

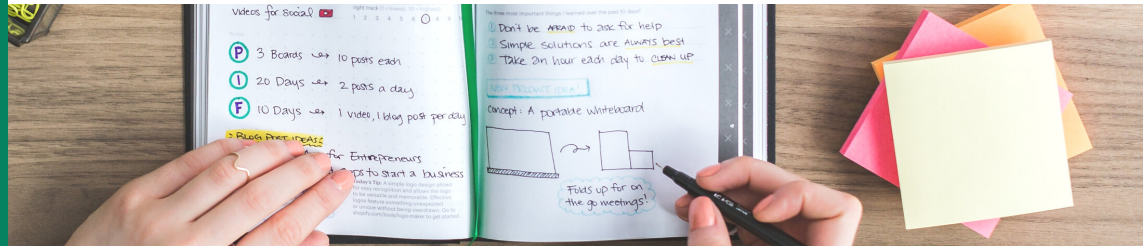


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READ AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

A simple guide to understanding more of what you read.



ISSUE NO. 4 CONTEXT IS KING HISTORICAL CONTEXT: OVERVIEW FROM CREATION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD

“Context is king” is essential in reading the Bible – or anything else. Context, though, consists of three different spheres: historical, cultural, and literary. Knowing a little bit about biblical history helps to understand so many passages. Today, a quick overview of history, then in subsequent issues, we will look at other facets of context.

1. From Adam to Abraham. The God of the Bible is the creator of the universe (Genesis 1:1). Bible believers assume this so easily that they often underestimate how important it is. This teaching is foundational for understanding biblical theology (what God is teaching us about himself) and ethics (how we should then live). The one point I wish to make here is that because the Lord is the God of all creation, he is the God of all mankind. Scripture devotes only 11 chapters (Genesis 1–11) to this relationship. So much of how God interacted with other peoples is not recorded. What we do know is that God has always been involved in reconciling all people to himself. The means for doing that, however, was the sending of his Son to earth as a sacrifice. For the world to be able to understand this act, God spent centuries preparing for just the right time (Galatians 4:4).

2. From Abraham to Nationhood. God needed to make it crystal clear who was this Messiah that was coming. For this reason, he chose a people to become a nation. From them all the nations of the earth would be blessed. From two people, Abraham and Sarah, God formed a nation, brought them out of slavery in Egypt, and gave them a nation (Genesis 12–Joshua).

3. Development of Kingship. Israel lived in the Promised Land, but failed to remain faithful to the Lord. The nation began as a theocracy, but became a monarchy. First they were united under three successive kings (1 Samuel 8–1 Kings 11). Then they divided into the north (Israel) and the south (Judah). The northern kingdom was destroyed in 722 (2 Kings 17), never to exist again. The southern kingdom lasted until the Babylonians destroyed them in 586 and exiled them to Babylon (2 Kings 25).

4. Israel in Exile and Restored to the Land. In 539 BC, the Medo-Persians defeated the Babylonians and allowed the Israelites to return to the Promised Land (Ezra 1–2). Far from their powerful past, Israel found themselves militarily weak. Except for about a century of independence from 164–63 BC, they were ruled successively by the Persians (539–333 BC), Greeks (333–63 BC), and Romans (63 BC and for many years after New Testament times). Jesus was born during the period of Roman domination.