

**A Short Course
in Hermeneutics
(with an emphasis on
Context
in the Interpretation
of the Bible)**

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A Very Short Course

- Everything in the Bible is true, because it's from God.
- The "2 or 3 Witnesses" Rule – when the Bible says something more than once, we'd better pay close attention.
- So...

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"There Is No God."

That's the double witness of Scripture

- Psalm 14:1 — "There is no God."
- Psalm 53:1 — "There is no God."
- Any questions before we conclude for the week?

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**Oh, you mean
context
is
*important?!?***

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What Is Hermeneutics?

- (Don't confuse this with *Homiletics!*)
- The branch of theology that deals with the principles of Biblical exegesis.
- The Science and Art of interpreting the Bible.
- It's guided by certain rules and principles, so it's something of a *science*.
- But the application of the rules requires experience, ability, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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The Goals of Hermeneutics

- Determine exactly what God is communicating through the Scriptures.
- Get as close to the original meaning of that the inspired authors were communicating to their original audience.
- To build bridges between our listeners and the original authors in terms of history, language, geography, culture and worldview.

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Why Is It Important?

- As pastors, teachers, leaders, soul-winners — Christians! — it is our responsibility to be “**rightly dividing** the word of truth.” (KJV)
- Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 NASB
- ὀρθοτομέω — ortho-tomeō – *to cut a straight line* (only here in NT). Outside NT: used of roads, esp. military roads.

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A Solemn Motive

- As Christian workers handling God’s word, Jesus will judge us by the faithfulness we use in completing our task.
- “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such **we will incur a stricter judgment.**” — James 3:1 (NASB); “**the greater condemnation**” KJV.

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What Is Context?

- In the time we have together we can not deal with all aspects of hermeneutics, but we can concentrate on the most important fact of all and develop it.
- In this week’s Bible sessions, we want to learn to **ask** — and **answer** — this question: **WHAT IS THE CONTEXT** of the verse, the passage, the chapter, or the book I’m reading?
- This is one of the two test questions!

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Origin of the Word CONTEXT

- From a 15th-century Latin word *contextus* that means *connected*; comes from *contexere* — **to weave together**, from *texere*, **to weave**.
- “Context” comes from the same root as **textiles** (cloth, etc.)
- We want to see the “thread” (a verse or a passage) and its relation to the “whole garment of truth.”

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Context: Definition #1

- **Context** is the text we encounter around the immediate verse or passage: the verses, paragraphs, and passages that come before and after our text. Only in this context can we see the complete meaning.
- Our short example: Is it true that the Bible says, “There is no God”? No! The context of that sentence is: “The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.”

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Context: Definition #2

Context is also the influence, circumstances and events that form the environment of a Scripture passage. Other factors weigh in:

- The history
- The language
- The purpose of the author
- The literary style (e.g., narrative, historical, poetic, prophetic, apocalyptic, wisdom lit.).

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QUICK POLL

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The Whole Counsel of God

Paul's words to the Ephesian elders:

- For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel (βουλή / *bou-lē* = purpose, intention, design) of God. — Acts 20:27 KJV
- How can we declare “the whole counsel of God” is we don't *know* the whole counsel of God?

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The Most Important Context

The most important Bible context is **the whole Bible!** (The is the answer to the second and final “exam question.”)

- How are we going to know the whole context if **we don't read** the whole context?
- Make it your goal to read the Scriptures through at least once a year, every year.
- The more familiarity you have with the entire Bible, the better you'll be able to see the entire context.

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Benefits of Annual Reading

- You're never more than six months away from any given passage.
- You hide away treasures the Holy Spirit can use later (even if you don't remember the passage).
- *Almacenar* – la cena del alma.
- You can more easily identify counterfeit teaching.

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The "Elephant Test"

- John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) wrote a humorous poem called *The Blind Men & the Elephant* that describes what happens when we don't see the entire context of a thing.
- We need to pass the "Elephant Test" in order to see the whole counsel of God – the entire context.

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6 "Blind" Interpretations

- 1st: The elephant is like a wall!
- 2nd: The elephant is like a spear!
- 3rd: The elephant is like a serpent!
- 4th: The elephant is like a tree trunk!
- 5th: The elephant is like a huge tree leaf!
- 6th: The elephant is like a rope!

Nobody saw the entire context!

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Why Can't We See the Whole Elephant?

- We come to the Text with prejudices and presuppositions.
- We aren't in the habit of constantly reading the entire Bible.
- We don't read and re-read entire books.
- Our minds have been crippled, being programmed to think in terms of artificial divisions – chapter and verses.

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How Do You Eat an Elephant?

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Marinating in a Book

- To understand or teach a book or epistle, re-reading, mediation, and “marinating” in that book are required.
- Who was the author? His original audience? The historical circumstances?
- Ask yourself: What was the author's principle purpose in writing? How does this passage fit into that focus and purpose?

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Can You Read This?

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Chapters & Verses: Friends...

- They are familiar.
- They help us find passages.

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Chapters & Verses: History

- Chapters & verses **aren't part of the original, inspired text.** (What are the obvious exceptions?)
- **Chapters:** Appeared first around 1200 A.D.; attributed to Stephen Langton (Archbishop of Canterbury, 1207-1228).
- **Verses:** Concept began with OT text, but they didn't appear in Latin NT texts until the Middle Ages.

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Chapters & Verses: Enemies!

- Chapters & verses can be enemies to contextual perception, keeping us from "seeing the whole elephant," understanding "the whole counsel of God."
- Because they *seem* like independent and complete units, the chapters and verse divisions deceive us into thinking that we have a complete thought, a complete truth or a whole promise.
- Western mind + Twitter mentality = interpretive disaster!

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Prejudices & Presuppositions

- If we come to a verse / pericope / chapter with a prejudice or presupposition, that's usually exactly what we will see in that passage – nothing more.
- Like wearing colored lenses that tint everything I see, my P & P will cause me to see the scriptures in that "color."
- The report of people after cataract surgery...

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Examples

- This week let's look at various examples using hermeneutics (the science and art of interpreting the Scriptures) to uncover the true or deeper meaning of certain passages.
- Sometimes we'll use **definition #1** (the context of text), moving from small examples to large ones.
- For others, we'll rely on **definition #2** – the context of culture, language, history, etc.

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...in a Chapter Out of Context!

- 1 Corinthians 13: The “Love Chapter”? **Paul didn’t write in chapters!!!**
- What are the most important contexts here?
- Chapters 12-14 are a complete section. Its entire focus is all about the spiritual gifts and how they are to function in the Body of Christ, especially meetings of the church.
- The primary context/purpose of 13:1-3 is that love must underlie gift manifestations.

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Context: All of 1 Corinthians

- The overriding theme we forget in 1 Corinthians. From 3:1 onwards, the whole letter is “baby food”! Yes, even spiritual gifts (12-14), and all the teaching on resurrection (ch. 15) – it’s all “milk.”
- 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. **Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly....**

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#3: Another Verse Out of Context

- “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:3).
- In the USA, it seems that most Christians consider this verse a declaration of “positive thinking” or “positive confession.”
- But is that what Paul was trying to communicate? **What is the context?**

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#3: Context

- Philippians 4:11-13 — “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (And consider the greater context of 10-20.)

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#4: “Wives, Submit” in Context

- Where is the balance between “Wives, submit” (Eph. 5:22-24) and “Husbands, love your wives?”
- Temporary, immature solution — use scissors!
- **What is the context?** The true solution exists in seeing these verses in their complete context (5:18–6:9).

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#4a: Context in Quick Overview

- **KEY:** v. 18 — “Be filled with the Spirit!”
- v. 19 — mutual edification, heart worship
- v. 20 — giving thanks for everything
- **KEY:** v. 21 — **submitting to one another in the fear of Christ**
- Then Paul lays out six different examples of mutual submission.

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#4a: Holy Ghost Submission

Submitting to one another

- Wives to Husbands (5:22-24)
- Husbands to Wives (5:25-33) [What a terrible place for a chapter break. Paul still has 4 more examples!]
- Children to parents (6:1-3)
- Fathers to children (6:4)
- Slaves to masters and...
- Masters to slaves (5-9)

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Everything Depends...

- ...on the context, especially the *spiritual* context of “be being filled with the Spirit.”
- Any relationship outside of that *spiritual* context is a case of legalism just waiting to happen!

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#5: A Chapter Out of Context

The Bugbear of Romans 7 – the “escape clause” of those who believe they can’t be freed from the the Sin Nature. But **what is the immediate context** of “7”?

- 6: I am dead to Sin and alive to God Christ Jesus.
- 7: Living in a non-New Covenant state. The outworking of the Law to reveal Sin within, and the resulting internal war.
- 8: Liberation from the law of Sin and Death!

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What Is the Context?

- The flow of Romans 1-8 is the state of mankind and the powerful liberating work of Jesus Christ, ultimately living in and filled with the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.
- Romans 7 is a parenthetical statement along the way, showing the Law's purpose (expose Sin) and its inadequacy to do anything about it and what it's like to live apart from Christ.
- "Wretched man that I am"? Or "Wretched interpreter that I am"?

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#6: Linguistic Context

- "...and upon this rock I will build My church; and **the gates of Hades** will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).
- Gates of Hades or Hell? The Kingdom of Darkness (i.e., of the devil and his demons)?
- The standard preaching of this verse: Jesus says that we will be victorious over the devil and the kingdom of darkness.

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#6a: Linguistic Context

- This interpretation is based on the unfortunate KJV translation of a single word in this verse. It is influenced by:
- Careless translation of the Greek (linguistic context);
- Loose theology (theological context)
- Presupposition, Catholic superstition, and eisegesis.

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#6b: Linguistic Context

- **Hell:** Hebrew: **Gê-hinnôm**; becomes **γέεννα / Gehenna** in Greek – the place of fiery, everlasting punishment after the Judgment.
- **Hades** (Hebrew: **לִישׁ / Sheol**; Greek = **ᾠδης / Hades**)
- The place to which souls descend after death to await judgment – prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

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#6c: Linguistic Context

How do **gates prevail** against someone? — “The gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church.”

- Jacob, Genesis 37:35: “I will go down to Sheol (Hades).”
- Jesus, Revelation 1:18 — “I have the keys of **death** and of **Hades**.”
- Paul, Philippians 1:23 — “...having the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”

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#6d: Linguistic Context

- Our view of the text is colored by our cultural heritage.
- Our idea of Hell is influenced by superstitions dating back to the Dark Ages:
- Hell is the home or HQ of the devil.
- Sinners go directly to Hell.
- In Hell demons are employed tormenting souls.

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6e: The Reality!

- My Bible says that Hell is the last place the devil wants to go – and the last place he is going to go!
- What is Jesus saying in Matthew 16:18? – The gates of Hades won't "prevail" against the Church, because all those who die in Christ Jesus go straight into the presence of Jesus.

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#7: Historical Context

- Generally accepted idea: Roman soldiers arrested Jesus and guarded His tomb.
- This conflicts with Scripture, military jurisprudence, and cultural norms of the day.
- Flavius Josephus & John & Luke tell us about **the Jewish Temple Guard**.
 - John 7:32, 46
 - Acts 4:1; 5:21-24

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#7a: Historical Context

The Arrest: Once we understand the role of the Temple Guard, we can understand what the Gospels tell us about the arresting group (e.g., Matthew 26:47) —

- A large crowd, probably the Temple Guard and "deputies" (local "toughs");
- Armed with swords and clubs (not swords and spears);
- "From the chief priests and elders."

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#7b: Historical Context

The Tomb: Now we can read the words of Pilate (who had washed his hand of the matter) with a different significance:

- “YOU (pl.) have a guard. YOU (pl.) go make it [the tomb] as secure as YOU (pl.) can.” So THEY went [i.e., the priestly overseers with the Temple Guard], and having sealed the tomb, THEY set the [Temple] guard” Matthew 27:65-66.

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#7c: Historical Context

This makes it very clear what happened Resurrection Morning!

- Matthew 28:11-15 — The Temple Guard reported to their bosses, got shut up, paid off, and “insured” against possible reprisals.
- The “gray area” — operating outside the Temple precincts under special dispensation from Pilate, how much of Roman military jurisprudence would apply to the Temple Guard?

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#7d: Historical Context

Roman Military Jurisprudence helps us to understand important passages in Acts and (by way of comparison) Matthew 28:14

- Acts 12:4,18-19 — Peter’s guards
- Acts 16:27-28 — the Philippian jailer
- Acts 27:42-44 — the soldiers on board Paul’s ship
- Matthew 28:14 – Temple Guard off the hook!

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Tools

- Pastor Giovanni: "I can't teach that!"
 - Reference tools for pastors (concordance / dictionary / commentary)
 - Learning a new approach to study, as a preventative against weird doctrines from the USA.
- A different mindset – learning to approach the Scriptures holistically, rather than piecemeal.
- An openness to all of the Scripture and a growing sense of how it all fits together.

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Resources Online

[https://FinestOfTheWheat.org/\[whatever\]](https://FinestOfTheWheat.org/[whatever])

- /joseph-cl
- /bestripever
- /Circumcision-4
- /doyouloveme
- /leper

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Cultural Context: Table Manners

- An ordinary presupposition – people sit on chairs at a table.
- NASB – **recline** from ἀνακλίνομαι and ἀνακλίνω (ana-KLI-nomai / ana-KLI-nō)
 - Matthew 8:11; 14:19
 - Mark 6:39
 - Luke 12:37; 13:29

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**De-Feet-ed
by Cultural Cluelessness**

- The “sinful woman” story in Luke 7:36-50
– Not Mary Magdalene — “And it came to pass afterward...” (Luke 8:1-3)
- John 12:1-8 — Mary (sister of Martha and Lazarus) anoints Jesus’ feet.
- Matthew 26:1-13 — the nameless woman
- John leaning on Jesus’ breast – John 13:21-26

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#8: Cultural Context

- Isaiah 6:5 — “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”
- Woefully inadequate interpretation: Even though Isaiah was a prophet, he occasionally slipped into bad language. :-P
- Basis of the interpretation: A lack of cultural understanding of the phrase “unclean lips.”

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#8a: Cultural Context

Leviticus 13-14 tell us about:

- The diagnosis of leprosy
- The isolation of lepers from society
- The offerings, sacrifices, and processes required after someone was healed from leprosy.
- Diagnosis of leprosy was the job of the priests. Why?

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#8b: Cultural Context

- The lepers couldn't live with people who were "clean." They could only live with other lepers.
- Anyone who touched – or was touched by – a leper was considered unclean for 7 days.
- A leper had to wear a cloth to cover his upper lip, and he had to shout, "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn clean people to steer clear of spiritual pollution and disease (Leviticus 13:45).

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#8c: Cultural Context

- What is *in* the context of Isaiah 6 that we always overlook? — **"In the year King Uzziah died..."**
- Yeah, okay, so who cares? Let's get on to the glory-of-God stuff!
- We should care, because King Uzziah (also known as King Azariah) is a major important indicator of how we interpret this chapter.

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#8d: Cultural Context

- Uzziah was an incredibly successful king during his long reign (1 Chronicles 26:1-15) until God smote Uzziah with leprosy, the disease from which he died. See 2 Chronicles 26:16-23; 2 Kings 15:4.
- Opinion: Isaiah may have been among the priests declaring Uzziah leprosy.
- Leprosy and its uncleanness is a type of the Sin Nature; hence the responsibility of priests to diagnose it.

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#8e: Cultural Context

- Now we have all the pieces necessary to exegete this passage in Isaiah 6:
- Isaiah the prophet (and priest?) has a vision in the year the leprous king died of leprosy.
- The Levitical laws for diagnosing leprosy were common knowledge (which is why people knew to call the priest).
- Isaiah has a vision of God in His holiness.

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#8f: Cultural Context

- The holiness of God exposed the leprous (sinful) state of Isaiah's heart, and Isaiah himself declared the diagnosis.
- Having declared the diagnosis, Isaiah does what every leper is ordered to do:
 - Even though he can't cover his upper lip, he warns everyone in hearing distance: "Unclean lips! Unclean lips!"
 - The warning is so that no one else in heaven will be defiled by his nature.

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#8g: Cultural Context

- Isaiah is finally purified by the ember from the altar. At this point:
- Only then does God ask, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"
- Only in this condition of heart purity can Isaiah respond and say, "Here am I! Send me."

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#8h: Cultural Context

What contexts have been needed to deal with Isaiah 6?

- The immediate context: Do we ask about – or just skip – “the year King Uzziah died”? We need familiarity with the historical books.
- We need familiarity with the Torah, specifically Levitical law as found in Leviticus 13-14 (two of the longest chapters in the Torah) and how culture treated leprosy.

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Jesus' First Sermon

<https://FinestOfTheWheat.org/1stsermon>

The importance of context, specifically **understanding the context of the Old Testament quotes** that are used in the New Testament.

“Mnemonic Trigger”

- O say, can you see?
- O Canada!
- We hold these truths...

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Glimpses of His Message

The general tenor of His preaching:

- “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel.” — Mark 1:15

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The Lead-Up to the 1st Sermon

- “Jesus, **full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil...” — Luke 4:1-2
- The wilderness temptation after infilling.
- We don’t do a good enough job giving people a heads-up about this typical pattern: Action — Reaction — Counteraction

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Before and After

Notice the progression in the text:

- “**Full** of the Holy Spirit” as He enters the desert
- The Battle of Temptation in the Wilderness
- Returning victorious from the time of testing “in the **power** of the Holy Spirit” (v. 14).
- *Then* He begins “teaching in their synagogues” (v. 15).

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Quick Points to Note

- 4:16 — “**As His custom was...**” — regular attendance and fellowship.
- 4:16 — “**...He stood up to read...**” — He came “to church” to be a participant, not a spectator.
- 4:17 — “**...He opened the book and found the place where it was written...**” — Intimate familiarity with the Scriptures.

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Other Quick Points

- 4:20 — “He sat down.” That means He was preparing to teach. Thus, all eyes were “fixed on Him.”
- 4:21 — “Today this Scriptures has been fulfilled in your ears.” This is significant because of what Jesus DID – and DIDN'T – READ that day.

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The Reading

- “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me...”
- The list of blessings in vv. 18-19, which we could easily accept at face value (though there is much more here!)
- “To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”
- What IS “the Acceptable Year of the Lord”? Your translation may say “favorable” or something similar. Greek: δεκτός / dektos – pleasing, appropriate, welcome, favorable

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A Basic Interpretation Rule

- When you find a New Testament passage which quotes an Old Testament passage, turn back to the Old Testament passage and read that in context. Over time, you'll be amazed at what the Holy Spirit will open up to you. Almost always, a New Testament writer or preacher makes the assumption that his audience will know that Old Testament passage in question and know the context.
- Example: Jesus' quotation of Psalm 22:1

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Which Old Testament?

By the time of Jesus there were two translations of the Old Testament:

- The “original” Hebrew; and...
- A Greek translation created by Jewish scholars around 200 B.C. This was called the **Septuagint**, which you'll also find abbreviated as **LXX** – the Roman numeral for **70**, because tradition says that 70 scholars worked on the translation.

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LXX Usage

- Many OT quotes in the NT are from the LXX. That's the reason that sometimes you'll look up a quote from your NT in your Hebrew-based OT, and wonder why the quotation varies slightly.
- Most interesting quote from the LXX:
 - Romans 3:11 = Psalm 14:1;
 - Romans 3:12 = Psalm 14:2; BUT
 - Romans 3:13-18 = all contained in LXX Psalm 14:3!Paul is clearly quoting from the LXX at this point.

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The Isaiah 61 Passage

- vv. 1-2a, ending with “To proclaim the **favorable** [ἄεκτός / dektos] **year** of the LORD.”
- Jesus STOPPED READING HERE. But let's continue, following where the “mnemonic trigger” would take us:

The favorable **year** of the LORD,
The **day** of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn...

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The Balance Point: Day vs. Year

- What is the “the Day of Vengeance of our God”?
- And what is “the favorable / acceptable / δεκτός YEAR of the LORD”?

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Leviticus 25!

The inheritance in the Promised Land

- v. 23 — The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, **for the land is Mine**; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.
- The “chapter” speaks of **8 special years in God’s calendar**.

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Sabbath Day / Sabbath Year

- 7 = number of completion, of rest, of deliverance from slavery
- Forgiveness – 70 x 7
- Exodus 21:2 — a Hebrew slave goes free at the beginning of the 7th year.
- Sold for debt, but freedom is granted. However, the inheritance is not restored.

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Leviticus 25:8-13

- The Year of Jubilee!
- Not only release but **restoration of one's inheritance** – because the land belongs to God, and HE says it gets returned to its rightful owner!
- The Year of Jubilee was initiated by the blowing of a ram's horn – **yôbēl**. Found in Lev. 25, ch. 27 (3x), once in Num., once in Exo. and in a little "trumpet-related story" in Joshua 6.

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The Spiritual Implications

- 7th year, year of forgiveness, is like salvation. There is release, but not full restoration.
- 50th year – God's original inheritance to us is restored. Not just forgiveness for sins but deliverance from SIN. Our inheritance – a pure heart and communion with God is restored.
- Except one thing *isn't* restored... "As in Adam, all die."

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The Final Jubilee Trumpet

- ...the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the sky with power and great glory...**with a great trumpet**... Matthew 24:30-31
- ...we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for **the trumpet will sound**... 1 Cor. 15:51-52
- ...the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout...**with the trumpet of God**... 1 Thessalonians 4:16

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Σάλπιγξ / salpinx / trumpet

- Rev. 1:10 — I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of **a trumpet (σάλπιγξ / salpinx)**.
- **Same word** in Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians.
- In the LXX (the Greek OT, remember?) of Leviticus, it's the **same word for the Jubilee trumpet – σάλπιγξ / salpinx!**

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The Day / the Year / Today

Thus says the LORD,
 “In a **favorable** time I have answered You,
 And in a **day of salvation**
 I have helped You;
 And I will keep You and give You
 for a covenant of the people,
 To restore the land,
To make them inherit the desolate heritages...
 — Isaiah 49:8 —

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When is “the acceptable year”?

...we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain, for He says,
 At the **acceptable time** I listened to you,
 and on the **day of salvation** I helped you.”
 Behold, now is the acceptable time,
 behold, now is “the day of salvation.”
 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Especially acceptable – not just δεκτός, but **supercharged** as εὐπρόσδεκτος.

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What Is the Deceitfulness of Sin?

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called **"TODAY,"** so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. — Hebrews 3:12-13

- It's Sin telling you, "You've lost the inheritance and you can't have it back! Only death can free you from me."

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Jesus' First Sermon

- "This day this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears," says Jesus, "this day of proclamation of the year of Jubilee, the acceptable year of restoration."
- God says to Satan and to Sin, "When I blow the **yôbēl**, when I declare Jubilee, the land, the inheritance goes back to the original recipients — My people — **BECAUSE THE LAND IS MINE — AND BECAUSE I SAY SO!**"

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