God. His lovingkindnesses and mercies never fail. In fact He is so faithful that they are new every morning. We do not know what prompted the writer to rejoice in these qualities.

Lamentations 3:22,23 *continued*

Full grammatical context observations: This is an often quoted verse, and has been incorporated into many songs as well. Again, a Bible Encyclopedia would be helpful to give some background on our friend Jeremiah the prophet, who wrote *and experienced* Lamentations. Jeremiah was the prophet before and after Jerusalem's final defeat from the hands of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. The temple was burned and all the furniture of the temple was taken away. Jeremiah's message during this time was unpopular and he was beaten and persecuted by other prophets and the people. The King of Judah refused to heed his message and paid dearly for it. The Lord rescued Jeremiah time and time again through it all. If we go back to the beginning of the chapter, we discover some amazing insights. While the words in our verses are very nice and encouraging, they proceed from the mouth of someone who had seen more suffering in a few years than we will probably see in our lifetime. Read the tale of suffering that follows and ponder how it is possible that through this incredible depth (in some cases literal depth, as in the bottom of a well) of despair, a man's relationship with God could pull him through.

Verses 1-20 *I am the man who has seen affliction Because of the rod of His wrath. He has driven me and made me walk In darkness and not in light. Surely against me He has turned His hand Repeatedly all the day. He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away, He has broken my bones. He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship. In dark places He has made me dwell, Like those who have long been dead. He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He is to me like a bear lying in wait, Like a lion in secret places. He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces; He has made me desolate. He bent His bow And set me as a target for the arrow. He made the arrows of His quiver To enter into my inward parts. I have become a laughingstock to all my people, Their mocking song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust. My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, "My strength has perished, And so has my hope from the LORD." Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers And is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.*

Verses 22, 23 *The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*

- Nehemiah 8:10 *Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*

Verse only observations: The verse contains an often repeated phrase *the joy of the Lord is your strength*. It is encouraging to know that the joy of the Lord can strengthen us. The verse also encourages us to send food to those who have none. We do not know why people were possibly feeling sorrowful, nor why the day was to be regarded as holy. Also we do not know why in this particular instance the joy of the Lord would give them strength.

Full grammatical context observations: Many songs have been written with the phrasing *the joy of the Lord is our strength*. Let us now dig in to the context behind these words of encouragement. If we go back to Nehemiah 6:15 we find that the re-building of the wall of Jerusalem had just been finished (in 52 days), on the 25th of the month of Elul which is the sixth month of the ecclesiastical calendar, but the last month of the civil calendar (Bible Handbook would help here obviously). If we were to read the Book of Nehemiah from the start we would realize that rebuilding the wall was Nehemiah's purpose for coming to Jerusalem, being allowed to do so by the reigning King of Persia, Artaxerxes, in his 20th year. A few days later after the re-building has finished, on the first day of the seventh month (ecclesiastical calendar) we find all of the people gathered in the city to hear the Word of the Lord as read to them by Ezra. (Ezra and Nehemiah are thus contemporaries. In fact the earliest versions of the Old Testament actually combined the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and only referred to them as the Book of Ezra. Later versions broke the texts up into first and second Ezra, and then finally Ezra and Nehemiah).

The first day of the seventh month represents the beginning of a new month and in this case the beginning of a new year in the Jewish civil calendar. Also we find in Numbers 29:1-6 that it was a holy day as well for the ecclesiastical calendar: *Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets. And you shall offer a ...* Also on the tenth day of this month they were to celebrate the Day of Atonement; and beginning on the fifteenth of this same month — the feast of Tabernacles. So this was a very important month.

Nehemiah 8:10 *continued*

The verse right before our study verse (verse nine) says that the people wept when they heard the words of the Law. They are instructed in verse nine through eleven to: not mourn, weep, be sorry, or be grieved. Why? — Because the joy of the Lord would be their strength. So why were they crying? While it does not say exactly in the scriptures, we can surmise that when they read the portion of the Law about how the Lord would punish them for turning to other gods and send them into exile, perhaps they realized as they gazed upon the rebuilt ruins of Jerusalem, being just a shadow of its former glory, that it was too much for them to bear at that moment. Just like the old men who had seen the recent rebuilding of the temple under Ezra's direction had wept: Ezra 3:12 *But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice...* Thus during this time of healing it was important to rejoice over each new step they were taking to rebuild the temple, the wall, their lives, and their nation. The joy of the Lord would be their strength during this time of sorrow and mending.

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- Malachi 2:16 *'For I hate divorce,' says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'and him who covers his garment with wrong,' says the LORD of hosts. 'So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.'*

Verse only observations: It is clear in this passage that the Lord hates the following: divorce, wrong doing, and dealing treacherously. We may not understand why the phrasing *cover his garment with wrong* is being used. We do not know what prompted the Lord to say these things.

Full grammatical context observations: If we go back to the beginning of the chapter we discover that the chapter is basically an admonition and rebuke directed toward the priests for their unfaithful instruction and behavior. Among the list of wrong doings: Not listening to God, not honoring His name, turning aside from the way, causing people to stumble by bad instruction, corrupting the covenant, showing partiality, dealing treacherously, profaning the covenant, profaning the sanctuary, marrying women who believe in foreign gods, and dealing treacherously with their wives.

Malachi 2:16 *continued*

The verse right before our study verse, fifteen, is a key one, but a tough one for translators (as you may see from notes in your study Bible). Perhaps the best translation looking at the Greek (Septuagint) and Hebrew is from the NASB (the NET Bible also has a decent translation) *But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.* The idea here is that marriage is a union of godly people who both possess the Spirit. We need both parents to serve as godly examples if we want to promote that life to our offspring and others. So, dealing treacherously with your wife, including divorce, is not an example of God's covenant with us, or being united as if one flesh, or of representing godliness. This is why our study verse begins with, *for I hate divorce.* So we see that divorce, and dealing treacherously are actually just a few things on a whole list of grievances that the Lord has against these worldly priests. But we also gained a little insight as to why the Lord hates divorce so much. The marriage covenant is a symbol of our covenant with God. He hates it when we break our covenant with Him, and He hates it when we break our covenant we have made with our spouse.

As for the phrasing of *cover his garment with wrong*, if we were to do a word search for garment or cover garment we may find the following verses: Psalm 109:17-19 and Psalm 73:6. These verses make it clear that just as we recognize people by the clothes they wear so a person's actions reveal their character. Even without these cross references perhaps we could have surmised this.

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- Malachi 4:6 *He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.*

Verse only observations: Someone (we do not know the identity of this person) will restore good relationships between fathers and their children. We do not know how he will do that. We do not know how or why these family relationships had deteriorated so much. We can presume that God is the one who will smite the land with a curse. It appears that God really values the family unit enough to chastise people when they are not functioning as God intended.

Malachi 4:6 *continued*

Full grammatical context observations: If we move one verse back we find the identity of this person who will be restoring relationships as Elijah the prophet. But going back to that verse spurs additional questions. Elijah will be coming before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. So what is this day referring to, and how far in the future is this? If we go back to the beginning of chapter four we see that verse one is already talking about this day that is coming that will *burn as an oven*. If we head back to verse one of chapter three we see that a messenger (presumably Elijah) is already being referenced, Malachi 3:1 *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

So let us go back one more verse to the last verse of chapter two, Malachi 2:17 *Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?*

Ok, now we see the question that seems to have spurred the words in chapters three and four of Malachi — *Where is the God of judgment?* We can almost hear the Lord, “*well, glad you asked, I will tell you about the judgment of God, and what will take place during My judgment.*” So let us try and summarize chapters three and four so that we can gain some insight into our study verse, which if we have not realized by now, is the last verse in chapter four, of the last book of the Old Testament (chronologically). Note that for the Jews the last book of their Old Testament was 2 Chronicles, since they organized their books by three major subdivisions: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (2 Chronicles being included in the Writings).

In the beginning of chapter three it states that the people will delight in seeing the messenger of the covenant coming to the temple. But instead of arriving as perhaps a victorious king like David, this messenger will be like a refiner's fire, and a fuller's soap. This gives us insight into the viewpoint of the people during Malachi's ministry. Although the people had been allowed to return and build a new temple and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they were still under the control of another nation. The God of judgment they were looking for would execute judgment on the surrounding nations. But the Lord knew that His holy judgment needed to begin with the Jews first. The Lord

Malachi 4:6 *continued*

clearly shows that the wicked will be defeated not by a great physical army, but by those who fear the Lord.

While there is much more we can comment on we have enough here to answer our basic questions. We already know that the messenger is Elijah. It is clear that the people had gone astray as the Lord quotes from the people themselves in chapter three, *Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.*

The reference in our passage about restoring *the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers*, probably refers to a rededication on the fathers part to teach their children the Law of Moses, and for the children to recommit themselves to honoring their parents and the Law of their fathers. Malachi ends with an admonition to remember the Law of Moses, and the promise of Elijah. Now, has Elijah appeared? Has the Day of the Lord arrived? Hmm, it appears we have some more studying to do....

➤ Matthew 11:30 *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Verse only observations: Jesus is talking in symbolic terms here. The terms yoke and burden can refer to the use of animals for working in the fields, plowing, carrying loads, etc. What this is supposed to mean for people or why Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light is uncertain.

Full grammatical context observations: To understand this verse we need to go back to the beginning of this chapter. John the Baptist who is now in prison sends two of his disciples to Jesus to confirm that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Jesus answers them and then starts to address the crowd that is around Him. He clearly tells them that John the Baptist is Elijah (The messenger mentioned in the Book of Malachi). He also says that people have neither recognized John as Elijah nor Himself as Messiah. Jesus then begins to rebuke different cities where many of His miracles have taken place. He states that the *wise* people (religious leaders) are completely ignorant of the real meaning of

Matthew 11:30 *continued*

the Scriptures and of His ministry; and yet the common people (babes—who are no doubt approaching their ministry with repentance and faith) are seeing the message and the meaning of John and Jesus clearly. Jesus then clearly states that God the Father has given Jesus the Son, the task of revealing the Father to the world. Then He begins in verse 28 with the phrase that is often repeated and leads into our study verse: *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Now, based on the full context we may see that Jesus is contrasting the wise religious leaders teaching versus His own teaching and revealing of the Father. The religious leaders of the day had added so many minute additional requirements to the Law while neglecting some of the weightier issues, like mercy, justice and humility. That is why they would accuse John of being a devil, and accuse Jesus of being a glutton and a friend of sinners. Jesus does not abandon the Old Testament moral code, but implies that following the way of the Lord was never intended to consist of millions of minute specifications that the Pharisees had transformed it into. The Lord's way is easy and light, led by one who is lowly and meek. This also explains verse 28, why those who labor and are heavy laden (under the Pharisees' traditions) can find rest for their souls.

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- Mark 14:36 *And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."*

Verse only observations: Although this may be a familiar passage to some, if we take this on face value, we do not know who is saying this, or why the person is asking for a cup to be removed. The person seems to have great faith in the Father (presumably God the Father) acknowledging that all things are possible for Him. The person also seems to be resigned to the fact that if this request is not granted that would be acceptable as well.

Full grammatical context observations: If we go back to verse twelve we see that Jesus and His disciples are preparing to celebrate what would be the Last Supper (Passover). During the supper (verses 23 and 24) Jesus describes a cup filled with wine as *my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many*. Now we can understand what the *cup* in our verse is referring to. After the supper He and His disciples go to the garden of

Mark 14:36 *continued*

Gethsemane to pray. It is there in the garden that He utters the words in our study verse. So now we see that Jesus, knowing God can do anything, is asking if there is any other way to provide salvation for mankind besides shedding His blood. Despite this request He also acknowledges, that whatever the answer, His desire is to do only God's will.

➤ Luke 1:37 *For nothing will be impossible with God.*

Verse only observations: God can literally do anything, since nothing is impossible to Him. We do not know who is saying this or why this is being stated. This phrasing is similar to what Jesus said in the garden of Gethsemane.

Full grammatical context observations: If we go back to verse twenty-six we find the context of this statement. The angel Gabriel is appearing to Mary let her know that she ... *will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.* Mary is understandably doubtful and confused as she says, *How can this be, since I am a virgin?* The angel then goes on to say, *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.* So we see the angel has mentioned the power of God, and an example of that power in Mary's relative Elizabeth, before he relates our study verse, *For nothing will be impossible with God.* Thus it is the angel Gabriel who is stating this; and the impossibility for a woman of having a child in her old age (Elizabeth), or even without the union of a husband (Mary), is dismissed as God can do all things.

- Luke 18:27 *But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."*

Verse only observations: We do not know who is talking, but evidently something that is impossible for people is possible with God. We do not know what things the speaker is talking about.

Full grammatical context observations: For this one we can go back to verse eighteen, where we discover that a ruler of some sort was posing a question to Jesus, *Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* Jesus responds to what is the crux of the matter, although the ruler missed the message, as Jesus says, *Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.* Jesus then mentions some of the Ten Commandments, to which the ruler somehow claims that he has actually kept all of them from his youth. Knowing he was extremely covetous of his personal riches, Jesus tells him not just to give some money to the poor, but to sell everything that he possesses and distribute it to the poor. As the man becomes very sad Jesus says, *How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.* The people who are standing around are understandably dumbfounded as they exclaim, *Then who can be saved?* Then Jesus shares our study verse, *But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."*

Thus we have clarity now on our verse. It is Jesus Himself who is talking. What is impossible for people is to obtain salvation and inherit eternal life on their own merits and good works. Salvation and eternal life are only achievable because of what God has done on our behalf.

- John 1:35 *Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples,*

Verse only observations: A person named John was with two of his disciples. We do not know which John this is or what he was doing, but evidently he must be some type of teacher since he has disciples.

Full grammatical context observations: If we go back to verse nineteen we see that this John is John the Baptist. Priests and Levites have come out to him to ask if he was the Messiah, which he denies. They ask him if he is Elijah, or the Prophet, to which he

John 1:35 *continued*

responds, *No*. So why are these three people mentioned: the Messiah, the Prophet and Elijah? The reason is that all three of these people have been mentioned in the Old Testament as people who will eventually come to the Jews (Prophet: Deuteronomy, Messiah: Isaiah, Elijah: Malachi — using a Bible concordance or Bible search program would help to find this information). It is interesting that John does not claim to be the prophet Elijah, while Jesus (Matthew 11) tells people that John is Elijah the messenger mentioned in the Book of Malachi. So is John playing games with them? John only states that he is a *voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said*. They ask him why he is baptizing, and he tells them, *I baptize in water, but among you stands One whom you do not know. It is He who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie*. The very next day John sees Jesus and the dove descending upon Him as a confirmation that Jesus is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The day after that John is with two of his disciples, as our study verse says. So evidently in addition to baptizing with water and preparing the way for Jesus, John attracted a following of disciples as well.

- John 3:30 *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Verse only observations: We do not know the identity of the He or I and we are not entirely sure what *increase* or *decrease* refers to (maybe popularity, wealth, influence, etc.).

Full grammatical context observations: If we go back to verse twenty-two we see that Jesus and His disciples are baptizing people. John's disciples come to him and seem concerned that many people are now following Jesus and not coming to John. John clearly relates to them that his ministry was in fact to pave the way for Jesus, and he is rejoicing that Jesus has begun His ministry. So in that context we can see why John says, *He must increase, but I must decrease*. John can still prepare people for the Messiah, but while the Messiah is here, He must take center stage.

- John 10:30 *I and the Father are one.*

Verse only observations: Not sure who the *I* and the *Father* are, but if the Father is God, this person seems to be claiming either equality with God or actually being God.

Full grammatical context observations: We need to go back to verse twenty-two. The Feast of the Dedication (Hanukkah) is taking place. Jesus is walking in the temple area and He is asked by some Jews why He does not simply come out and plainly tell people that He is the Messiah. Jesus claims that in fact He has and His miracles also bear this testimony. He goes on to say that the reason these Jews do not believe in Him is because they are not His sheep; for His sheep follow and listen to Him. Jesus says that His Father gave Him His sheep and gave them eternal life. Jesus states that the Father is greater than all. But then Jesus goes on to say that He and the Father are one, making Him also equal with God. It is interesting that Jesus does not say that He was just the Messiah, which the Jews could assume was a military deliverer, but He claimed equality with God. Thus He clearly shows that He is more than Moses, David or Elijah.

- 1Corinthians 9:19 *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.*

Verse only observations: We are not sure who is saying this but it appears that someone is giving up freedoms they currently have so that they can win many. What this person is trying to win is unknown; and why they want to win as many as possible is unknown as well.

Full grammatical context observations: We need to go to the beginning of this chapter. We find the Apostle Paul speaking about his ministry and specifically how much he has given up while he ministers to others. He gives a few examples of what he has given up in order to win people to the gospel. For Paul, if giving up certain things even though he may be entitled to them, will allow him to win more people to the gospel, he is willing to do it. He is a slave in the sense that he does not have the same freedoms other people enjoy.

- 1Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

Verse only observations: Stated simply, we will all face similar trials and temptations and God will always provide a way to bear them.

Full grammatical context observations: The larger context is found at the beginning of the chapter. The Apostle Paul recounts the trials in the wilderness (Exodus) and how people perished because of their disobedience. Paul mentions idolatry, pagan revelry, sexual immorality, and grumbling. The wilderness journeys were filled with trials where God provided a way of escaping the trial or temptation. Many people did not wait for God though with disastrous results. Verses eleven and twelve state: *Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.*

Verse fourteen which follows our study verse is a summarizing statement. *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.* Thus Paul summarizes all the bad behavior in the wilderness as a form of idolatry, while further encouraging us to take the way of escape that the Lord will provide us so that we can flee from sin.

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- Revelation 3:20 *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*

Verse only observations: Basically the person in this verse is saying that he is outside people's homes knocking on their doors. If people open their doors (and presumably invite him in) he will dine with them. He will also (invite the person who let him in to) have dinner with him.

Full grammatical context observations: Thus the beginning of fellowship begins with the door opening and the invitation to fellowship presumably accepted. The larger context reveals much. The Apostle John in Revelation chapters two and three is writing short letters to seven different churches. This verse in our passage is part of a letter to the

Revelation 3:20 *continued*

church at Laodicea. The characteristics of this church: they are neither hot nor cold, they were rich and complacent, not realizing how poor off spiritually they were. The letter states that instead of spending money on gold, fine clothing, and expensive salves and oils, they were to allow themselves to be refined in the fire of trial. In this way their character would be refined as if gold, and they would be worthy to wear garments of white, reflecting their righteous behavior. Additionally, instead of using salves and creams for vain purposes, they were to metaphorically use them so that their eyes of faith and belief would be opened.

Thus once that is done they will hear the Lord knocking and invite him in for fellowship, whereas before it is doubtful that they could even hear him knocking. It is clear this passage is primarily directed to believers although this verse is used for evangelistic purposes quite often. The last verses end with an encouragement for believers who overcome: *He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*
