

Christ in Prophecy

Bible Times 7: Greenwold on Luke 2

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: One of the most important principles of biblical interpretation is to keep in mind the context of what you're trying to interpret. There is a wise adage that says, "A text without a context is a pretext." But grammatical context is not the only context we need to be aware of. There is also cultural context, historical context, geographical context, among others. For a fascinating discussion of biblical context as it relates to the Christmas story in Luke chapter 2, stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. My colleague, Nathan Jones, and I have one of our favorite guests with us today. Back for the third time is Doug Greenwold. He is a down-to-earth Bible scholar who serves as the Senior Teaching Fellow for a ministry called Preserving Bible Times. Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy, Doug

Doug Greenwold: Thank you, David. It is a delight to be back here and to have another opportunity to dig deeply into God's Word.

Dr. Reagan: Well, thank you. You are always a blessing when you come.

Nathan Jones: Definitely. Definitely. Well, Doug it is great to have you back. Your website we were joking that if in real estate it's "Location. Location. Location!" Your website is context, context, context. That seems to be the foundation of your ministry. So if you could briefly, tell folks what your ministry is about and why context is so important?

Doug Greenwold: Meaning. Meaning. Meaning.

Nathan Jones: Meaning. Meaning. Meaning.

Dr. Reagan: I like that

Doug Greenwold: It's all about original meaning of the passage.

Nathan Jones: Okay.

Doug Greenwold: Why does that matter? Because that's where the transformational power of a passage is to be found. And so what we're about, about preserving Bible times is bringing context; how the original people who heard those words and observed these events would have understood them. And to get out of our Western mindset and to engage those passages, to have the Bible come alive by bringing the various contextual pieces to bear. And then when the Bible comes alive no longer are we like passive participants and observers, we actually place our self into the passage and that is when transformation starts to occur. So, simply stated

context allows the Bible to become alive. And when the Bible becomes alive God's people thrive.

Nathan Jones: So, you fill in the blanks for something that is lost in the translation of history, time, and interpretation.

Doug Greenwold: Exactly. It is helpful to look at it this way, the biblical writers always assumed their readers lived when, where and how they did.

Nathan Jones: Logically.

Doug Greenwold: So, they assumed you just knew a lot of things; they had no need to put them in the passage.

Dr. Reagan: Sure.

Doug Greenwold: They just assumed you knew. Well, in some passages 90% of what they thought we would know is now missing. We have to put that back in place, it's called contextual restoration, it's what makes the Bible come alive in three dimensions.

Dr. Reagan: I think the average person here in the Western world just does not have any concept of how much they miss by not knowing the culture in which this was written. They just don't understand how people lived then, and the parables of Jesus are based upon the life then.

Doug Greenwold: Exactly. Remember Ken Burns?

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Doug Greenwold: PBS special of National Parks?

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Doug Greenwold: How would you care to watch that on 60 inch full color plasma TV, or a 1955 black and white Zenith TV? Okay? The text is the same. The narrative is the same. But what you see and appreciate is so much better.

Dr. Reagan: Well, that is exactly what I tell people about going to Israel on one of our pilgrimages is that it turns the Bible from black and white into Technicolor. No longer is Capernaum a word on the page, it's a place you've been. You've seen it. You've smelled it. You experienced it, and you have some idea of really where it is. So its context is so important.

Doug Greenwold: I heard something the other day that really caught my fancy, sort of went like this, the Bible without putting it back into its original context is like listening to Bach being played on a harmonica.

Nathan Jones: That bad, wow.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, with that we are going to take a break and come back and apply context to one of the best known stories in the Bible, Luke chapter 2, the Christmas story.

Part 2

Nathan Jones: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our discussion with Doug Greenwold about the importance of biblical context. Doug, let's take that biblical context into the Christmas

story of Luke 2. I want to read the first three verses to you and maybe you can explain something that has always puzzled me. Luke 2:1 says, "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city." First, what is a census? And why do people have to go the cities rather than just door to door census people coming to their houses?

Dr. Reagan: Why didn't they just send a census taker by and knock on the door?

Nathan Jones: Yeah. What's that about?

Doug Greenwold: Or send carrier pigeons to everyone. That's a great question. And Luke would assume that we would understand what a census means.

Dr. Reagan: Sure.

Doug Greenwold: First observation here the reference to Caesar Augustus, this is history. This is a real story. You know we say it is the Christmas story, yeah but it's also a real history. And that mention of Caesar Augustus reminds us of that. The first emperor who created census because he wanted to create a systematic taxation. He is the first emperor who wants to now fund the Roman legions. So, this is one of his reasons.

Nathan Jones: So, it was a fund raiser?

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, so to speak. And he also wants to figure out where to spend the public works money in the kingdom, in the empire. So, you've got to know where the biggest concentrations of people are. Now, what we learned on our trips to Italy to study Paul's Roman world is that Rome systematically had a census every five years. And because they wanted to maximize participation they allowed, and there is some debate here, whether it is 12 months or 24 months for the census to be completed. This notion that we have that we all vote on the first Tuesday of November and everybody shows up at one place at one time, not the way it works. Are you seeing a myth starting to evaporate already about no room in the inn because so many people showed up, you know? That's not the way it worked. And Luke would assume that we would know that. Now, here's another thing. The reason you have to go to the city of your clan is only if you own property there. This is an asset tax. And that raises a fascinating question: Why is Joseph who is part of the clan of David, own land around Bethlehem, why is he living 90 miles north in Nazareth? Luke would expect us to be struck by that. Okay?

Dr. Reagan: Well, what about it? I'm sitting here in anticipation. Don't leave me hanging.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, well we don't have a precise answer, but here are two good ones. Okay? Joseph, and I suspect his father were tradesmen, not just carpenters, they were primarily stone masons. If you've been in Israel everything is made out of stone. And so you have Herod the Great in the south there who keeps conscripting trades people to do these massive building projects. A lot of people particularly from Bethlehem area hate Herod the Great. And it maybe that Joseph's father or grandfather went north to Nazareth because then Herod the Great cannot get you; you are in the region of Herod Antipas. That's one thought. Second thought and maybe these do come together here, is that there's a whole group of Jews, we'll call them Messianic Jews they are fascinated with Messiah. They want to be where Messiah is going to be shown first. And the rabbis have taken that Isaiah 9 prophecy about the light will shine in Zebulun and Naphtali. Zebulun is the tribal allotment where Nazareth is found. Naphtali is the tribal allotment where Capernaum is found. And so there maybe another reason; we want to be where Messiah is going to be seen first in the eyes of the rabbis and so they relocated them. Those are two possible reasons.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, well let's move on. I want to get as much of those covered as we can.

Nathan Jones: Yeah, definitely.

Dr. Reagan: So, let's pick up with verse 4.

Doug Greenwold: "He went to the city of David, called Bethlehem because he was the house and line of David." Now, that reminds us of something. If he is of the house and lineage of David, when we read in the Mishnah, which is the oral codification of the Jewish oral tradition which was put down in 200 AD, we learn a lot of things including that the clan of David is required to, is mandated to do to support for the wood offering in the temple in the month of July. Okay? So, year after year, after a certain age, maybe 14, Joseph is coming down to Bethlehem to be part of the Davidic wood offering in the month of July. And on one of those trips he says, "Oh, do I have good news! I am betrothed to a wonderful young lady named Marion." Mary. Okay?

Dr. Reagan: That raises another question. What does betrothed mean?

Doug Greenwold: Oh, boy, does it ever. Does it ever.

Nathan Jones: Yeah.

Doug Greenwold: It starts to set the stage because he was the house and family line of David. Now, let's pause there. In this culture hospitality is mandatory. And obviously hospitality is mandatory to your own clan. So, we are going to factor that in here in just a moment. He went to be registered with Mary who was betrothed in marriage to him. We've got to understand betrothal.

Nathan Jones: It is different then we see engagements today?

Doug Greenwold: Quite a bit. First it starts out by it is a brokered marriage between families.

Nathan Jones: They didn't choose each other, their parents did.

Doug Greenwold: Exactly. And then you go to a scribe and you write what is known as a ketubah, which is a marriage contract. It lays out the terms and conditions of the dowry and what happens if things go south and what have you. At that moment and time they are considered to be legally married, but not socially married. When the betrothal is done and there is a little ceremony there which is almost like a miniature communion. And then the bride goes into seclusion, and the bridegroom is never going to see her until the day of the wedding. And basically we are waiting for the woman, the young lady to start menstruating because the purpose of a woman is to procreate in this culture.

Nathan Jones: So, we're talking 13 year old brides?

Doug Greenwold: Typically the man is 18 years old and the young woman is 13.

Nathan Jones: So, we are talking teenagers in this story?

Doug Greenwold: Typically, if this follows the form here. Right? Point being once the betrothal contract is signed Joseph and Mary will have no contact. So, the fact that she becomes pregnant in the eyes of this culture is two things; it is either adultery, or it is promiscuity. That's what the clan in Bethlehem is going to be thinking when we get there. Okay? So, we've got to understand that backdrop here who was expecting a child. Now, in verse 6, "While they were there." We don't know how long Mary and Joseph have been in Bethlehem, two days?

Nathan Jones: That's a good point because you see these Christmas specials and they are riding in on a donkey that night and she is ready to give birth. But you are saying from that verse they could have been they were there days, weeks?

Doug Greenwold: Or months.

Nathan Jones: Or even months, oh, okay.

Doug Greenwold: Yes, you know we have this mythology that they got there at 10 o'clock at night and all the rooms were filled and Tom Bodett forgot to leave the light on for him, you know at Motel 6. And therefore there is no room in the inn. No, it doesn't work that way.

Nathan Jones: That's true. That's true, I've always missed over that little bit of verse that they had been there already for a little while.

Doug Greenwold: There it is in black and white and it is like we have never seen it before. "While they were there the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped Him in strips of cloth, and laid Him in a manger." Now, the word manger is going to be a very important word to us because it's going to help the shepherds realize they can complete the task that they had been given. Only the poorest of the poor, the most marginalized of people would ever put a newborn baby in a manger. It is a feeding trough for animals.

Nathan Jones: Well, how did they even get to a place where there was manger? Why was there no room for them in an inn?

Doug Greenwold: Great set up, that's exactly where we're going next. Because in this verse, "laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Nathan Jones: Now we're talking about like you said Motel 6? I mean lots of rooms, big building?

Doug Greenwold: Negative.

Nathan Jones: No, okay.

Doug Greenwold: The underlining word here is kataluma, it means guestroom. When Jesus uses the word inn in another setting, the Good Samaritan it's a very different Greek word, almost like caravanserai, it's where caravan are staying. They're in and on major trade routes.

Nathan Jones: Like a trailer park kind of where everyone parks their camel, and gets together?

Doug Greenwold: Exactly. But they're really tough environments. It's almost like being in a biker bar. No man is ever going to take his wife about to give birth into one of those inns.

Nathan Jones: A different inn, a kataluma.

Doug Greenwold: Totally different inn. Kataluma is not an inn at all, it's a guest room. Now, we have to now understand how homes were constructed in the first century. Ninety-percent of the people in the first century are living in a one room home. The footprint may be 12 foot by 15 foot. The 12 by 12 foot of it is the one-room everything room. Then there is an interesting divider wall here it is a giant canister set, it's called the granary. And behind that is a little three foot space called the kataluma; the guest room. And the reason that guest room exists is because the rabbis who run this observant Jewish culture have said no married Jewish man can ever sleep in the same room with another man's wife. But you've got mandatory hospitality. You've

got your clan coming for the major festivals when they travel to Jerusalem. So, you've got to have this little guest room.

Nathan Jones: It's walled off? A section of the regular room just walled off?

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, it's separated.

Nathan Jones: Okay.

Doug Greenwold: Yup, almost the floor to ceiling kind of separation. Now, most of these homes are constructed at least a 100 different ways; a German archaeologist in the late 1800's actually made drawings of all these one-room homes. It's not one size fits all, but if we put a composite together there is a half basement underneath this house where either the sheep or the goats, but certainly not both are kept at night along with the chickens. No cows. No horses. In the heat, in the winter time convection heating goes up and it helps to warm the place up. So, you've got this picture.

Nathan Jones: Oh, the odor.

Doug Greenwold: So, while they were there Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem and the clan observes a very pregnant showing Mary. What do you think their first question is?

Nathan Jones: Who's the father?

Doug Greenwold: No. How was the wedding feast?

Nathan Jones: Oh.

Doug Greenwold: Because that is a several day wedding feast.

Nathan Jones: That's true that would be the logical proof. And they weren't invited because they were family?

Doug Greenwold: They weren't invited. Probably wouldn't have been because of the distance here. But Joseph very stutteringly, "Well, the truth of the--I mean there wasn't a wedding feast." Boom. What do you think the conclusion is?

Nathan Jones: Promiscuity or adultery, right? But he's there.

Doug Greenwold: Shame.

Nathan Jones: Shame.

Doug Greenwold: Therefore I can't let you into my kataluma because I don't want to ritually make my house impure.

Nathan Jones: Oh, and that's why there's no room?

Doug Greenwold: There is whole protocol to cleanse my house and I'm not into that. Now we think there is roughly 2,000 people in Bethlehem at this point and time. If we have six people per family. We've got 300 homes. Three hundred katalumas; three hundred guest rooms. Why are all of them off limits? When hospitality is mandatory especially to a member of your own clan. Perception of shame.

Nathan Jones: See I always thought it was just because of everybody traveling for the census that they just filled up. But even if they weren't filled up, because she was pregnant they wouldn't let her in.

Doug Greenwold: Correct.

Nathan Jones: And they stuck her with the animals.

Doug Greenwold: And so I think some kind man said, "You know look. You know I can't let you into my kataluma, but I'll tell you what you can go downstairs in the half-basement and be with the sheep and the chickens.

Nathan Jones: And that's where a manger would be.

Doug Greenwold: That's where a manger would be.

Dr. Reagan: And I want to make a point about that to show you how context is so important. I grew up in the church so I grew up studying this from the time I was born, hearing these stories. I was probably 25 years old before I came to an understanding of what the word manger meant. I thought when it said he was born in a manger that that was a place where the kept animals like a barn. I didn't know it was a feeding trough. I thought the manger was the name for the barn.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, and it's not a wooden thing with crossed legs either.

Nathan Jones: What would it be then a stone basin?

Doug Greenwold: In the north it would be made from hewn limestone. In the south where we have different geology here it probably would be made from straw and clay.

Nathan Jones: Because if you go to the Church of the Nativity and they have a stone one that is all fancy. Isn't it marble? I mean it is super fancy and that clearly wasn't the case.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, and only the poorest of the poor would use such a thing in such a place.

Dr. Reagan: Well, we need to move on rapidly here if we're going to get anymore covered, so.

Doug Greenwold: Alright.

Dr. Reagan: Let's pick up from there.

Doug Greenwold: Now, there were shepherds nearby living out in a field at night keeping watch over their flocks. Okay, Luke would want us to say, "Whoa, wait a minute! Why are sheep out in a fields at night? They should be in sheep pens for protection."

Nathan Jones: It's December right? It's cold. It's freezing.

Doug Greenwold: Well, the reason, one of the reasons they are in the fields is if it is birthing season.

Nathan Jones: Oh, which would not be December then.

Doug Greenwold: There are two birthing seasons. Late April, and then there is a secondary birthing season in the end of June, early July. Okay, just file that away. And they were in their fields at night. Now when we read Josephus we find out that temple flocks are kept as far south around greater Jerusalem as far south as Bethlehem. There is a strong suspicion here these are temple shepherds, and these are temple sheep and they are giving birth to pascal lambs.

Dr. Reagan: There you go.

Nathan Jones: And a pascal lamb is a?

Doug Greenwold: A lamb that's destined to be sacrificed at Passover.

Nathan Jones: So, Jesus was born when the lambs were getting ready to be sacrificed?

Doug Greenwold: Could be. But we can say for sure that these shepherds and these flocks the purpose of which is to produce pascal lambs, depending on the time of year here and that's the scene that the perfect Pascal Lamb was born.

Nathan Jones: Very fitting. Very fitting.

Doug Greenwold: And so the shepherds are told, this will be a sign for you, you will find the baby wrapped in strips of cloths and lying in a manger. Well, this word manger now is extremely important because shepherds unlike Psalm 23 are not romanticized in the first century; in fact they are despised. Some of the rabbis have said they can never be forgiven because as they travel across fields that they don't own, eating grass that they don't own, they are stealing somebody's grass.

Dr. Reagan: They couldn't even give a testimony in court could they?

Doug Greenwold: In a Jewish court of law they are forbidden. No one would trust a shepherd.

Dr. Reagan: They were just outcast sort of.

Doug Greenwold: They were marginalized. They were on the outside looking in. They might as well as been equivalent of prostitutes.

Dr. Reagan: And yet, God uses them to make this tremendous declaration.

Doug Greenwold: These are shameful shepherds. I want to get you to feel this motif of shame is just building here. How did Jesus die? On a shameful Roman cross.

Dr. Reagan: That's right.

Doug Greenwold: What did He do for a ministry? He lifted people out of shame. I mean this whole scene may stink, have a stench from the perspective of the Davidic clan. But from heaven's perspective this is glorious this motif of shame. It's what He did for people. So, anyway, these shepherds are shameful shepherds, they are on the outside looking in. Everywhere they go no one will give them time of day. And so this word manger is a very important word. Say, hey, wait a minute these people are so poor, they are so unassuming that they are putting their baby in a manger. They are our kind of people.

Dr. Reagan: Our kind of people, right.

Doug Greenwold: They'll actually receive us if we show up, you know?

Nathan Jones: Good point.

Doug Greenwold: So, it's a great word there. It is a key word that gets them there. Now, we continue along here suddenly a vast heavenly army appeared with the angel praising God and saying. And my first reaction is: What is the word army there? That is a military word.

Nathan Jones: Yeah, I always wondered how many?

Doug Greenwald: Yeah, well and vast. Now how big is vast? Does this mean all the angels in Heaven? Or is this just the varsity?

Nathan Jones: The best singers.

Doug Greenwald: And even if it was the varsity were there try outs? Because this is the one event that the whole creation has been pointed towards. Did they sing, or did they chant? Was it a melodic kind of thing? Did they have to practice? Or is practice not necessary in Heaven because everything is perfect? I mean a whole series of questions start to come to mind here. But the key word for me now is army. Obviously they are there to praise, but I would also suggest they're there to protect. There is somebody else who knows that this massive invasion of grace is starting to unfold. It's God's adversary. And he is determined to mess up everything God tries to do. And so I would suggest these angels are on guard duty as well saying, "This is sacred ground tonight. Don't mess with it. And if you do there will be consequences." A vast, heavenly army arrives on the scene.

Nathan Jones: Wow!

Doug Greenwald: Yeah, ain't that fantastic.

Nathan Jones: I've always wondered if angels are we just can't see them, like maybe the multitude was there but then their eyes were opened to be able to see them, or did they arrive? If we had those eyes what would we see today?

Doug Greenwald: I have no idea. But this raises all sorts of issues. Were they in concert formation on the ground, or were they hovering in the air? Did they have a director when they did this kind of thing?

Nathan Jones: That is really getting into the context.

Dr. Reagan: What about their message there, in 14?

Doug Greenwald: Oh, their message is one of praise, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth shalom amongst people with whom God is pleased." Let's just deal with the word shalom which we translate as peace here. To the Jewish worldview shalom means four things, all at the same time. It means: reconciliation with God, reconciliation with the community; the community is always more important than the individual in Judaism, in the Hebrew worldview, you're reconciled with yourself, and you're reconciled with God's creation. There's actually the theology of ecology in the Hebrew understanding of shalom. And this is a cord woven together of four strands in a rope. The Western people come along and say, "Oh, well let's just take this part. Let's just take this part and put it under the microscope." And you lose the impact of the power of that Jewish word shalom.

Nathan Jones: Beautiful. And on earth peace, goodwill towards men.

Doug Greenwald: And then the angels left them and went back to Heaven. And the shepherds went to Bethlehem. And if we pick it up in verse 20, "For all they had heard and seen just as they had been told." Who do you think the shepherds told this good news to?

Nathan Jones: Other shepherds.

Doug Greenwald: Who are? Shameful people, or prostitutes who are shameful people. The one thing they're not going to go to the Temple Mount and tell it to the Chief Priest and the High Priest. They are not going to go to the Sanhedrin and tell them. They are not going to any rabbi and tell them. They're persona non grata. The good news of the birth of Jesus Christ was propagated from one shameful person, to another.

Part 3

Nathan Jones: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our discussion with Doug Greenwold about the context of Luke chapter 2. Alright, Doug, we've covered Luke chapter 2. Please tell us then what is the main idea we can get out of that chapter?

Doug Greenwold: Well two things strike me. One is this is a manifestation of an amazing invasion of God's grace, for a plan that was set in motion before creation even began. And it answers the Adamic riddle, Adam. When Adam gets cast out of the garden and if God had to said to him, "Adam how do you think I'm going to fix this mess that you just created?" He never would of thought of a baby in a manger, in Bethlehem, with shameful shepherds. Never in a thousand years.

Nathan Jones: You say that word a lot shame, shame, shame.

Doug Greenwold: That for me is the second motif, and so glorious about the birth of Jesus. How God uses shamed people, who are shamed by the culture and incorporates them into His Kingdom plan.

Nathan Jones: Wow.

Dr. Reagan: Well, Doug we don't have much time left, but I want to ask you one last question here and that is: When do you think these events took place? Summer? Fall? Or winter?

Doug Greenwold: Well, I think when Luke gives us the clue, "Now shepherds were out in the fields at night, keeping guard over their flock." They would never be allowed to do that unless the wheat harvest was complete. The wheat growing actually takes place around Bethlehem. Bethlehem means house of bread. And so, if they were in the fields before the harvest they would trample the crop and lower the yield. But once the harvest is done they are encouraged to be in the fields because their byproducts, their waste is fertilizer for the next season they are growing. So, we know it's at least end of June, early July. The one thing we know it never would be December because if you had an electiveness with anytime in a year or two to go register you'd never pick mid-winter to do it.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, what about the view that it probably was in the fall, around the Feast of Tabernacles?

Doug Greenwold: Well, that clue comes out of Luke 1 when we deal with Zechariah and Elizabeth. And if we read in the Mishnah we know when Zechariah's clan did their weekly service at the temple in Jerusalem. If we assume he immediately went home and conceived with Elizabeth. And then we add six months to that for the difference between Jesus and John, we can get pretty much close to October 1st, and for some people that puts it in the Feast of Tabernacles.

Dr. Reagan: So, you are saying it is either late summer, or it's in the fall. But, you're saying it's definitely not in December.

Doug Greenwold: That would almost be impossible. No one in their right mind would want to electively travel to Bethlehem along the central ridge in the winter.

Nathan Jones: Even in Israel.

Dr. Reagan: That's our program for this week. I've just been so blessed by Doug and his ministry. And we pray God will continue to bless you in that ministry. That's our program until

this time next week, the Lord willing this Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near."

End of Program