

Context Always Enriches Content

Becoming a *Judean* Shepherd



Kingdom Care Insights for Individuals and Groups

Doug Greenwold

Author of *Making Disciples Jesus' Way*



A Digging Deeper Faith Study

Becoming a Judean Shepherd

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Author of

Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God

The Rest of the Story: A Closer Look at Familiar Passages

Making Disciples Jesus Way: Wisdom We Have Missed

Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Their Stories

A Digging Deeper Study

Context rescues truth from the familiar.

– Kenneth Bailey

*When reading the Scriptures, we see what we know
but do not always know what we see.*

– Unknown

*There is no substitute for reading the Bible (in context);
It throws a great deal of light on the commentaries!*

– Unknown (added)

*If all the compassion of all the tender fathers in the world
were compared with the tender mercies of God
they would be but as a candle to the sun or
a drop to the ocean.*

– Matthew Henry

*Reading the Bible through fresh eyes constantly reminds us
of the depths that still remain to be discovered there.*

– Philip Jenkins

*The Bible writers assumed their readers lived when, where and how they did.
They saw no reason to explain what everyone knew to be true.*

– Randall Smith

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ISBN

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Forward

A few years ago I was contacted by Marlene LeFever, David C Cook (DCC) Vice President of Educational Development for Global Mission. She wondered whether Preserving Bible Times (PBT) would be interested in developing some context-for-kids lessons as part of a new club curriculum they were creating for orphans and semi-orphans ages 9-11 in Asia and Africa. At that time, DCC was starting a curriculum test phase in India with over 600 children at six different orphanages. While at least one parent is still living, these children are not adoptable. Many parents are sex trade workers, some too poor to feed his/her child; some are lepers whose children are healthy. To say that I was intrigued with and challenged by this project was an understatement! Kids as well as adults need meaty, engaging Bible lessons. So I told Marlene, the Lord willing, I would like to attempt it.

My first project was developing some lessons for “Being a Kid in the Time of Jesus,” Since that material was well received, DCC asked me if more material could be developed for this 9-11 year-old age span. I immediately thought about shepherding; taking the perspective of a 12-year-old boy in first-century Judea who is learning from his father how to care for sheep. Marlene really liked the idea, so I started the research. After developing the contextual background material, DCC’s curriculum development staff added graphics, crafts, puppets and skits to bring the lessons alive for children.

I recently spoke with Marlene and learned that this DCC club program has exploded. It is now preparing to reach over ten million at-risk children! Not only are the shepherding lessons being taught to many more orphans in India, but also to increasing numbers of children-at-risk in Bangladesh, Uganda, Zambia, and Indonesia. For many of these children, the DCC club Bible lessons may be the only Christian education they will ever receive.

This shepherding context-for-kids project illustrates another way that we at PBT support and encourage God’s Kingdom with the contextual resources, insights, and frameworks He has entrusted to us. If you would like to see a sample finished lesson, just let us know at ask@preservingbible.org and we’ll email one to you.

Recently I've felt prompted to share these same shepherding "lessons" with adults. They are rich with servant leadership insights and provide us with Psalm 23 glimpses into the immensity and constancy of God's care. Hence this little book. Given the nature of its original audience, these chapters are written in an informal style that are not overly concerned with sentence structure, verb tense, voice, or tightness of content.

The only changes I've made for adults are a new title, adding appropriate pondering and sharing questions at the end of each lesson and including a "Case for Context" as an Appendix. These pondering questions can serve as guided discussion questions for small groups and Bible studies. In the rabbinic tradition, you will find no fill-in-the-blank questions nor any easy questions; rather thought-provoking questions to wrestle with to further hone your discernment regarding discipling and body life issues. For devotional purposes, they can also guide personal meditation and journaling. However this little book ends up being used, the prayed-for outcome is the same – transformation by the Holy Spirit.

At PBT we deeply desire to share with God's people an exciting and expanding vision of the depth and breadth of God's Word (and transforming power). Our prayer is that the Spirit of our Good Shepherd will use this little book to stir and soothe your soul so you can be a shepherding blessing to others. ■

Doug Greenwold
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Columbia, Maryland
July 2013

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The Lord is my Shepherd

I alone am the shepherd, the good one. The shepherd, the good one, lays down his life on behalf of and instead of the sheep.

– John 10:11 Wuest

At the sight of them (the crowds), his heart broke – like sheep with no shepherd they were. – Mark 6:24a The Message

My Family

My name is David (Da-veed) and my father's name is Hosea. In our culture that makes me David ben Hosea (David son of Hosea). I'm seldom called David except by my father and my older brothers. Everyone else in my clan calls me "ben Hosea" (son of Hosea) because in our culture it is who you are related to that matters most. My family believes *Yeshua* (that's our Hebrew word for Jesus) was the long awaited Messiah and we are followers of Him.

I was born in 53 AD about 25 years after Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem. I'm 12 years-old and for the last four years my father Hosea has been teaching me to become a shepherd just like he did with my older brothers, and just like his father did with him.

Our family comes from a long line of Judean Shepherds. My grandfather was a shepherd in Bethlehem's fields that night some 60 years ago when the angels announced that Messiah had just been born in a manger in Bethlehem. That was quite a night for a humble shepherd! I'll tell you more about it later.

My Village

My family lives with many of my relatives in a village known as Ein Karem. It's located in southern Judea about five miles SW of Jerusalem, which means it is not far from Bethlehem. Just about everyone in our village is part of our clan and almost all, except for the ordinary priests, are involved in some form of agriculture (grains, olives, dates, vines) or shepherding.

Sheep and Goats

Sheep and goats are important parts of our village life. Sheep provide milk to drink and wool to weave into cloth that becomes our outer clothes. Sheep skins provide us with the rough clothing we wear when we are out in the Judean hills with our flock. Sheep and goat milk can be made into cheeses, butters and yogurt-type foods which are good "traveling" foods as we roam far from home to find grass and water for our flock.

In our village, if your family has five sheep, you are considered to be fortunate. If your extended family has 15 sheep, you are very fortunate. With those small numbers of sheep, you can see why every sheep is important to us. If a family with five sheep loses one, that is a 20% loss in the family's milk and wool production. For most families that is a crisis. That's why when Jesus told the (Luke 15) story about a shepherd who left the 99 sheep (most likely in a sheep pen with another shepherd as no Near Eastern shepherd would ever leave his sheep alone) to go out and find that one lost sheep, we understand why He had to do that!

When we combine all the sheep from our village clan, we have about one hundred sheep. And that's the flock of sheep that our family takes care of for the village.

Our Home

In Ein Karem our one-room house is no larger than 15 feet by 15 feet square. Being so small, there is no such thing as privacy in our family! Being poor like so many others in our village, my family has only one set of serving bowls and goblets (drinking vessels). Inside our humble home there will be no cupboards since there is nothing to store! There are also no closets because we have no extra clothes. Usually, the only clothes we own are the ones we are wearing!

Our Oral Tradition

We have no books in our culture except for the scrolls of God's Word that are kept at our local synagogue. In our culture, history is passed down to us as stories which we are expected to accurately memorize so we can pass them along to our children. Often times in the early evenings, our fathers will gather their sons in a circle and retell the great stories of our tradition. Abraham, Moses and David are three very important Jewish heroes that we often hear great stories about. As you might imagine, my family has always liked the shepherding stories, particularly that Psalm of David where he talks about how "The Lord is my Shepherd." It sometimes causes me to shudder in excitement thinking about David (son of Jesse) walking on these same hills with his flock one thousand years earlier that *Abba* and I now walk. That's why his Psalm 23 is one of our favorites.

We also have some newer stories that have become a part of our Oral Tradition. They are *Yeshua* stories about His teachings and encounters with people. Jesus often used shepherding stories and word pictures to talk about God's Kingdom. His teachings are some of my most favorite! If you don't mind, as I tell you about the various things my father taught me about shepherding, I'm also going to tell you about some of what David and Jesus said about shepherding.

First Things First

When I was eight years-old, *Abba* (that's our culture's affectionate word for "Daddy") told me it was time for me to start to learn shepherding. He said it was going to take several years of walking with him because there is so much to learn and so many different things a shepherd has to be prepared for.

The very first day that *Abba* and I headed out to the hills, we were at the front of our flock leading them out of the village. I didn't know it then, but only in our part of the world does the shepherd place himself at the head of the flock. Everywhere else in the world, the shepherd and the sheep dogs are always at the rear. Isn't that a great picture of *Yeshua*? He's always in front leading the way. He really is the Good Shepherd. As we talk about sheep and shepherding, I hope you will relate to these sheep as well as with Jesus as

your Shepherd Savior. As we will see, sheep and people have a lot in common! They both desperately need a Good Shepherd!

Understanding Sheep

On that very first day I walked with *Abba*, he told me that shepherding is a demanding task requiring total dedication to the sheep. “Unless you have a heart for shepherding,” he would say, “you won’t last very long because the constant demands and needs of the sheep will overwhelm you.” He would also remind me that “There are no part-time shepherds.” For him, caring for and protecting the flock was twenty-four hours of total commitment, seven days a week.

It may help you to know that sheep are essentially helpless and not particularly bright. That’s not a good combination! For example, sheep are easily spooked and will always impulsively react before they think. They have this instinctive ability to make bad decisions that (repeatedly) puts them in difficult and dangerous situations. Sheep are also vulnerable to a wide variety of diseases, ticks, insects and parasite afflictions requiring continuous monitoring and intervention by the shepherd. Because of that, sheep require constant attention and care. Maybe now you are starting to get a glimpse as to why people are indeed like sheep and why they too desperately need God’s constant and careful care! I had no idea what *Abba* was telling me that first night, but over the months and years ahead I discovered just how right *Abba* was with his “first things first” wisdom about sheep and shepherding. Maybe now you can start to appreciate some of what King David was including in his opening words... *The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.* (Psalm 23:1 NASB)

Staying in Touch

Something else *Abba* said to me that first week on the hills has always stayed with me. He said that shepherding is a “hands on” calling. You can’t shepherd sheep from a distance. You have to be with the sheep and they have to know it and feel it. On a daily basis it seems sheep need to be repeatedly touched to be reminded that their shepherd is there caring for them. That reminds me of one of my favorite *Yeshua* stories that we would often retell around the village campfire. It happens right after Jesus calls His first disciples (Luke 5). The very next thing *Yeshua* did was to compassionately

touch a leper! He knows that His sheep need His personal touch if they are ever to be healed from their infirmities. He wanted that Kingdom truth to be the first “lesson” His brand new disciples needed to learn if they were going to be good shepherds of the flock He was going to leave with them. As I said before, understanding shepherding really helps you understand God’s Kingdom and its leadership ways.

Green Pastures

Good grass and plenty of it is the desire of every shepherd. *Abba* once said that if sheep could dream, they would dream of abundant green pastures. That’s because in our part of the world, green grass year around is one of the hardest things to come by. Part of that is due to rainfall patterns in our country where 75% of the rain falls on only 25% of the (mostly northern) land. That means that only 25% of the rain falls on the remaining 75% of the (mostly southern) land. Since we live in the south, we get very little rain. And most of that comes in the winter. So while we have green grass on our Judean hills in the spring, that grass is already turning brown by early summer. That means for much of the year we have to journey toward the coast or far to the north to find grass for our flock.

Abba taught me early on that just because grass looks good and green, it does not mean it is good grass for sheep to eat. In southern Judea there are dozens and dozens of grass type plants, some of which are poisonous, while others tend to give sheep nausea and stomach gas. Still other types of grasses, while looking like they are good for eating, really provide no nourishment at all for the sheep. It doesn’t take long to realize that each new hillside or valley is a separate eco-system with its own variety and mix of grasses (and weeds). So the really good shepherd knows the plants and grasses of each area/region and surveys each new pasture to assess which part of this pasture/hillside has the best grass for nourishing the flock, and which portions of the hill need to be avoided.

When good grass is found, the shepherd has to carefully control the access of his flock to the best grasses. For starters he has to make sure the bully sheep will not run rough shod over the younger sheep to get to the best grass first. Yes, there are bully

sheep in every flock. A good shepherd will keep the bullying sheep away from the best grass in a new pasture until both the younger and the older sheep have had sufficient time to eat some of it.

Protecting Grass from Sheep

Sheep have no sense of what would be reasonable behavior. When they come to good grass, they will continue to eat until the grass is gone. And even then they will try to eat what's left of the remaining stubs where the grass comes out of the ground. When that happens, sheep will pull up the roots of the grass along with the stubs. Over time that leads to erosion of the soil and reduces the amount of grass left to grow. A good pasture can easily be destroyed by over grazing as it loses its ability to sustain itself.

So yet another important decision a shepherd has to make every day is to judge how long his flock should stay in any one place on a hillside field so as not to over graze good pastures. When the hills have sparser grass later in the season, *Abba* would sometimes move the flock three and four times a day to protect those fragile pastures from over grazing. That way we could return to productively feed on those slopes a week or two later.

When you consider all that goes into providing and preserving pastures for sheep, David, our Shepherd Psalmist, puts a lot of meaning and significance into a few words when he said of the Lord...*He makes me lie down in green pastures* (23:2). And we have not even gotten to the *makes me lie down* part yet! That's where we will continue next.

pPonderings

What insights have struck you so far in this development of sheep, shepherds and shepherding? What new insights might you already have into how God cares for you? Does that give you new reasons to praise and thank Him?

Do you resonate with David the Psalmist when he says...*I shall not want for anything?* What does that mean to you? The Message translates that...*I don't need a thing.* If contentment is a key ingredient of the Christian journey, how is your contentment index doing these days?

What speaks to you in the "green pastures" section? In your human condition, are you susceptible to over grazing on too much of a good thing? How about feeding on "grasses," e.g. activities, that don't provide you with any nourishment?

Can you or did you identify with the sheep? In which ways? Is the analogy accurate or overstated?

Any thoughts about shepherding and leadership development in the Kingdom? What differences might there be between a pastor who “manages” a church and one who shepherds the flock?

What take-a-ways from this first shepherding Reflection might there be for you in how you approach tomorrow?

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Living Waters

Jesus said to Peter...Tend my lambs (John 21:15c)...Shepherd my sheep (16c)...Tend my sheep (17c)

All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. – Isaiah 53:6a

Water: Another Essential

Grass and water are two things sheep must have every day. The water that leaves a sheep's body from sweating and bodily functions needs to be regularly replaced. If it isn't, sheep are very unhappy! They can get water in different ways. In the spring, there are often heavy morning dews on the grass just waiting for sheep. Since sheep are early risers, they get some of their water by eating this dew covered grass. A second source of water comes from wells and a third source comes from water we save from the winter rains. *Abba* always reminds me that to properly care for our sheep we have to plan ahead for water. That often makes shepherding a difficult daily task because water is scarce in southern Judea for much of the year.

Winter Storms: Friend and Foe

In our part of Israel there is a soil dust called *loess* that the winds blow across our hills and valleys. This silt-like *loess* tends to settle in the lower valleys where it covers the ground. The winter rains combine with the clay particles in the loess to form a crust on the ground's surface and makes a seal that keeps the water from soaking into the soil. As a result, winter rains tend to rapidly drain and collect in low lying valleys and canyons often resulting in flash flooding. That's why *Abba* says that when you see winter rain

clouds coming, make sure the sheep are on higher ground. Every few years we hear of a careless shepherd whose flock got caught in a canyon during a winter storm and drowned in a flash flood.

Saving Water

Judean shepherds know of ways to save water from winter storms so it can be used later in the year to refresh their sheep. *Abba* is really good at knowing how to do this. He seems to know just where my brothers need to dig out a large 15 foot deep by 10 foot wide hole in the soft limestone ground near a dry river bed (we call these dry river beds *wadis*). It would always be at a place where they could also build a small rock dam to direct some of the *wadi's* water into these storage holes that we call cisterns.

Judean shepherds have to be good builders to figure out where to put a cistern near a *wadi*. It has to be in such a place where a small dam of rocks can push the *wadi's* water into a side channel to take it into the cistern. Sometimes when the ground is hard limestone and too hard to dig out, *Abba* figures out where and how the winter rain waters from the *wadi* can be directed into a nearby low lying area to create a pond of water, or lagoon. This place can hold the water for several months before the heat of the summer season evaporates it. *Abba* says you need to know your rocks since water will leak from soft limestone formations (that's why we have to plaster the insides of soft limestone cisterns) but not from ponds and lagoons with a hard limestone floor. To best manage our water, *Abba* first uses the water in the ponds and lagoons for our flocks, leaving the water in the cisterns for later in the year.

If the Sheep Only Knew!

One day as we were digging out another cistern, *Abba* said to my brothers and me, "Sons, our sheep have no idea how much work we do to make sure they can have daily water!" *Abba* is right. Sheep are totally unaware of how much work it takes to care for them in the ways they so easily get used to! That must be part of the reason why *Yeshua* is called the (really) Good Shepherd. Imagine what it must be like for Him to meet the daily needs of ALL the sheep in His Kingdom flock!

Still Water

Sheep are really scared of moving water. The sound of a waterfall in the late spring will upset them. Even the ripples of pond water created by the wind frighten them. The small waves that come from dumping water from a cistern bucket into a watering trough will frighten them too. That's why *Abba* says never to let our sheep see water until it is completely calm or they won't drink.

There is a reason why sheep are deathly afraid of water that is not still. Between a sheep's throat and front legs is the best and longest wool. This wool quickly absorbs water and holds it like a sponge. When the sheep lowers his head to drink, the wool gets very close to the water. If the water is moving at all, the lapping of the waves will come into contact with the wool. This causes the wool to absorb more and more water until it gets so heavy it begins to push the sheep's nose into the water. That then causes more wool to absorb water which adds so much more weight to the neck and the relatively weak front legs of the sheep that it can no longer keep its head out of the water. Sheep intuitively know they can drown when they are around moving water, which is why they are always afraid of any water that is not perfectly still. Shepherds know this too. That's why a good shepherd will only expose his sheep to still waters and why he goes ahead of the flock to make sure that each site's water is perfectly calm before the flock arrives to drink.

Good Water and Bad Water

Just like all grasses are not good for sheep to eat, the same is true for water. Over time, especially as it gets warmer during the summer, some ponds and lagoons will develop water borne parasites. When sheep start to get thirsty, they quickly become agitated and start looking for any water to drink. Since sheep have no ability to choose between good and bad drinking water, they can very easily harm themselves by their poor drinking choices. Knowing this, a good shepherd has to anticipate when his flock will need water and make sure that he has moved them to a good water site at just the right time.

Making Sheep Lie Down

One of my favorite parts of David's 23rd Psalm is *He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters*. You don't have to be a shepherd in training for very long to realize that you cannot make sheep lie down just because you want them to! Sheep will only lie down when:

■ Their stomachs are full from a day of grazing. At the end of each day, a good shepherd will always place his hand under each sheep to make sure his/her stomach is extended. That way he knows their stomachs are full. Sheep that are not full will not lie down and will "baa, baa" all night long in the sheepfold. Then no one, sheep or shepherds, gets any rest!

■ They have been able to drink enough water. The best way for a shepherd to know if his sheep have had enough water is to feel each of their noses. If a sheep's nose is moist, it will lie down. If a shepherd finds a sheep with a dry nose, he will give that sheep water from a wineskin bag of water he carries with him for that purpose. If a sheep is stubborn, *Abba* will even force water down that sheep's throat so it will lie down for the night.

■ They are not bothered by flies, ticks, leeches or parasites. When you think about it, sheep have their mouths on the ground most of the day either eating or looking for something to eat. That puts their nose and eyes very close to the ground for long periods of time. This is why sheep will often get parasites in their nose and tear ducts from eating grass all day long or occasional leeches in their throat from drinking. One of the shepherd's evening tasks is to check his sheep for these pests. When necessary, *Abba* will use a linen cloth to remove the parasites from the sheep's noses and tear ducts. Without that attention, sheep will itch all night long and not rest. Leeches from a sheep's throat are removed in a different way. Like *Abba* often says, shepherding is a "hands on" calling!

■ They feel safe and secure. Sheep feel most secure at night when they are in sheepfolds, which are stone-walled structures with a door/gate opening. Good shepherds know where sheepfolds can be found. Most sheepfolds are built on uneven ground, some on hill-sides. That's because sheep are easily bored standing and walking on

flat ground. And when they are bored, they start biting each other and that leads to night time trouble! So a good shepherd will make sure he uses a sheepfold that has plenty of uneven ground.

When the sheep are safely in the fold, *Abba* plays the flute to calm the sheep and soothe them to sleep. *Abba* is really good at playing the flute and next year he is going to teach me how to play it so I will be able to put our sheep to sleep!

p*onderings*

Are you becoming comfortable with the parallels between sheep, people and leadership? Where do you see similarities? Any differences?

What struck you about a sheep's need for still (and clean) waters? See any parallels for your life?

What are you thirsting for these days? Like sheep that have no ability to discern good water from bad, are you at risk of drinking the wrong kind of water? Looking through the rearview mirror of your life, can you see how the Good Shepherd has repeatedly led you to drink from clean, refreshing water and protected you from partaking of bad water?

Are you starting to get a vision for how constant and comprehensive a good shepherd's care is for his flock? Also, how oblivious (and therefore perhaps thankless, unappreciative, presumptive) the sheep might be to His care? Does that give you a different perspective on God's Providence and constant care for your life? Ever thought about praising Him for the care that He has repeatedly brought and continues to bring into your life that you are unaware of?

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, sees us as His sheep (John 23). Ever thought about how naïve, arrogant, and dense it is to feel that (we) sheep really can take care of most aspects of our life ourselves? That we really only need the Good Shepherd's caring intervention occasionally or periodically? To falsely conclude that there are a goodly number of things in my life that I can take care of myself, thank you!? From what you know about sheep so far, what is it that sheep are capable of taking care of on their own? When do they not need the shepherd's constant care? See any implications for your prayer life?

Has your life been downward focused too long? Your nose too close to the ground (the grindstone)? Might you have picked up some parasites that are irritating your (spiritual) eyes and nose (ability to discerningly smell right from wrong) and thus causing you to be unable to fully rest (in Him)?

What does it take for you to be willing to lie down in His green pastures?

Are you open to having your shepherd(s) take the parasites out of your nostrils and tear ducts as well as the leeches that can sometimes get lodged in your throat? What implications come with that realization?

Three

Protecting the Sheep

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. – 1 Peter 5:8b

Enemies

One of the first things *Abba* warned me about was the natural enemies of the sheep. They include lions, bears, wolves, hyenas and foxes. Some of these predators strike at night, others during the day. Packs of wolves are fast, cunning, and persistent and attack at night. Lions are bold and will attack alone anytime during the day. There is never a moment when a shepherd can relax because one or more of these natural predators are always lying in wait for just the right moment to snatch a sheep away.

Valley of the Shadow of Death

We often have to travel dozens of miles from home in the summer when *Abba* is moving the sheep from one grazing range to another. On these journeys there are times when we have to pass through valley floors, and that can be a dangerous time for the sheep and the shepherd.

In Israel we have many rocks and stones on our hillsides. Over the years the winter rains wash the stones and rocks down onto the valley floor creating long rocky stretches. That rockiness makes it difficult for sheep to walk, slowing them down and making them easy targets for their enemies. Valleys are a particularly dangerous place for young lambs because their thin and weak front legs can break easily if they slip and fall on the uneven rocky ground.

Abba will try to avoid the valley floors by leading the sheep along hillside paths. But sometimes the valley walls are too steep.

The sheep's enemies know this and they know which valley floors the shepherds cannot avoid and those parts of the valley floor where the flock are especially defenseless. In anticipation of a good meal, they will hide in the hillside caves or behind large rocks and wait for the sheep. *Abba* teaches me how to constantly scan both sides of the valley walls looking for hiding places where these killers are waiting to pounce upon a straggler sheep stuck in the rock or a lamb that has just broken its leg.

When we go through the valleys in late afternoon, the sun no longer lights up the valley floor, making it much darker for the shepherd and more dangerous for the sheep. Those situations remind us of our Shepherd King David who walked these same hillsides and valley floors and talked about taking great comfort that God was with him even when he walked through each *valley of the shadow of death* (Psalm 23:4a).

Protecting the Sheep

Shepherding is one of the few jobs where you must travel with weapons to protect sheep from their natural enemies. That's why *Abba* is teaching me how to use the rod, the staff and the sling to scare and fight off these determined enemies of the sheep when they get too close. Many long-time shepherds have scars on their arms and legs from the wounds they received from fighting these animals up close while protecting the sheep.

The Sling

One of the weapons that *Abba* travels with is a sling. It's a leather pouch with three-foot long cords attached to both sides. In the center of the pouch a round stone is placed. These stones are small balls about three inches in size that weigh about 1/3 of a pound. To scare off one of these predators, *Abba* whirls the sling around his head faster and faster. Then at just the right time, he releases the strings on one side of the pouch sending the stone ball straight at its target. With all of his practice through the years, *Abba* can get that stone to travel over 120 miles per hour and can hit a six-inch target a hundred feet away. Now you know how David could kill Goliath with just his sling (and God being with him!). The weight of the stone ball and the speed at which it travels is deadly if it hits

the enemy in the right spot. That's why I need to practice throwing the sling for several years so I can accurately hit a bear or a lion when I need to.

We use the sling to scare lions away whenever we see them on the hillsides. Lions can do a lot of damage to a flock in a very short period of time. Even though they will only carry one lamb/sheep away with them after an attack, they will often kill ten lambs/sheep before deciding which one they want to eat. One of our stories reminds us that Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, described the devil as a *roaring lion prowling around seeking whom he can devour* (1 Peter 5:8). We shepherds know what he was describing and what he meant.

The Rod

The sling is used for scaring away dangerous animals from a distance. But there are times when we have to fight these predators up close. That's why *Abba* always travels with a rod, which is a three- to four-foot long, thick stick with an enlarged, rounded end. It's like a club with a knob on one end. *Abba* has carried a rod for so long he feels like it is just a natural part of his right arm. He will use it like a club if a bear gets too close. Sometimes *Abba* will whirl and throw the rod at the feet of a fox that has gotten too close to scare it away.

One of our historical scrolls tells us (I Samuel 17:34-35) that one day David told King Saul about a time when he *was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him* (NASB). These experiences taught David that God was with him and it gave him the courage and confidence to fight Goliath.

The rod is not used just as a weapon; most of the time it helps us care for the flock. Sometimes we use it to separate the thick wool so we can take a closer look at the sheep's skin. Other times we use the rod to prod a sheep that we see bullying and harassing other sheep.

Abba often says that being a shepherd is great training to be a religious leader who serves, feeds, guides and protects God's flock, just like King David did. In fact one of our Psalms (78:70-72) tells us God *chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of His people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; and with skillful hands he led them* (TNIV). The story of David is one of our favorites to retell. We shepherds never get tired of hearing it! Wouldn't it be great if everyone in God's family could have a shepherding experience to learn what King David learned?

The Staff

When we are out with the flock, *Abba* carries the sling and the rod, and I carry the staff. A staff is longer (five feet) and thinner than a rod and has a U-shaped crook at one end. We use the staff to guide a sheep in a new direction by placing it around its neck or body and then giving a gentle pull. It's another way the shepherd stays in contact with the sheep. The staff is also used to reach out and pull a sheep closer for personal examination. And then there are times when we have to use the staff to keep apart some sheep that can't seem to get along with the others.

During birthing season we often place the U-shaped end of the staff under a newborn lamb to carry it closer to its mother. Other times we use the staff to rescue a sheep who gets stuck in a thicket from trying to eat some green grass just beyond its reach, or when a sheep loses its balance and falls into a pit. As you can see, the staff is very useful in a number of ways. Maybe now you can better appreciate what David was describing in Psalm 23 when he said *thy rod and thy staff; they comfort me* (said from the perspective of the sheep!)

Cast Down Sheep

Sheep not only need to be protected from their natural enemies, they also need to be protected from themselves. Sheep easily lose their balance on rocky ground, and they can make bad decisions about where to rest. Sometimes a sheep will lie down in a slight depression or hollow place in the ground because it is more

comfortable for them. When it tries to get back up, it may lose its balance and fall, often ending up on its back. A sheep on its back stays on its back. It cannot stand up. This is serious because the blood quickly starts to drain out of its legs causing numbness. When a sheep falls down like that, we call it a cast down sheep. It's a sheep that needs the shepherd's help to get back on its feet. When the shepherd gets the sheep upright, he takes whatever time is needed to caringly massage the sheep's legs until the blood flow slowly returns. Then the shepherd will gently lead the sheep back to the flock.

There is a Psalm that asks the question, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me?* (KJV 42:5). Those two questions have a special meaning to shepherds because we see our sheep being *cast down* regularly. It is a great comfort to us to know (and remember) that when we need the Lord to pick us up and get us back on our feet again, He is faithful to lift us up, massage our legs to restore our circulation, and lead us back to the flock. Maybe now you can understand and appreciate what David was describing in Psalm 23 when he said, *He restoreth my soul* (23:3a).

Wolves and the Sheep Pen

Sheep not only need to be protected from their enemies during the day, but also at night because night time belongs to the wolves and hyenas. That's when they will attack even when we have the sheep in the sheepfolds. In the early evenings when the moon provides enough light, *Abba* always scans the ridge lines of the hills for an outline of wolves and hyenas on the prowl.

Wolves are cunning, daring, and persistent, especially when they are hungry. They usually travel in packs and will lie in wait quietly stalking for long periods of time, often before the shepherd is even aware of what's happening. That's why *Abba* throws stones in all directions at different times during the night to try and scare off the wolves from the sheepfold. It's his way of letting them know that he is still there and watching. You can see why shepherds seldom sleep soundly most nights. Constant vigilance is a necessary part of the job.

*p*onderings

What new things did you learn in this Reflection about shepherding? What new appreciations do you have for our Good/Chief/Great Shepherd as well as the various oversight shepherds in your fellowship?

On your spiritual journey, who/what would you describe as your spiritual enemies? In your view of yourself, where are you most vulnerable – what do you need to be protected from most? Do you concur with Luther's view that the three enemies of the Christian are the world, the flesh and the devil?

Have you ever thought about praising God for the many times He has protected you unawares?

People, like sheep, can easily get stuck in life's depressions, becoming cast down souls. Looking through the rearview mirror of your life, can you see where our Father has (repeatedly) lifted you up, restored you, and put you back on your feet so you can resume the spiritual journey?

When you had to walk through your versions of *the valley of shadow of death*, did you sense the Good Shepherd with you? What have you learned from those experiences?

Jesus warned about false teachers who will *come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves* (Matt. 7:15 ESV). Have you had that experience? How best can we discern the wolf's presence?

It's not the rod, nor the staff, nor the sling per se that provides comfort to the sheep. Their comfort comes from realizing it's the Shepherd's presence together with the rod, the sling and the staff that provides the sheep with a sense of security. How have you been practicing His Presence these days?

four

Guiding the Flock

If all the compassion of all the tender fathers in the world were compared with the tender mercies of God they would be but as a candle to the sun or a drop to the ocean. – Matthew Henry

The Nature of Sheep

Sheep are not very bright. They are also creatures of habit that get easily bored and distracted. That's why sheep need constant attention to keep them from getting into trouble. Sheep also have very weak eyesight. It is often hard for them to see where *Abba* is going, so they must depend more on hearing than seeing. To help them, *Abba* will hit his rod on a rock when he wants the sheep to move or stop doing something. Sheep get very used to that sound and pay attention when they hear it.

Proven Paths

Sheep like staying close to each other. That's why they will often rub up against each other to feel secure. So when *Abba* starts to move the flock, sheep will line up and closely follow each other nose to tail. This can be a problem if a shepherd chooses a difficult trail that has steep sides and dangerous gaps where sheep can lose their footing and fall. We have a shepherding story that is told around the campfire about a sheep from a very large flock that walked off the edge of a cliff one day causing hundreds of other sheep to do the same thing. *Abba* says that's why a good shepherd always moves his flock along safe, proven paths and why David praises God for leading His sheep on *paths of righteousness* (23:3).

Sometimes it's not the shepherd that chooses a dangerous path, but the sheep themselves, and without even knowing it! In any

flock there are a few sheep who seem to be natural leaders. It's hard for us to guess which ones they are. Yet there is something about them that causes the other sheep to be willing to follow them. The shepherd can use these "leader" sheep to help him move the flock to a new pasture by bringing them to the front of the flock. However, there are times when one of the leader sheep will decide to wander off on its own to find new grass or water. When that happens, many of the flock will quickly follow that leader. *Abba* needs to closely watch this sheep to protect the flock from wandering away.

Rescue and Restoration: The Broken Leg

Some sheep can be particularly difficult and challenging, even to the best of shepherds. For example, when there is a sheep that repeatedly insists on going its own way and no amount of guidance or correction from *Abba* changes that behavior, *Abba* will take the cords from his sling and tie the sheep's mouth shut so it can't bite him for what he is about to do. Then *Abba* takes one of the sheep's legs and places it over a rock, using his knee to break it. Afterwards, he resets the sheep's leg, makes a brace and wraps it. Until the leg has healed, *Abba* will carry that sheep on his shoulders everywhere. This sheep is now totally dependent on *Abba* for daily grass from his hand and water from his bag. When the leg is healed, that sheep may have a limp for the rest of its life, but its relationship with *Abba* will be so close that it will never again wander away from his presence. As *Abba* says, different sheep get different kinds of care, but the purpose is the same – to keep them safe, secure and healthy in the flock.

Leading From Behind

Abba is usually out in front of the flock, but sometimes he needs to go to the rear to push the sheep along. This keeps lagging sheep from falling behind and at risk for attack by one of their enemies. Sheep usually lag near the end of the day when they are tired and want to rest. When this happens, *Abba* will go back and walk alongside those sheep to encourage them to speed up and rejoin the flock. Have you noticed how each sheep gets the personal care it needs at just the right time?

I Shall Not Want!

I think you've learned by now that the shepherd is always thinking about what's best for his sheep. He provides them with good grass and clean water. He protects them from their enemies and from their own poor decisions. He leads them on all the right paths. He rescues and restores them when they are cast down. And he never gives up on any sheep no matter how disobedient and difficult that sheep may be. That's why sheep are satisfied and content in the presence of a really good shepherd. David could truly say about our Heavenly Shepherd, *I shall not want* (23:1). Can you say that and mean it?

Those Christmas Shepherds

Remember when we first met and I told you that our family comes from a long line of Judean shepherds? My great grandfather, Hosea, was a shepherd in Bethlehem's fields the night the angels announced that Messiah had just been born in Bethlehem. Many times around the campfire, *Abba* retells what happened that evening using the exact words of my great grandfather that have been passed down to us for three generations. We never get tired of hearing about *Yeshua's* birth!

Did you ever wonder why the greatest announcement ever made to the world was given to humble shepherds and not to the proud Chief Priests in the Temple in Jerusalem? Maybe now you will understand because good shepherds know how to take care of sheep. It was as if God was reminding us that night what kind of care He wants for His people and who He wants to provide it. Not the rich Temple leaders who were taking advantage of His flock. Not the proud Pharisees who despised the outcast "sheep." But caring shepherds with humble hearts that will daily provide the sheep with good grass and clean water while protecting, leading and guiding them.

I think another reason shepherds were the first to hear that really good news that night is because many years later *Yeshua* was going to call Himself *the Good Shepherd* (John 10:11). As it says in our Isaiah scroll,

He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young. (Isaiah 40:11 NKJV)

When you understand shepherding, giving shepherds a role to play as part of *Yeshua's* birth makes perfect sense. It all fits together!

Shalom, Shalom

Thanks for letting me share some of what it means to be a shepherd in first-century Judea. I hope you learned some things about shepherding that will grow your faith in *Yeshua* and help you appreciate David's 23rd Psalm even more. Above all, I hope these insights into Judean shepherding will encourage you to put your complete trust and confidence in our Heavenly Shepherd who always has the best interests of His sheep at heart, and who never lets His sheep down! Never!

*p*onderings

What new things did you learn in this Reflection about being a sheep as well as a shepherd? What new appreciation do you have for the gifted shepherds in your fellowship?

Which attributes, tendencies, instinctive behaviors of sheep can you most identify with in your human condition; e.g., poor spiritual eyesight, too easily following the wrong leader, prone to bad decisions? Has it been relatively easy or difficult for you to acknowledge that you (occasionally, frequently, usually, always) need a Shepherd? Are you embracing that reality?

Looking back over your spiritual journey, can you see a pattern of bad habits – tendencies to (repeatedly) head in paths that are not good for you? Do you let the Good Shepherd direct you back to the right path when you sense those urges and tendencies arising again? What are some examples of how our Father Shepherd has guided you (back) into paths of righteousness?

How content in your inner being are you right now? On a scale of 1 (perpetual turmoil) -10 (deep-seated inner contentment), where would you place yourself? In which direction are you moving? Are you trying too much to be your own sheep (or shepherd), or have you placed your life in the caring hands of the Good Shepherd?

A good shepherd never gives up on any of his sheep regardless of how difficult their tendencies and wayward behaviors may be. In fact he increases his watchful care over them. And yes, sometimes he has to break a sheep's leg and carry it for a while. What does that reality do for your soul?

What if seminaries had a mandatory first-year course called Shepherding 101 that required spending two weeks in Israel walking the Judean hills night and day with Bedouin shepherds and their flocks? What if that experience sorted out which aspiring pastors really had the skills, the appetite, the will, the heart and the right shepherding vision for God's flock? What if that experience was pass/fail? Might we have more shepherding pastors in our fellowships and fewer ministers "managing" churches?

From what you now know about shepherding, any more insights into Luke's account of the birth of Jesus...*Now there were shepherds nearby living out in the field, keeping guard over their flock by night* (Luke 2:8 NET)?

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Appendix

The Case for Context

A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text. – unknown

A Diagnosis

Words in Scripture have precise meanings – they always have and always will. Unfortunately, 2000 years of a Western worldview layered over with 300 years of modernity thinking, have taken a toll. This has caused us to increasingly become egocentric people who prefer analysis, categorization and “how to” answers when reading the biblical record. We have also been conditioned to prefer simplistic answers to deep questions. As a result,

- Spiritual narcissism is increasingly becoming the malignant condition of the church. This causes us to approach Scripture as if it’s all about me – my Jesus, my salvation, my gifts, my call, my ministry – rather than first and foremost about Him.
- We increasingly don’t know how to accurately read the Bible as it was meant to be read, let alone understand the original purpose and meaning of a passage.
- Unaware that we are often practicing existentialists, we tend to be more focused on what we think (or guess) a passage might mean rather than dig deeper to discern what the Holy Spirit intended it to mean.
- With our “microwave” orientation to life, we are all too often focused on trying to quickly discern the “principles” or application of a passage rather than its intended purpose (and meaning) as part of a greater whole.
- We have a distinct preference for quick, easy answers packaged in neat spoon-fed formulas accompanied by simple diagrams, e.g. three steps to humility, four steps to effective prayer, and five principles of righteousness.

- We much prefer dissection, analysis and quantification, yet the Bible is all about synthesis and integration. Thus, we can easily become so preoccupied with analyzing a leaf (verse) under the microscope, that we forget the leaf came from a tree (book), and the tree came from a forest (entire Bible).
- We take the theological facts we discover and put them into categorized cubbyholes. Then having put a label on them, we convince ourselves that we have now mastered these truths. However, being able to identify and list all the attributes of God does not necessarily mean we actually “know” God!

Far too often these westernized, modernistic tendencies are as true for the pulpit as they are for the pew. When taken together, they create an interpretation climate that is often alien to the world of the Bible! Because of this twenty-first century mindset conditioning, much of what the Gospel writers assumed their Middle Eastern readers would contextually know and understand about a passage is now missing from our comprehension. While we still have the words of the text, much of the assumed context of those words is gone. As a result, we often hear only part of the passage and therefore grasp only a part of its intended message.

It should be a “given” that if we are going to connect with the fuller meaning of a passage for today, we first have to know what those words meant to those we meet in the Bible. To do that, we have to adopt their mindset. As a result, understanding the cohesive context of a passage becomes essential for several reasons.

Words Have Meaning

Words have very precise meanings in Scripture. That’s why the biblical writers deliberately chose their words under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to communicate an intentional message. For the Gospels, insights into these word meanings include the

- **Historical context** they were rooted in, including the intertestamental and Roman occupation periods, as well as Israel’s own extensive history.
- **Geographical context** of the sites mentioned including their physical characteristics as well as their respective topographical, geological and climatic features.

- **Literary context** of the words used including their literary form, idiomatic expressions, linguistic meaning and their use in rabbinic teaching pedagogy.
- **Religious context** they were drawn from including the nature of observant Judaism, the Temple, Sabbath worship, the Oral Tradition, Rabbinic interpretive wisdom, Messianic themes and prophecy, as well as ceremonial feasts and ritual purification.
- **Village context** issues including Jewish social customs of mandatory hospitality and social reciprocity, as well as the agrarian nature of farming, shepherding, vineyard care and fishing life.

Such an integrated contextual approach allows us to get closer to what the biblical writers intended to communicate about whom God is and what God wants to reveal to us about Himself in His Word.

Context Enhances Connectedness

One of the issues that every Bible teacher struggles with is how best to get the hearers of a lesson or sermon to connect with the text. As pertains to Jesus' encounters with people, how to help the listeners relate to and identify with these lepers, tax collectors and prostitutes, real people with real issues, in a real culture that was hostile to them. An integrated context enhances our ability to help others connect with the text and meaningfully identify with those individuals whom Jesus encounters.

Context Sets Helpful Boundaries

One of the problems with many Bible messages today, so often crafted without the inherent constraints and illumination of context, is that a passage can easily be taken into metaphorical realms the biblical writers never intended. It can also be treated in allegorical ways that may actually violate the intent of the text. Carried over into small group Bible studies, this can easily slide into group thinking where we collectively listen to everyone's version of "What do you think it means?" and then vote on the best answer! That may be good representative democracy, but it hardly qualifies as a group that correctly handles the word of truth!

Context Allows Meaning to Emerge

Reconstructing the cohesive context of a passage is like staining a fine piece of wood. That approach does not change or alter the nature of its truth (its inherent grain). Quite the contrary, it serves to draw out the inherent grain (of the passage) so that its meaning and purpose can be more readily seen and understood. In this way, the revealed truth can be first seen, then internalized, and then lived out in the reality of every day.

Context Gets to the Heart of the Matter

When all the aspects of the Middle Eastern contextual setting of a passage get rewoven back together for our western mindsets, we see that some things have not changed in 2,000 years. People then and people now still struggle with the same relational issues of abandonment, humiliation and rejection. They are the timeless realities of the human condition. Integrated context allows these human issues to be more clearly drawn out of the passage for all to see. In doing so, the compelling narratives of the Scripture touch our hearts and connect us with the reality of both the text and our own life experience. As a result, we fall in love with Jesus more deeply.

Watching Jesus rescue and restore people from these human realities back then is to understand His non-changing heart for us today as we still struggle with all those same abandonment, humiliation and rejection issues. Post-modern people are still people with these same relational issues. Contextually restoring the Gospel encounters reveals the timeless truths of Jesus to be relevant to all ages, all cultures and all worldviews.

Context Enhances the Contemplative Disciplines

Several years ago I attended something called the Spiritual Formation Forum. The purpose of that conference was to encourage disciples of Jesus to devote more time and attention to the contemplative side of life. As I left that conference, it struck me that the contemplative needs to meet the contextualist. If the contemplative is going to meditate on the words of Jesus and His encounters with people, then it behooves us to meditate on as much of that encounter as we can – to see the whole scene in 3-D. Doing so gets

us closer to the intended meaning of the passage and therefore closer to the epicenter of its intended transformation.

The contextualist brings a wide-angle lens that can help the contemplative see not just the one-dimensional 21st century Western understanding of many passages, but also the fuller first-century Middle Eastern understanding of the text. The biblical contextualist always provides more for the contemplative to ponder.

Context Provides Boundaries for the Appropriate Use of Imagination

Jesus used the technique of imaginative story telling not only to reveal more about His Father, but to teach His disciples how to live, think, feel and act in the Kingdom of God. His imaginative use of stories allowed His listeners to remember His message together with its purpose and meaning. He is both The Story as well as the Story Teller. His parables were consummate narratives, rich with imaginative treatments of everyday images, situations and occurrences. His use of people's imaginations not only allowed his listeners to connect with the story, but also allowed them to remember it word for word so they could accurately pass it along to others.

In today's environment, using any form of imagination in some Christian circles runs the risk of being misunderstood. Today that word can also suggest meanings of fantasy, unreal, and make believe. That was the antithesis of how Jesus used His imaginative stories to connect with His listeners' lives. He used imagination to bring out both the truth and the meaning of what He was communicating.

In opening up a passage, we need to restore the rightful use of appropriate imagination in bringing out the fuller meaning of God's truth in memorable and transforming ways for pulpit, pew and culture. C. S. Lewis said in one of his selected essays that "reason is the natural organ of truth; imagination is the organ of meaning." For too long, evangelicalism has emphasized reason as the pathway to truth without also using appropriate imagination to bring the passage's meaning into clearer focus.

Context Allows Us to See the Whole Picture

All too often during our time spent in churches, we end up being given many theological, doctrinal and factual ornaments, but seldom

are we shown the tree on which to hang them. It's as if we have been handed hundreds of pieces to a puzzle, but no one has ever showed us what the completed picture on the top of the puzzle box looks like. We have emphasized the dispensing of facts without providing appropriate frameworks within which people can organize and understand the facts they have been given. I am convinced that the more we can reset a passage back into its original context, the more we will see the complete picture on the top of the box.

Contextual Resources

You can find our favorite Preserving Bible Times' (PBT) resources for studying the Bible in context on PBT's website www.preserving-bibletimes.org. Go to the "FAQ" section (top left side) of the home page, open that section and click on the first question you see: "What Other Contextual Resources are Available?" By clicking that link, you will find a helpful list of contextual resources for understanding the Bible in its context organized by area of interest.

*p*onderings

We know that context matters in everything we do and in everything we know. Yet somehow we seem to so easily forget that notion when we come to the Scriptures. Why is this? How did this come to be?

Without knowing it, how many ways might we be filtering the message of the Bible through our Western worldview perspectives? And then further massaging it so that it fits neatly within our framework of modernity thinking? Is it any wonder that sometimes we just don't "hear" or "see" what the biblical writers meant to communicate to us?

About the Author

Doug Greenwold is a long-time teacher of the Scriptures. He received his BS and MS degrees, as well as a MBA degree from the University of Michigan, where he also played basketball. For thirty-two years, Doug worked in general management and executive positions in Information Systems, Healthcare Services, and Life Sciences. He retired from the corporate world in 1999 to work with teaching ministries.

In 1978 Doug discovered he was called to teach the Scriptures, his true vocation. An ordained Elder in three denominations, Doug has been teaching the Bible, writing and leading retreats, conferences, and workshops for churches and para-church ministries ever since. In 1988, he first visited Israel on a study tour and realized the importance of integrating the context of the land with the biblical texts. Since then he has been an avid student and teacher of the Bible in its contextual setting.

Presently Doug is the Senior Teaching Fellow at Preserving Bible Times, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and presenting biblical truth through contextual restoration of the biblical record. Prior to that, he was a Teaching Associate at the C. S. Lewis Institute in Washington, D.C. Doug was also a Teaching Director with Community Bible Study and a Christian educator in the Washington, D.C. area.

Doug's first book, *Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God*, is a contextual revisiting of Luke's first chapter. This innovative book opens up this couple's remarkable journey of faith by telling "the rest of their story." His second book, *Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We Have Missed* contextually examines the missing ingredients from "making disciples" in the First Century in our Western notions of "discipleship" today.

Doug's third book *The Rest of the Story* takes familiar Bible passages and contextually restores them so we can understand all the implications of the passage as if we were Middle Eastern villagers.

His fourth book *Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Those Stories* examines Jesus' interactions with Simon Peter, the leper, the paralytic, the calling of Levi, the rescue of the demoniac, the woman with the issue of blood, and others in a way that restores the First Century contextual richness of these encounters.

Doug also co-leads contextual immersion trips to Israel (The Life and Land of Jesus) and Italy (Paul's Response to the Roman World). He is a frequent interview guest on Christian radio and is the author of dozens of articles on aspects of biblical context.

Presently Doug and his wife Nancy live in Columbia, Maryland, in close proximity to their three children and six grandchildren.

About Preserving Bible Times

Preserving Bible Times (PBT) is a faith-based ministry with a vision for preserving and presenting Biblical Truth and meaning through integrating the Biblical text with its visual, historical, geographical, literary and cultural context. PBT's strategy is to creatively assemble a "tool box" of Bible Times related images and contextual elements that will allow the Scriptures to increasingly come alive for 21st Century people as they did for 1st Century hearers. As part of its charter, PBT has assembled one of the finest archives of Bible Times related images in the world. This includes high resolution aerial footage that is without peer. These resources are shared in a variety of ways with God's Kingdom to encourage believers and further equip teachers and preachers in the Body of Christ.

As a non-profit, 501 (c) 3 tax-exempt corporation, Preserving Bible Times depends on the contributions of like-minded people, as well as revenues from its "Bible in Context" resources, seminars and conferences to 1) research and write on the cultural, literary, historical and geographical context of the Bible, and 2) share these contextual materials in a variety of ways, e.g., print, video, digital, trips to Israel and Italy, with followers of Jesus Christ everywhere.

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Rich. Thought-provoking. Sometimes startling. Always refreshing. Doug's insights continue to inspire and stimulate my own thinking and give me new ways of looking at Jesus in the Gospels. Read! Reflect! Contemplate! Your heart and mind will be enriched.

D. Michael Crow, Ph.D., CRM Project Coordinator for "Jesus-in-Context"

I always benefit from Doug Greenwold's teaching and writing. He brings fresh, previously ignored insight: but more importantly, Doug opens up the biblical world and thus the Scriptures take on greater meaning and power. With Doug as a guide, stories and insights from the Scriptures jump off the page. Prepare yourself for a series of aha! moments.

Bill Hull, Teacher and Writer, Author, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*

Read, chew, reread and rechew Doug Greenwold's teaching on making disciples. It will be a "life-changer." One caution, I do not recommend reading his material before you go to sleep. It is too stimulating and paradigm shattering to provide deep rest.

Chuck Miller, Trainer in Discipling, Author, *Now That I'm A Christian*

Doug's teaching is like someone pulling the curtain back so you can see the movie that's been playing for quite some time on the BIG screen. Doug "pulls back the curtain" to help us all uncover wisdom and insights that have been staring us in the face for centuries.

Pat Goodman, Teaching Pastor, Grace Fellowship Church, Timonium, Maryland

Through revealing context, Doug has done a wonderful job of drawing out profound understanding and applications from "familiar" passages.

Daryl Nuss, Chief Ministries Officer, National Network of Youth Ministries

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