**Context is Key**

*All Scripture from NKJV and Wikipedia general quotation are in italics*

Jesus’ accused the lawyers, of Jewish religious law, in His day of having *‘taken away the Key of knowledge’*. By this they had neither entered into God’s grace themselves and also hindered those who were entering in. (See Luke 11:52).

This disregard for one or more of the keys of knowledge is just as active today, building semi-Christian organizations and hindering seekers from entering into a full and ungoverned walk with God through Christ.

There are a number of things which could be named as ‘Key’ when it comes to knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Identifying something as key is to recognize that by usage it unlocks something important.

In a short and perhaps non-exhaustive list from the Bible, I consider the following to be super foundational keys of knowledge since by them even a non-believer who is willing can unlock and experience introduction to God and truth.

* *And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).*
  + This promise from God can also be stated in anti-thesis: ‘if you do not seek Me you will not find Me’
* *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).*
  + Backed up by additional insight in Proverbs 9:10, this verse contains its own anti-thesis for one either fears, respects and has reverence for God and is therefore at the gate of knowledge, or one is a fool.
* *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).*
  + Trust is foundational to any relationship and the God who insured the authorship of the Bible is clearly calling us into a relationship with Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ (see John 17:3).

Other verses may come to mind, yet we can easily see the effect upon the developing character and life of any ‘Christian’ individual or organization with regards to the extent they seek God with all their heart, hold Him in actual reverence, and put their trust in Him.

However, when it comes to modern Christian teaching and preaching [those avenues by which the many are so often discipled in the ways of Christ] even these foundational keys are heavily affected by yet another key. The extent to which context is respected within our study and handling of the Word of God.

Discussing the concept of context and understanding that it is more than just academic, let us first consider a few more Biblical keys.

* *knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).*
  + At a glance, modern western Christianity seems obsessed with interpretation. What’s your interpretation? or, That’s your interpretation! When in reality it is key for us to understand that only the word of God itself and the Holy Spirit of God can interpret, or reveal insight, into the word of God.
* *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).*
  + This passage identifies the main purpose of God’s Word in the life of a believer, as with a proper life of prayer, intimacy with God is greatly enhanced in the life of those who embrace this as key.
* *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5).*
  + Are there biblical concepts or just general areas of your life which you find perplexing? You are in good company, even the Apostle Paul was perplexed at times (see 2 Corinthians 4:8). James reveals this key of directly seeking God, and God’s promise to those who use it.
* [Regarding Jesus]- *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Colossians 1:15-18).*
  + Everything that we see, touch, feel, or experience is about Jesus. Embracing this key, we begin to understand that this life is not primarily about us. Rather God has inserted each of us on purpose into history or His-Story. Life viewed from that perspective can be very clarifying (see Acts 17:24-28).

When it comes to understanding a biblical passage, context is a key and often ‘the’ key. For it is largely by contextual use that we understand original meaning. Context can also apply to individual words because the original languages of the Bible may have shallower or broader meaning for certain words than the translated language does. Also of note, words, specifically in English which has quickly become universal world-wide, take on new meanings as our cultures blend and change.

Following are two examples regarding context, both have divided modern western churches in our day. The first over a more touchy-feely type of contextual ignorance. The second over a more minor intellectual issue, which many have turned into ‘a hill to die upon’. Both of these have left those outside of Christian circles scratching their heads about us.

God is Love and God loves everyone. Well yes, God is Love and God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to redeem us. However, in our day and age we have seen two major formerly evangelical Christian denominations completely change their stripes crowning these two concepts above all truth. Loosely viewed, the context of God’s message [the rest of the Bible] is being ignored in favor of the current human perception of love. The general basis proceeds as follows. Because God is love a loving God would never really condemn anyone over an issue of love. This train of thought has led to a mixture of abandonment of basic scriptural: moralities, submission to government, and even discarding the warnings of hell.

Contextually, the passage defining God as love (1 John 4:7-8) is not universal but rather nested in a broader message, the entire chapter, towards those who have received the Gospel message and chosen to follow Jesus. It specifically uses the Greek word Agape, which expresses love as an act of the will through the actions of the lover without regard to the current state of the object. Very unlike the heart-felt version of anything goes as long as it is loving type of love which our current western culture has embraced. God’s love cost Him and continues to cost Him dearly, we don’t see this type of love being expressed by many humans in our world today.

God loves everybody, or as John 3:16-17 puts it: *‘for God so loved the* world’, is directly coupled with a call to repentance changing rather than accepting the entire course of ones live to realign with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I would encourage a contextually relevant study of these concepts vs. choosing a path based on the world’s current understanding of ‘love’.

Our next example revolves around an intellectual controversy regarding the age of the earth and cosmos. The Old Earth or Young Earth argument. In one sense this is a very minor topic because it has little bearing upon whether or how one follows Jesus. In another sense, to our shame, the argument has become so heated in western Christian circles that unbelievers who are outside looking in can’t help but wonder why we hate each other so much vs. Christ’s purposeful call to love one another as a means of revealing who we are to the world (see John 13:34-35).

Aligning the sides of this argument with context, I make no pretense of telling you what you should or shouldn’t believe. Rather, since both sides claim that the Bible supports them, let’s review that portion of the argument in context.

Does the Biblical context of the Hebrew word for day support creation of the world over eons of time, or does it support a reading of creation having occurred over a literal six-day period?

Turning to the internet, I find that Wikipedia has actually stated the case for contextual understanding of the Hebrew word Yom (day) quite well. Found at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yom>

*Although Yom is commonly rendered as day in English translations, the word Yom has several literal definitions:*

*• Period of light (as contrasted with the period of darkness),*

*• General term for time*

*• Point of time*

*• Sunrise to sunset*

*• Sunset to next sunset*

*• A year (in the plural; I Sam 27:7; Ex 13:10, etc.)*

*• Time period of unspecified length.*

*• A long, but finite span of time - age - epoch - season.*

*Biblical Hebrew has a limited vocabulary, with fewer words compared to other languages, like English (which has the largest). This means words often have multiple meanings determined by context. Strong's Lexicon Yom is Hebrew word #3117: The word Yom's root meaning is to be hot as the warm hours of a day.*

*Thus "Yom", in its context, is sometimes translated as: "time" (Gen 4:3, Is. 30:8); "year" (I Kings 1:1, 2 Chronicles 21:19, Amos 4:4); "age" (Gen 18:11, 24:1 and 47:28; Joshua 23:1 and 23:2); "always" (Deuteronomy 5:29, 6:24 and 14:23, and in 2 Chronicles 18:7); "season" (Genesis 40:4, Joshua 24:7, 2 Chronicles 15:3); epoch or 24-hour day (Genesis 1:5,8,13,19,23,31) – see "Creationism".*

*Yom relates to the concept of time. Yom is not just for day, days, but for time in general. How Yom is translated depends on the context of its use with other words in the sentence around it, using hermeneutics.*

*The word day is used somewhat the same way in the English language, examples: "In my grandfather's day, cars did not go very fast" or "In the day of the dinosaurs there were not many mammals."*

*The word Yom is used in the name of various Jewish feast days; as, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; Yom teruah (lit., day of shouting) the Feast of Trumpets.*

*Yom is also used in each of the days of the week in the Hebrew calendar.*

Wikipedia has accurately laid out the true basis of context, so important in order to gain the meaning 'in context' of this particular word.

The remaining question is: what is the context of Yom as used in Genesis 1 the creation story? To answer that we reference Genesis 1:5 where Yom [day] does not stand alone but is joined by three other words: Night, Evening, and Morning. This is all contextually repeated over and over again in the other verses of Genesis 1 where Yom [day] is accompanied by just two: Evening and Morning.

*God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (Genesis 1:5).*

Regardless of our personal beliefs about the cosmos, if we are to understand contextually what God is saying to us in Genesis chapter 1, whether Yom in this context is to be taken as literal day or 'time period', we need to know whether these other three words have the same broadness of scope as Yom does. The answer is that they do not. Night, Evening, Morning are all literal without other common shades of meaning.

Therefore, whether we accept it or not, contextually God is sharing with us events that happened in literal days. (Reference the full definitions of each of these words from Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words, provided below).

Take care my brothers and sisters in the faith of Jesus Christ. There are reasons that go far beyond this general lack of respect for context that drive mankind, even those saved but yet not fully yielded [aren't we all?], to feel a need to explain away the scope of God and His power. We all want desperately to 'fit in' with the world but we should not stray from Christ or Biblical truth to do so. This always leads to more people who are marginal in their walk towards God not less.

Instead let our zeal for good works and our love for one another be the hallmarks by which the world in its ignorance of God will see Him through us.

*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14).*

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jesus- John 13:34-35).*

**EVENING**

(from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

±ereb OT:6153, "evening, night." The noun ±ereb appears about 130 times and in all periods. This word represents the time of the day immediately preceding and following the setting of the sun. During this period, the dove returned to Noah's ark Gen 8:11. Since it was cool, women went to the wells for water in the "evening" Gen 24:11. It was at "evening" that David walked around on top of his roof to refresh himself and cool off, and observed Bathsheba taking a bath 2 Sam 11:2. In its first biblical appearance, ±ereb marks the "opening of a day": "And the evening and the morning were the first day" Gen 1:5. The phrase "between the evenings" means the period between sunset and darkness, "twilight" Ex 12:6; KJV, "in the evening".

**MORNING**

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A. Noun.

boqer OT:1242, "morning." This word occurs about 214 times and in every period of biblical Hebrew.

This word means "morning," though not the period of time before noon. Rather it indicates the point of time at which night is changing to day or that time at the end of night: "And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts" Ex 10:13.

Boqer can represent the time just before the rising of the sun. In Judg 19:25 we read that the men of Gibeah raped and abused the Levite's concubine "all the night until the morning: and when the day began to spring, they let her go" (cf. Ruth 3:13). In the ancient Near East the night was divided into three watches. The last period of the night was called the morning watch Ex 14:24. It lasted from 2:00 A. M. until sunrise, and in such a context the word indicates this period of time.

Boqer can mean "daybreak" or "dawn." In Ex 14:27 it is reported that the water of the Red Sea "returned to his [normal state] when the morning appeared [literally, "at the turning of the morning"]." Boqer is used as a synonym of "dawn" in Job 38:12: "Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place...?"

Sometimes boqer appears to mean "early morning," or shortly after daybreak: "And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them and, behold, they were sad" Gen 40:6. Thus, Moses "rose up early in the morning" and went up to Mount Sinai; he arose before daybreak so he could appear before God in the "morning" as God had commanded Ex 34:2,4. In the "morning" Jacob saw that his bride was Leah rather than Rachel Gen 29:25; cf. 1 Sam 29:10.

As the opposite of night the word represents the entire period of daylight. The psalmist prays that it is good "to show forth thy loving-kind- ness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night" Ps 92:2, in other words, to always be praising God (cf. Amos 5:8).

In Ps 65:8 boqer represents a place, specifically, the place where the sun rises: "They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice."

At least once the word appears to represent the resurrection: "Like sheep they [the ungodly] are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning..." Ps 49:14.

Boqer can mean "morrow" or "next day." This meaning first appears in Ex 12:10, where God tells Israel not to leave any of the Passover "until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire" (cf. Lev 22:30).

**NIGHT**

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laylah OT:3915, "night." Cognates of this noun appear in Ugaritic, Moabite, Akkadian, Aramaic, Syrian, Arabic, and Ethiopic. The word appears about 227 times in biblical Hebrew and in all periods.

Laylah means "night," the period of time during which it is dark: "And God called the light day, and the darkness he called Night" Gen 1:5 — the first biblical appearance. In Ex 13:21 and similar passages the word means "by night," or "during the night": "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud... and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night." This word is used figuratively of protection: "Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; [betray] not him that wandereth" Isa 16:3. Laylah also figures deep calamity without the comforting presence and guidance of God, and or other kinds of distress: "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night...?" Job 35:10.

During Old Testament times the "night" was divided into three watches: (1) from sunset to 10 P. M., Lam 2:19, (2) from 10 P. M. to 2 A. M. Judg 7:19, and (3) from 2 A. M. to sunrise Ex 14:24.

**DAY**

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yom OT:3117, "daylight; day; time; moment; year." This word also appears in Ugaritic, extrabiblical Hebrew or Canaanite (e. g., the Siloam inscription), Akkadian, Phoenician, and Arabic. It also appears in post-biblical Hebrew. Attested at every era of biblical Hebrew, yom occurs about 2,304 times.

Yom has several meanings. The word represents the period of "daylight" as contrasted with nighttime: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" Gen 8:22. The word denotes a period of twenty-four hours: "And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day..." Gen 39:10. Yom can also signify a period of time of unspecified duration: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" Gen 2:3. In this verse, "day" refers to the entire period of God's resting from creating this universe. This "day" began after He completed the creative acts of the seventh day and extends at least to the return of Christ. Compare Gen 2:4: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day [beyom] that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens...." Here "day" refers to the entire period envisioned in the first six days of creation. Another nuance appears in Gen 2:17, where the word represents a "point of time" or "a moment": "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day [beyom] that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Finally, when used in the plural, the word may represent "year": "Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year [yamim]" Ex 13:10.

There are several other special nuances of yom when it is used with various prepositions. First, when used with ke ("as," "like"), it can connote "first": "And Jacob said, Sell me this day [first] thy birthright" Gen 25:31. It may also mean "one day," or "about this day": "And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business..." Gen 39:11. On Joseph's lips, the phrase connotes "this present result" (literally, "as it is this day"): "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" Gen 50:20. Adonijah used this same phrase to represent "today": "Let king Solomon swear unto me today that he will not slay his servant..." 1 Kings 1:51. Yet another nuance appears in 1 Sam 9:13: "Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him." When used with the definite article ha, the noun may mean "today" (as it does in Gen 4:14) or refer to some particular "day" 1 Sam 1:4 and the "daytime" Neh 4:16.

The first biblical occurrence of yom is found in Gen 1:5: "And God called the light day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." The second use introduces one of the most debated occurrences of the word, which is the duration of the days of creation. Perhaps the most frequently heard explanations are that these "days" are 24 hours long, indefinitely long (i. e., eras of time), or logical rather than temporal categories (i. e., they depict theological categories rather than periods of time).

The "day of the Lord" is used to denote both the end of the age (eschatologically) or some occurrence during the present age (non-escha- tologically). It may be a day of either judgment or blessing, or both (cf. Isa 2).

It is noteworthy that Hebrew people did not divide the period of daylight into regular hourly periods, whereas nighttime was divided into three watches Ex 14:24; Judg 7:19. The beginning of a "day" is sometimes said to be dusk Est 4:16 and sometimes dawn Deut 28:66-67.

END