

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Proper 24 – Year B

RCL Readings¹ – Isaiah 53:4-12; Psalm 91:9-16; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45

ACNA Readings – Isaiah 53:4-12; Psalm 91; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:35-45

Seasonal Introduction. The Christian calendar revolves around two principal feasts: Christmas (involving Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany) and Easter (involving Lent, Easter, and Pentecost). However, throughout the year there are also smaller feasts. The 18th of October celebrates the feast of Saint Luke while the 23rd celebrates the feast of Saint James. On the same stone that Jesus rejected Satan's temptation on the temple mount as Psalm 91 was quoted, His brother James, also rejected the temptation to reject Jesus, instead being thrown off the Temple mount to his eventual death. May we follow the example of James who, at first, rejected his brother but finished his race with uprightness and strength.

Common Theme. The common theme is obedience in suffering and trials. We are called to be disciples of Jesus. He suffered in trials and tribulations, He was tested by Satan towards disobedience and God "put Him to grief" as an offering. But Jesus resisted Satan and submitted humbly to God. We too will suffer trials and tribulations, if we truly follow our master. We too will be tested by Satan. And we too should resist Satan and turn in humility towards God—and He will be present with us.

Hebraic Context. Jesus continually taught the disciples about what it meant to serve. He Himself declared that "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" which is an incredible statement in context.² But the concept of servanthood is a recurring theme throughout the entire Scriptures.

The Hebrew word עֶבֶד (*eved*) can mean either slave or servant. Slaves and servants have existed throughout history up to the modern period. The Torah provided instructions in order to restrict and even outright stop the abuse of slaves, providing a frame of governing indentured servants as well as involuntary servitude.

Many slaves in the Bible had an amicable relationship with their masters, such as Eliezer of Damascus with Abraham, the young servant girl who served Naaman, or the servant who travelled with Saul. There were also servants, such as Nabal's who had a bad relationship with Nabal but a good relationship with his wife, Abigail. And, of course, Joseph had a good relationship with Potiphar—until he was thrown into prison on the word of a single witness. Slaves still had a master and were still to obey their masters—a slave is still a slave.

¹ Alternate RCL Readings: Job 38:1-7, 34-41; Psalm 104:1-9, 25, 37b

² Jesus, in using the term "Son of Man", would have brought the disciples' thoughts towards the throne of heaven and a figure who had authority over all the nations—just the opposite of a servant. See Hebraic Perspective for how shortcuts were often used in teaching in the 1st and 2nd centuries.

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But Psalm 119:91 states, "...for all things are your servants." God called Israel His servants throughout the Scriptures but people also voluntarily took the title, and responsibility of obedience, for themselves.³ The root of servant, עבד, is the root word for work (similar to servant and serve) but also of worship. Servanthood can have the nuance of devotion to both God and the one being served. It was those who worshiped God who served as the greatest shepherds of God's people.

Early Jewish scholars quickly noticed a parallel between the leaders of Israel and shepherding. A question arose on why so many of the great biblical leaders were shepherds. The answer always returned to the understanding that the shepherds served: they had compassion, were sacrificial, and were faithful. God called servants to be the leaders and asked the leaders to be servants.⁴

Isaiah 53:4-12. Isaiah 52:12-53:12 is the final poem in a series within Isaiah called the "Servant Songs" (the others being Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11). The four poems open and close with God speaking of His servant while the middle two speak from the perspective of the servant. Each poem, or song, speaks about a servant of God who acts: in righteous judgment but also with justice; to faithfully redeem Israel; to follow the way of God, regardless of the opposition; and to bear the sin of many nations. But while this servant is great, he is also portrayed as gentle and meek—often enduring pain and suffering in order to obey God and serve the people of Israel.

Modern Jewish interpretations would suggest that the passages are metaphors that refer to a servant nation, such as mentioned in Isaiah 49:3—specifically, Israel. The majority of Christians

³ Samuel was told to respond to God with, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears." Moses was called the Servant of the Lord. David took the title of servant for himself in the Psalms several times. The prophets were also called the servants of God. And finally James, Jude, Peter, Paul, and John all called themselves servants of God and of Jesus.

⁴ Isaiah 56; Jeremiah 23 and 25; and Ezekiel 34 all speak of shepherds who started serving themselves rather than the flock they were called to serve and God's anger at them because of their self-serving actions.

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interpret the passages as referring to a single individual.⁵ Jesus clearly fits the image of the suffering servant that is presented in Isaiah 53.⁶ In either case, in bearing the pain and suffering of others, the servant was considered to be smitten by God by those who saw him. In reality, this might very well be true. The affliction of the servant is at God's instigation, "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer". God is not aloof or removed from the sufferings of His servants rather the Lord has a hand in it.⁷

⁵ Because the passage can be read as referring to an individual, a nation, or as differing depending on the particular poem, skeptics and opponents of the Christian faith often argue that Christianity superimposed the person of Jesus over passages and prophecies in the Hebrew Bible. One such argument is that the servant songs were never interpreted prior to Jesus in the way that Christians interpreted it. However, this was not the case.

In reading through Second Temple period Jewish literature, particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls, one of the major interpretations of the suffering servant was as a messianic redemptive individual. Following the Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH^a) was a poem that, damaged as it was, quoted from Isaiah 53 in a very similar way to identifying an authoritative and powerful figure who was also a suffering servant. This idea of a righteous individual who suffered to bring redemption for many people was also an important theme in II and IV Maccabees.

The connection of Jesus to the servant songs, and Isaiah 53 in particular, was well within the interpretive norm of the 1st century both in terms of connecting the themes and words of the prophets with the life of Jesus (see Hebraic Perspective) and other interpretations of the Messiah being an individual who suffered—although there were other interpretations of Isaiah 53 at the time as well.

⁶ Whether you read Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement, Tertullian or later writers such as Athanasius and Augustine, all the church fathers agreed on Isaiah 52:12-53:12 referring to Jesus. While some of them were vehemently antisemitic (such as Justin Martyr and John Chrysostom) there very arguments about how the church also can participate in the suffering of the suffering servant, namely Jesus, actually provides some evidence that an interpretation of Israel participating in the suffering of the Messiah would have held true in their minds were they not supersessionists.

⁷ Justin Martyr, and many before and after him, stated that the Jews killed Jesus. Because of this belief, Justin Martyr stated, "The purpose of this [circumcision] was that you and only you might suffer the afflictions that are now justly yours." John Chrysostom wrote a long essay entitled *Adversus Judaeos*, Against the Jews. One of his statements spoke of the synagogue as, "a place of meeting for the assassins of Christ".

Isaiah is very clear that it was the will of the Lord that would cause the suffering of the servant, even as it was the will of the Lord to prosper the servant. The creeds, meanwhile, noted that "Jesus Christ... suffered under Pontius Pilate (a Roman), was crucified, died, and was buried." In the trial of Jesus, it was a select few leaders in Jerusalem (who were noted by some of their Jewish peers as being corrupt) and a few disreputable people they literally hired who called for the death of Jesus. When given an opportunity, the crowds of Jewish people flocked to Jesus, both in the week leading up to *Pesach* (Passover) and during *Shavuot* (Pentecost).

The Scriptures do point out the failures of Israel to follow God—both as individuals and as a nation. It then proceeds to speak of the difficulties that come from disobedience to God. But it never rescinds the

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In the final servant song what reads like a terrible defeat (as the servant would be crushed, cut off from the land of the living, and assigned a grave with the wicked) actually ends in victory. The sufferings of the servant would bring atonement as “the Lord makes his life an offering for sin ... and bears their iniquities.” The servant is also lifted up in status, as because of the suffering he endures he will receive a portion “among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong.” The suffering servant will also be mighty.

Psalm 91:9-16.^{8 9} The psalmist used older, ancient words to describe God.¹⁰ The opening double lines of poetry convey the rest we can find in this eternal, but present God. The psalm is a powerful prayer of assurance in the protection and comfort of God.¹¹ At least for those who dwell with, and trust in, God. God delights to bring us into His secret place and beneath His shadow for He wants to be among His people.¹²

covenants God made with them—it never states that God abandoned them because of their disobedience. Rather, it speaks of God’s love and continual efforts towards redeeming Israel. As a follower of God and a sinner, this brings me hope (and certainly not hatred of the Jewish people).

⁸ The ACNA includes the entirety of Psalm 91

⁹ No author or historical setting is given to Psalm 91. The Greek Septuagint does attribute the Psalm to David but the Aramaic Targum does not.

¹⁰ In the opening verse, God is addressed as אֱלֹהֵינוּ *elyôn* and שְׁדַי *šhaday*. שְׁדַי (*Shaddai*) is used 48 times in the Bible, but the vast majority of them are found in the book of Job, known for its archaic language. It is also used in the time of the Patriarchs as well as in Numbers and as late as Naomi, in the book of Ruth. This is particularly interesting as the term *Shaddai* (*Shaddayin*) was used to speak of the gods in a manuscript dated to the 9th-8th centuries BCE in trans-Jordan, attributed to Balaam, son of Beor (The Deir ‘Alla inscription). Several scholars place the events of Job in trans-Jordan as well.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ (*Elyon*), is also unusual in that it was largely used in the story of Melchizedek, a priest of *El Elyon*, and the Psalms. This has led some scholars to assume that both these terms were for Canaanite gods. However, in Genesis, it was God Himself who proclaimed that He was *El Shaddai*. He wasn’t a god of the canaanites but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is quite possible that the author was familiar with more archaic terms for God (such as from his great-great grandmother if the author were David as the LXX suggests, see Psalm 68:1, 14) and even more likely that the author was using standard Hebraic poetry as he followed the first two, unusual, names of God with two more familiar names of God in Psalm 91:2.

¹¹ The entirety of Psalm 91 is often prayed over soldiers and loved ones who are in immediate danger during times of war due to the powerful promise of protection, security, and blessing for those who trust in God.

¹² The secret place of the Most High is neither a physical structure, although Psalm 27:4-5 pairs the house of the LORD with the secret place of God’s tabernacle. Nor is the secret place of God something mystical and reserved for only the most spiritual and wise of philosophers, although it is poetically linked to darkness, thunder, and the depths of the earth (or the womb). Poetically, and practically, dwelling in the secret place is to declare to the LORD, “My God, in whom I trust.”

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Those that decide to call out will find themselves under the care and protection of the Living God. This does not mean that those who have faith in God will never encounter troubles. The psalmist describes various disasters and destructions that could occur at any time. Being a believer in Jesus does not provide automatic divine protection against all harm and danger whether physical, spiritual, or emotional. As history attests, myriads of faithful followers of Jesus have fallen victim to plagues, disasters, wars, and persecutions. The psalm describes the confidence that the believer can have through all of the dangers and challenges there are in the world. Faith in Jesus does not spare you from the time of trouble, rather faith helps you get through such times.

Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12 when he was tempting Jesus in the wilderness (and the temple). Surely it would have been an amazing sight to see angels come down and rescue Jesus had he stepped off the Temple Mount and a testimony to the many who beheld it. But Jesus responded to Satan by going back to the intent of Psalm, which was dependence on God when trials do come.¹³ The psalm does not encourage us to put ourselves in harm's way unnecessarily, looking for angelic intervention. The Psalm encourages us to know that there is safety and security of our relationship with God even through difficulties.

Meanwhile, Jesus' brother (according to tradition) was thrown off that very same location and, though James trusted in the Lord fully, he was martyred for that very trust. And yet, it's possible that James' devotion and trust in the Lord in the face of death was a greater testimony than if Jesus had stepped off the Temple mount and been saved by angels.¹⁴

Interestingly, Satan quotes several verses of this psalm when tempting Jesus (Matt 4:1-11). Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12 to try and get Jesus to demonstrate His divinity as the Son of God while standing on the temple. This would have indeed been an amazing sight had this actually happened. If angels had indeed come to rescue Jesus, then this would have certainly been an amazing testimony to the many Jewish worshipers in the temple area. What this may or may not have proved could be debated.

Hebrews 5:1-10. The Levitical priesthood was established in Exodus and given specific functions in Leviticus through Moses at the instruction by God. The writer of Hebrews does not disparage the Levitical priesthood. Actually his depiction of the service of the priesthood is

God told Israel to build a sanctuary, "that I may dwell in their midst". God promised that "I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people." In context, this is Leviticus 26:8-12, which is poetically echoed in Psalm 91:7-10.

¹³ See also Hebraic Perspective.

¹⁴ Throughout the Scriptures it is clear that miracles often do not change the hearts of those who witness them. Meanwhile, the testimony of the martyrs is incredibly potent.

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entirely positive, describing it as an 'honour' from the Lord. As verse 4 says; "no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God." Through his ministry the high priest can deal gently with the wayward since he shares in and can identify with their weakness. The weakness of the high priest is illustrated through the personal sacrifice for his own sins before he can officiate at the sacrifice for the sins of the people.¹⁵

Like the high priest, Jesus was also appointed by God, although to a different priesthood—to the order of Melchizedek. Jesus, being from the tribe of Judah, would be naturally disqualified from joining the Levitical priesthood (which was only selected from the physical tribe of Levi). Hence the priesthood of the Messiah came from Melchizedek.¹⁶

Hebrews 5:6, which introduced the order of Melchizedek, is a quote from Psalm 110 and refers to the mysterious encounter between Abram (Abraham) and the king of Salem in Genesis 14:18-20. Very little was written about Melchizedek in the Bible, barely 4 sentences are given of the event in Genesis 14.¹⁷ This lack of information led to much speculation during the Second Temple period on the person, function, and role of this king-priest called Melchizedek. The Dead Sea community interpreted Melchizedek to be the messiah and even divine in the Melchizedek Scroll (Dead Sea scroll 11Q13).¹⁸

¹⁵ The ritual being described here was Yom Kippur and is detailed in Leviticus 16 in which the priest purified and atoned for the sanctuary, altar, himself and only then proceeded to offer the scapegoat as a living atonement of the people (not as a blood atonement).

¹⁶ Gentiles in the New Covenant do not replace or supersede the Levitical priesthood with their own. Just as it says that "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel" it also states, "and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever." (Jeremiah 33:17-18) Of course, people from Simeon or Asher were to be priests "you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." Just as Peter declared that we are to be built up to be a holy priesthood—just not from the Levitical priesthood.

¹⁷ Melchizedek appeared in the Scriptures without a genealogical backstory, there is no account of his birth, nor of his death. He was a king-priest, two offices which are usually separated in the Torah who reigned in Shalem—which is only poetically linked to Zion in Psalm 72:2 but never stated as being Jerusalem.

¹⁸ It is commonly argued that Judaism never anticipated a divine redeemer, this is actually incorrect. The theology of the late 2nd Temple period was not homogeneous in any sense, there were a variety of conflicting opinions on nearly all issues. One such opinion of the Dead Sea Community at Qumran concerning the coming redeemer is recorded in 11Q13 or the Melchizedek document. In the fragmentary manuscript the messianic redeemer is named Melchizedek and at the end of the scroll Melchizedek is revealed to be '*Elohim*' or God. "And your Elohim is [Melchizedek, who will save them from] the hand of Belial." Melchizedek also appears to be a judge and avenger regarding the judgements of God.

The authors of 11Q13 are also happy to reinterpret Zion in its relationship to Melchizedek and *Shalem* from Psalm 76:2, "As it is written concerning him, [who says to Zion]; your Elohim reigns. Zion is... those who uphold the Covenant, who turn from walking [in] the way of the people."

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When asked to finish the sentence in Hebrew 5:9, without reading it, it is almost always misquoted. The sentence reads, “And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who...” Most Protestants naturally want to finish the verse with “believe”. But the word is actually “obey”. There is a tension within Christianity, particularly Protestant Christianity that struggles with the concept of obedience as it appears so close to works-righteousness.¹⁹ However, the author of Hebrews was writing with a Jewish understanding, where faith is a verb. Faith is something you put into action.

Jesus asked, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). Jesus Himself was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek because of His own obedient submission to the Father.²⁰ Obedience is not removed from faithfulness, rather it is a part of it. The Messiah was (and is) faithful and obedient. Because of this He was appointed as head of the order of Melchizedek following the resurrection. Our response to the obedience of the Messiah should be to be obedient to Him who is the source of our salvation.

Mark 10:35-45. Jesus spoke of rewards for those who were willing to give up everything to follow Him. While the greatest reward of eternal life would be given in the age to come, there would also be rewards “now in this time.” On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was asked a question by two of His disciples—James and John.²¹

¹⁹ Because of the history and theology of the Protestant-Catholic world there is often a natural tendency to divert away from obedience in both sermons and commentaries in any topic related to salvation. There is also a natural tendency in post-reformation thought to believe that if one thing is true, the other must be false. Do we have free will or is God supreme, ordaining all that comes to pass? With faith, the law is no longer necessary or even good. To believe and to obey are polar opposites when it comes to salvation!

²⁰ The author used a play on words, εμαθεν αφ ων επαθεν, “He learned from the things He suffered.” Εμαθεν, to learn, seems to often have an experiential nature rather than simply book learning. Jesus likely didn’t have to learn what pleased God and become better at obeying God in these things, rather, as the author of Hebrews so often points out, He would have experienced, or learned, obedience in suffering—even as we do. Although we do have to learn what pleases God and become better at obeying Him in these things.

Spurgeon once said about obedience; “Obedience is a trade to which a man must be apprenticed until he has learned it, for it is not to be known in any other way.” Our natural inclination is not to obey God. And so, we have to not only be instructed in how to follow the Lord but also develop the habit of following and obeying God.

²¹ In Mark, it was James and John who asked Jesus but according to Matthew 20, it was their mother who actually asked the question. The gospels only give a brief glimpse into the life of Jesus and His disciples. Here, Jesus was travelling to Jerusalem with His disciples, but we discover that it was more than just the 12 who followed Him. Just as when Joseph went to the Temple to celebrate the pilgrimage festivals and took his wife and young son with him, so too, when Jesus and the disciples travelled to Jerusalem they would have brought their wives, children, and parents with them.

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Although they had been subtly rebuked for their discussion earlier on the same topic of power and greatness (Mark 9:33-37), the disciples seemed to have continued to focus on the more traditional role of messiah's in history—that is, when Jesus arrived in the holy city He would surely overthrow the Romans and establish a physical messianic kingdom. James and John (and their mother) understood that Jesus, the Son of Man, would sit on a throne in glory as He was given all authority.

Of course, Jesus had also spoken of persecutions “now in this time” for those who followed Him. Although He had just warned the disciples of his coming death (and resurrection) the disciples did not seem to comprehend or understand that the Messiah must be cut off. Jesus didn't immediately deny James and John a place at His side. In fact, in His conversation earlier on their journey to Jerusalem Jesus had told His disciples that if they followed Him they would sit on the twelve thrones. And so, Jesus asked James and John if they could follow Him and “drink the cup that I drink.”²² When James and John answered that they would be able to follow Jesus, He didn't disparage them but agreed (at least in part), stating that the same “cup that I drink you will drink.”

Nonetheless, Jesus took the opportunity to gather the other disciples and teach about leadership in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is humble service that is the hallmark of leadership in the community, modeled through the life and service of the Messiah Himself. Seeking to rule over the community should not be the goal or desire of a shepherd of the Church. Shepherds should place the priority of the flock before themselves. Jesus openly declared that when the Son of Man walked into Jerusalem He would come not as a conqueror but to “give his life as a ransom for many.”²³ There are, and will be rewards when we follow Jesus. But if we follow Jesus we must be willing to serve sacrificially and endure persecution from those who oppose Him.

Hebraic Perspective. “A text out of context is a pretext for a proof text” has become a common saying to describe a misuse of Scripture. Put more simply, words taken out of context often lead the reader to false or inappropriate conclusions (sometimes on accident and sometimes on

²² From Psalm 60:3, 75:8, and Job 21:20 to Jeremiah 25:15, 49:12, 51:8 and Isaiah 51:17 there is a common use of drinking from the cup to signify the wrath of God poured out on man. Even the bowls of God's wrath in Revelation signify the judgment of God. However, this doesn't seem to fit the context that Jesus was speaking in. In Luke 22:20, as Jesus prepared for His death He took “the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” Paul elaborated on this in I Corinthians 10:16, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?”

²³ This type of atonement language may actually have been familiar to many in late antiquity. In the apocryphal book 4 Maccabees 6:28-29, we read of the account of the martyrdom of Eliezer the priest under the hand of the Greek Seleucids. As Eliezer dies he says, ‘Be merciful to your people, let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification and take my life in exchange for theirs’.

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purpose).²⁴ Satan used Scripture on several occasions to twist the truth. For instance, when tempting Jesus, Satan quoted from Psalm 91, “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you, on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

Because Satan quoted a single line from a text in order to tempt Jesus, it can be assumed that he must have been taking the passage out of context and that doing so will lead to bad theology. But Satan only did so after Jesus twice quoted Scripture. Jesus' first quotation from Deuteronomy 8:3 makes it seem like the context should be about not eating. And yet, Deuteronomy 8:3 is very much about eating manna by the miraculous provision of God. Meanwhile, Satan quoting from Psalm 91 seems like it could, potentially, be in context. Why was Jesus correct and Satan wrong in their use of Scripture?

In the 1st Century the Bible wasn't owned by every family. Most people would never read the Scriptures themselves, instead the scrolls would be read aloud in public where everyone could hear the spoken word of God. We sometimes forget that the Scriptures weren't composed in quick soundbites but were part of a larger narrative and story—the Bible wasn't even divided into chapters and verses. And yet, with all these hindrances, many Scriptures would be committed to memory.

And so why did so many people in the Scriptures, including the authors of the New Testament, quote from a single verse or even two or three separate verses that seem disparate from each other and all have their own context? And why do so many of them seem to be out of context in modern literary opinions?²⁵

When someone would quote one verse of Scripture it was supposed to bring to mind the entire context of the narrative surrounding it for all those involved in the discussion. Because Scripture was heard, rather than read, it was often the pairing of a word in one passage with another

²⁴ A fun statement for a young teenager, for instance, is “I have more understanding than all my teachers.” For teachers, on the other hand, “Do all things without grumbling or complaining” might be quite popular. Meanwhile, “I can do all things” and “Where two or three are gathered together” are taken out of their immediate context almost every week at many churches around the world and I've never heard “where two or three are gathered together” used in its immediate context except in a straight exegetical teaching of Matthew 18:15-16—which was promptly forgotten within the hour, when it was once more taken out of context.

²⁵ For example, in 1 Corinthians 9 Paul quoted Deuteronomy 25:4 which says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” to refer to his own right to demand payment for his ministry (while also stating that he wasn't demanding the payment owed him). Yet the passage in Deuteronomy was clearly talking about animal husbandry and has nothing to do with the salary of pastors. The author of Hebrews consistently quotes single verses of the psalms, ‘out of context’ as it were, as they proclaimed Jesus to be the divine great high priest. Meanwhile, Matthew often quoted a Psalm to prove that Jesus fulfilled a prophecy when the Psalm didn't appear to even be a prophecy.

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passage that would connect these readings together, along with the context that everyone recognized.²⁶ When Jewish sages quoted one verse as a “prooftext” it was not that they failed to honour the specific contexts of biblical texts, rather they were supporting the overall doctrines, themes, and message of Scripture in connecting specific words or concepts together.

What was the safeguard against using a text out of context in the ancient world and at the time of Jesus? It was the fact that Scripture was studied in groups and not solely at the individual level. Accountability was reinforced by group study. The community would be part of the checks and balances of exegesis to prevent verses out of context becoming eisegesis. Paul admonished Timothy not to forgo meeting together in groups and the Didache urged the early church to “seek the company of the saints everyday”. The Scriptures were meant to be studied in groups.

A second safeguard was to insure that no Scripture could be antithetical to another. Satan, having just tempted Jesus twice and been rebuked by a single verse (or passage) of Scripture twice, used the Scripture to tempt Jesus once more. Jesus pointed out the flaw in Satan's use of Scripture by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:16, whose context was making God jealous through idolatry. This context clearly didn't directly rebuke Satan's use of Scripture. Instead it rebuked the original intent of Satan (to go after another god, namely Satan himself) by connecting to Jesus' second response against Satan when Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:13, which perfectly fit the context to rebuke Satan.

ACNA Readings

Hebrews 4:12-16. The Word of God is alive and active, or as described by the author of Hebrews; “sharper than any two edged sword”. The “Word” here could be referring to both the Holy Scriptures and also the “Living Word”, that being the Messiah.²⁷ The words of God, based

²⁶ Today, we have 100's of resources to do an exegetical study or a topical, word, character, theological, or any number of other studies that interest us. With the internet, I personally have been able to increase my ability to study something in depth. But I have also lost some of my ability to know where something is as I don't need to remember it, only that it vaguely exists—at which point I can look at any of my earlier studies and papers or even someone else's thesis or doctorate on a single Hebrew word written in German 50 years ago. This wasn't an option before I knew about all the resources that I could use and so my mind retained the information with more verve. For the followers of God in the 1st century these resources never became available and their ability to connect verses through word recognition became incredibly important.

²⁷ The connection between words (the word of God in particular), a sword, and the Messiah is found not only in the Bible but also in intertestamental literature. The connection in Psalm 149:6 is somewhat loose, “Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands to execute vengeance on the nations...” However, in Isaiah 49 the servant declared, “He made my mouth like a sharp sword.” The connection between the Messiah, the Word of God, and a sword was established and

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on the Scriptures, are incredibly powerful. When God spoke at Mount Sinai, the Israelites could not bear it and asked Moses to intercede and speak to the Lord on their behalf.²⁸

When reading the Bible, the Word of God continues to expose to us the fallen human condition and reveals our need for redemption. Truth is not an easy commodity to come by in our modern world. However, God's Word reveals the truth of human history—and of ourselves (even if we don't want to see it!) Hebrews reminds us that “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

Hebrews immediately transitioned from the word of God to the great high priest, Jesus the Son of God.²⁹ The living Word also refers to the Messiah, Jesus the great High Priest who has passed through the heavens.³⁰ The Messiah, Jesus, knows our disobedience as nothing is hid from Him and is the judge to whom we must give account. But He also knows our temptations and sympathizes with our weakness, to give us mercy and grace when we strive to hold fast. The judge and the judgment are real, but so are the mercy and grace that can be found in the risen Messiah.

so, in the second Temple period, the Book of Wisdom (Wisdom of Solomon) 18:15-16 stated, “Your all-powerful word from heaven's royal throne leapt into the doomed land, a fierce warrior bearing the sharp sword of your inexorable decree...” Revelation 1:16 similarly compared one “like a son of man” (see Daniel 7) from whose mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. This figure was Jesus the Messiah.²⁸ The Israelites trembled at the voice of the LORD. Exodus 19-20 and Deuteronomy 5:25 spoke of the fear that the voice of God caused. And it was not just the general populace of the Israelites that trembled, even Moses trembled with fear according to Hebrews 12. This connection between the word of the LORD and awe and dread was clear. But throughout the Scriptures there was also a deep connection between the giving of Torah and joy. Whether at Succot or *Shemini Atzeret* (the day after Succot) there was to be joy at the reading of Torah, such as seen on the Feast of Trumpets in Nehemiah 8. The day *Shemini Atzeret* was celebrated came to have another holiday either on the same day or the day after called *Simchat Torah* which has dancing, singing, revelry, and joy as the Jewish people complete the reading of the Torah and start the cycle of reading again on the same day.

²⁹ Jesus is only called a High Priest in the Epistle of Hebrews. In fact, outside of Israel being a kingdom of priests, no direct connection between Jesus and the priesthood is made. Levitical priests trace their lineage through the tribe of Levi. Being a descendant of Judah actually disqualifies Jesus from the priesthood on earth. However, the author of Hebrews would later quote Psalm 110:4 in order to make an eschatological and messianic argument. Jesus would not be a Levitical priest, for He could not be, instead He would serve as a High Priest according to a non-Levitical priesthood—the priesthood of Melchizedek.

³⁰ The Hebrew Bible records only a few righteous people who ascended into heaven, namely Enoch and Elijah. While Paul elaborated on Jesus' ascent and descent from Heaven, here the book of Hebrews focused more on Jesus' time on earth where he was “tempted as we are, yet without sin.”