

Sneak Peak at Context for Adults: Sexuality, Social Identity and Kinship Relations in the Bible

I had to choose a chapter that could largely stand on its own, so I went with “Lesson 39 – If Moses Allowed Divorce, Why Did Jesus Call Remarriage After Divorce Adultery?” The other lessons required a good working knowledge of group social dynamics, which I spend the first ten lessons teaching in depth, but this one only really required a knowledge of the first-century controversy in question – that of “any cause” or “every cause” divorce. Hopefully, we will have this book on the market in about a month. Just polishing it up!



Without context, the Bible can be used to do terrible harm to people. In this case, we are going to need to talk about three sections of Scripture that have been misused because of translational problems as well as a lack of knowledge

concerning the “any cause” divorces of the first century. First, let’s look at the three sections of Scripture in question:

*Deut 24:1-2 “When a man hath taken a wife and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then **let him write her a bill of divorcement**, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*

*And when she is departed out of his house, **she may go and be another man's wife.***

*Matt 5:31-32 "It hath been said, Whosoever shall **put away** his wife, let him give her a writing of **divorcement**: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall **put away** his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is **divorced** committeth adultery."*

***Matt 19:3-9** "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife **for every cause**? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, **Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away**? He saith unto them, Moses because of the **hardness of your hearts** suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."*

As we learn from the Babylonian Talmud, in Gittin 90a, during the first century BCE the House of Hillel Pharisees enacted a ruling stating that a man could divorce his wife for any cause. Although the intent of Deuteronomy 24 was clearly to allow divorce in the case of adultery, aka "uncleanness," Hillel expanded that ruling to allow a man to send his wife out for the smallest of offenses – even if she merely burned his meal. As you can imagine, based upon what we have learned so far, this left a wife in a terrible predicament. Even if her husband paid the ketubah money owed with a divorce, it

would only last so long and women in those days could rarely find respectable work. So what question was Jesus *really* being asked?

“Do we (men) have the right to divorce our wives for any reason whatsoever? Do you agree with Hillel’s ruling?”

The answer was undoubtedly not what many of them wanted to hear. Tragically, divorce had become rampant in the time of Jesus – not a mutual divorce as we see in modern times, but a one-sided affair where a woman had absolutely no say. Men had gotten used to having absolute power over their women, and they were using the Bible as their justification. The Bible certainly permitted divorce based on a breach of the marriage covenant, but not over trivialities.

How did Jesus reply?

“God created marriage to be eternal, and when you send your unemployable wives out into the world shamed and without support over insignificant issues, God is not going to see your actions as justified. She is going to be forced to remarry to survive, but as far as God is concerned, you didn’t divorce her legally, and so her adultery is your crime as she is still your wife and your responsibility; this was not her choice. And the guy she marries? He is going to be involved in adultery too – because your callous, selfish decision made a terrible mess.”

What Jesus is addressing here was just one aspect of the systemic societal evil in the first century. Was divorce allowed under the Law? – Yes, absolutely. Was remarriage after divorce allowed? – According to Deut 24, yes. Was “any cause” divorce acceptable? – Absolutely not. There is nothing righteous about treating your wife like she is not your family, throwing her out of the house without her having any say in the matter when she is not an adulteress. The Matthew texts make it clear that a marriage cannot have a one-sided

dissolution. It isn't over until both sides say it is over or until one side destroys that bond through sexual sin. One partner walking away does not unilaterally sever the covenant bond without their spouse's permission. Modern divorce is, in some ways, more like the Biblical model – despite the fact that we still divorce far too easily. One person can't just decide that the marriage is over – it has to be a mutual decision (or at the very least, it can be contested), ratified in the courts, in order for the petitioner to remarry. First-century men, however, were casting their wives aside and taking on new brides – whether their wives approved or not. This was considered adultery – as their wives rights in the matter were being taken into account, by God.

There is a reason why sexual relations in the Bible are so often referred to as “humbling” a woman – that humbling is not necessarily evil or bad, but to have one's way with a woman and then abandon her leaves her feeling violated and demeaned. Marital sexual relations, on the other hand, should leave a woman feeling valued and loved. There is a humility that exists between a man and a woman after sex, a humility that can either result in healthy intimacy or destructive shame. God's intention was for sexual intimacy to bind a man and a woman together honorably for life, not to give them cause for regrets, embarrassment, and feelings of abandonment and betrayal.

Women were created to be extremely emotionally vulnerable to rejection, and any study into honor/shame dynamics will verify that a woman's reputation is far more easily damaged than a man's, and is not easily recovered even if she is later found to be innocent. To be thrown out of her home by her husband merely because she is no longer attractive, or because he is tired of her, or becomes interested in someone younger, strikes at the heart of a woman's basic sense of self-worth. It is the epitome of what it means to be *unloving* to one's neighbor. Even knowing that her husband could legally abandon

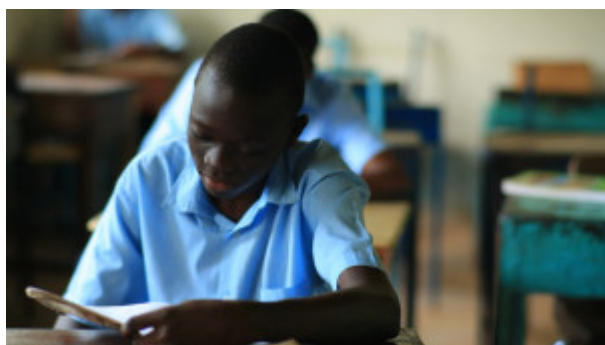
her, seemingly with the blessing of God, would have been a cause for much stress in the life of any married woman.

I want you to notice what Jesus didn't say, "Any of you who have married a divorced woman now need to divorce her, or you are sinning." He said nothing of the sort, or even hinted at it. New marriages produce children, and God is in no way honored when yet another home is broken apart. Frequently, Jesus addressed the real core problem without presenting a solution because there was no longer any good solution except – "don't do this anymore." Jesus was telling them that "any cause" divorce was not justified in the eyes of God and that they needed to start honoring the marriages they were in now. "Any cause" divorce was unjust, cruel and arbitrary – making each man a potential tyrant in his own home, and his wife little more than an expendable slave subject to the whim of her master.

Homework: In *Ten Commandments and the Covenants of Promise*, I taught a character lesson about being true to one's marriage covenant partner. As we discussed, Hillel said that divorce should be permitted even if your wife burns a meal, but Shammai recognized that a covenant between people cannot exist if there is no expectation of forgiveness. When a woman marries a man, she needs to know that as she gets older, he will remain true to her. She needs to know that doing her best will always be enough. The same goes for wives with their husbands; we must be loyal to each other unless there is an actual betrayal. My husband and I have been married for twenty-six years, and neither one of us is getting any better looking! I want you to imagine a world where your spouse had the legal authority to hand you a sheet of paper in front of witnesses and walk out the door (or rather, push you out the door) in a society without child support, where a woman had no honorable professional opportunities and whose family might not want the shame of taking her back in. How would that reflect upon your understanding of the nature of God's

covenants? Would you trust Him that forever means forever, or would you think that He is capable of abandoning His own covenant people? Would “Great is Thy Faithfulness” ever have been written if we thought He wasn’t long-suffering?

Question: How do you study Bible Context and how do I find good sources on my own?



Got asked this several times this week and since I hate rewriting the same things over and over again I figured it would be a worthy blog – and useful for my Context for Kids families who are wanting to know

how to find answers for themselves.

In the past week I have come in contact with two cases where absolute lies were passed off by lazy “historians” and people in the media that should have been immediately checked. Here is what I posted yesterday on facebook – and hence the reason for writing this today. Quotation from A History of US, Book 5 by Joy Hakim

A few days ago I shared about how the “curse of the Pharaohs” became common knowledge as one person made a claim which got repeated and then repeated again. I had no idea that this also happened to a great hero Joseph Cinque (Sengbe Pieh), but we read this as we were studying the Amistad slave ship revolt in school this morning (and of course, I verified it).

“You will read in some books that Cinque returned to Africa and became a slave trader himself. That is not true. And yet that story has been written many times. Why? Because an author who learned the story of the Amistad and Joseph Cinque decided to write a novel about it. A novelist CAN WRITE ANYTHING THAT MAKES A GOOD STORY. He decided it would give the story an ironic twist to have Cinque become a slaver himself. A historian read the novel, THOUGHT IT WAS TRUE, and retold the story in a history book. (History books, of course, should always be true.) Then ANOTHER historian QUOTED the first historian, and then ANOTHER, and then ANOTHER. And that is how made-up stories sometimes come to be history.”

If you want to know how easy it is for an author to make unsubstantiated claims and how hard it is to disprove something that there is no evidence for check out this article on the attempt to find out the truth about the Cinque allegations and how people still insist on believing the lie <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/caribbean/amistad-cinque.pdf>

About nine months ago I asked a local homeschooled high school student, who always aces the State tests, “If you were assigned a report, how would you research it?” He gave exactly the answer that I expected.

“Google and wikipedia.”

He was shocked when I told him that more often than not, that was a recipe for disaster. Why? Because anyone can have a webpage and frankly, anyone can edit or create a wikipedia page. All you have to do is make claims and you can even choose to or not to cite sources, but you don't have to accurately reflect those sources and the sources don't even have to be legitimate. Unless someone comes along who is fact checking, errors and myths can go unchallenged. Here is a quote from wikipedia which is “allowed to be imperfect”

“Don’t be afraid to edit – **anyone can edit almost every page**, and we are encouraged to be bold! Find something that can be improved and make it better—for example, spelling, grammar, rewriting for readability, **adding content**, or removing non-constructive edits. **If you wish to add new facts, please try to provide references** so they may be verified, or suggest them on the article’s discussion page. Changes to controversial topics and Wikipedia’s main pages should usually be discussed first. Contributing to Wikipedia will provide you with resources on all the basics needed to use, comment on, and contribute to Wikipedia.

Remember – you can’t break Wikipedia; all edits can be reversed, fixed or improved later. **Wikipedia is allowed to be imperfect**. So go ahead, edit an article and help make Wikipedia the best information source on the Internet!”

I’ve had people tell me that Wikipedia is properly vetted – this proves otherwise. This is not to say it is always wrong, but we should not put too much faith in its reliability. I’ve had folks claim that a book cited in a Wikipedia article says one thing – then I read it and it says the opposite. Of course, when they cut and pasted the reference straight out of Wikipedia complete with ISBN # in the exact same order, I knew they hadn’t actually read it – but I digress. It was a great book though, so it turned out for the best.

As for Google – type in something ridiculous, and someone has probably already “proven” it, complete with Bible references and quotes from Abraham Lincoln. You can prove absolutely anything using Google and that’s because both the sane and the insane have equal access to producing websites, the educated and the uneducated, the saint and the con-man, the wise and the gullible.

Can Google be used to study? Yes. Find out the experts in your field of study and do a search for them and you might get lucky and find a free online paper, or a website, but most

people in this life who work hard and study put the information into books and legitimate scholarly articles. They didn't receive their information for free and they won't give it out for free. I actually bought over 120 books last year and fortunately my book sales covered the expense – that means I wrote books to buy other people's books so that I can write more books lol. In studying, I learned who the legitimate scholars are and who some of the pretenders are. (Hint: the popular people are often the pretenders because the real story is generally boring unless you are a total nerd, which I of course am)

The key is going with the established experts in the given area of study, not necessarily with the celebrities, and not necessarily the people you agree about everything with. People wanting to read casually about mythology like Joseph Campbell, but true experts roll their eyes at him because he is not credible upon deeper study. I also make sure I am dealing with an objective source by seeing how their findings line up with people from different backgrounds. Believe it or not, I have found integrity and good scholarship (as well as a lack of integrity and bad scholarship) from Catholics, Protestants, Mormons, Jews, Muslims and Atheists! Good scholarship is marked by providing source material and not just by making wild claims, no matter how many people are making the same claims. When we are talking about archaeology and Bible context, the proof is either there or it isn't and we teach what has been unearthed – and a lot of material has been unearthed over the last 150 years.

Start with some legitimate names in contextual research – John H Walton is easily the most readable, really no contest. Look at who he works with and whose work he cites in his studies – they will be legitimate. Get a copy of Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament, as well as his IVP Bible Background Commentary on the Old Testament, as well as his Illustrated Zondervan Commentaries, and The Lost World of

Genesis One. Certain names will keep popping up as sources. Learn the differences between scholarly books like his, and commentary like my King, Kingdom, Citizen – a book that is properly documented but I am not an actual expert even though I seriously study the experts. I wouldn't tell anyone to write a report citing me, but citing my sources, definitely. Get as close as you can to primary source material.

Read what a number of people say about a subject before jumping to conclusions – after all, the first thing we hear sounds reasonable until it is rebutted.

Pro 18:17 The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

Even a good scholar can be wrong on a point, we all have our blind spots – the more scholars you get together, of differing backgrounds, the less likely it is that they will have the same blind spot. If an Atheist, a Muslim, a Protestant and a Jew can all agree on a piece of Ancient Near Eastern context, then chances are excellent that you have yourself a very objective piece of information. However, if your only source is a bunch of people with a narrow agenda who quote each other, back away quietly before they try to convert you – no matter how many people follow their youtube videos (especially if they do that scary thing with obscuring their voice – that's just creepy!).

JSTOR.org is a great starting place for looking at scholarly articles and you can register and have 3 free articles in your bookshelf at a time, checked out for three weeks before you can get a new one to replace it. You can't print them out, but it's worth it to check it out before you pay money for the privilege of being able to download it. Even scholars have to eat, after all.

Start small. I started with listening to teachings, but then I decided to actually test drive the information. Rico Cortes

was my first context teacher, and then Ryan White and then Joe Good. If I listen to a teaching and I want to know it and not just decide to believe it, I buy the books they recommend and then I read others as well. As I have grown in this, however, I am knowing who to take seriously on certain subjects and who not to waste my money on. And just because I take an expert seriously doesn't mean I automatically accept what they are saying – there has to be supporting evidence and not just claims.

Parents of my context kids – be studying with your kids, if they are interested, but I wouldn't let them study alone. Bible context is not always G or even PG-rated – especially Egyptian mythology, dang, ANY mythology. Please, please do not hesitate if you have a specific interest, to ask me who the real deals are doing the good research.

Getting back to the books is time consuming and expensive, but required for real studying. Watching a video isn't studying, it simply gives us something to agree or disagree with, but it is very valuable to get us started and to alert us to new areas of study. It's also good to hear someone else's take on it, someone who actually speaks English (unlike most of these ANE scholars, sheesh, who write "ivory tower intellectual" instead of "normal people language"). I sometimes disagree with my teachers because we will see the facts in a different light, but we are seeing the same facts, not just making them up.

Once I have a topic, I will find a book on it – usually I get a recommendation. Sometimes I will even contact an author as ask who they recommend in their field and they are often surprisingly quick to answer. That book will have references, and if they are papers in journals, I can oftentimes find them online and read them myself to make sure the author is being honest about what is there. Sometimes a book will lead to another book and especially on topics like Honor and Shame where it led to six books, plus a bunch of articles. When I

studied it out, I felt like I could finally teach about it with integrity – not just asking you to believe something that I had chosen to believe.

References alone do not mean legitimacy – I can reference a book I have never even cracked open and tell you it says something, when I have cherry picked or twisted the information. There are some very popular books out there that have done just that, and then they get quoted, and someone quotes the book that quoted them and then you have a Cinque situation, only now it's believers doing it, and the subject matter touches on God.

Just one last thing – If you ask a teacher for proof of what they just taught and they respond with “google it” or “If you give a man a fish you will feed him for a day but if you teach a man to fish he will never be hungry again” or “it's just obvious to everyone,” then it's time to realize they aren't teaching but regurgitating. Feel free to disregard what they are saying. Most people have not verified what they are saying and have no wish to because information limits us – kinda like it does with a defense attorney who actually knows his client is guilty. Information limits what we can and cannot pass off as truth, so a lot of folks avoid it – thing is, they never make it sound like they haven't actually studied.

Changing gears – a new direction for The Ancient Bridge



As much as we like to stay in the same place forever, sometimes God places us into a certain mode of operation for a time in order to train us for what we are really meant to do. Those of you who know me, know

that I never planned on writing any of my three published books and that every book that was 'my idea' never could get beyond the first chapter so generally I sit around studying whatever tickles my fancy, waiting impatiently, and then one day He tells me what my next assignment is.

Ten years ago I got a long term 'heads up' in the form of a very vivid dream.

I was in an upper room, sitting at a round table in front of a projector screen. On the table in front of me was a sheet of music and playing on the projector was a documentary about a middle aged couple with 100 children, none of them biological. As I sat there in admiration, I realized that I was watching a video of myself and my husband.

Well, I woke up freaked out, convinced that Mark and I were going to adopt/foster 98 more children. I cannot convey the absolute horror that produced in me. I loved my own kids but pretty much hated everyone else's. I informed God that if this was the plan He was going to have to fundamentally change who I am from the inside out. Four years ago when we moved to Lakeville, MN – our house just happened to sit next to a home based daycare.

There's something about children who rarely see their parents that is incredibly endearing – I found that a child values the people who don't have to spend time with them, but do so anyway. They can tell the difference. As I worked renovating the backyard, they would ask questions and I would answer. Answer time became silly story time, or sometimes I would sing

to them. I couldn't walk out my back door without hearing, "Tyler, will you tell us a story?" They had two stories they wanted to hear, the scary-silly "dark-dark" story and the story about the cute little (various animal) named (one of the day care kids) who really wanted to be a (ridiculous food item) and ended up getting eaten by a T-Rex after quizzing every other animal at the zoo about how to accomplish their goal. I learned that it wasn't the story that they really loved, but the time and effort spent on their behalf to genuinely engage with them. With some of the really little guys, my name was one of their first words.

We moved away in March. I miss those little stinkers – especially now way out in the country with no neighbors and no kid voices, my own kids being hairy, deep voiced and oftentimes smelly teenage boys.

Anyway, two years ago a dear friend in Ghana named Cassyama – a mighty Christian woman of God – was praying for me and had a vision. She told me she saw me surrounded by "so many children." I told her about my dream eight years before. She suggested I get into children's ministry.

What? Me? No way! Yuck – no one respects children's ministry! Visions of crayons and glitter danced in my head, and my eyelid twitched nervously. My very first 'ministry' position was as a Sunday school teacher to Middle Schoolers – not only was I just a brand new believer but I wasn't even a parent – I was not equipped. They didn't care – they needed a more mature version of day care and they handed me the little felt dudes and put me to work. It was a disaster. I can assure you it was NOT better than nothing, it was FAR FAR worse.

Anyway, I then wrote and published The Bridge – my outreach to the Christians I had so brutally and arrogantly (and ignorantly) burned my bridges with years before. Then I wrote and published King, Kingdom Citizen in response to the growing divide between Jews and former Gentiles within the Messianic

movement. I was getting ready to write a book called *Eternal: Our God, His Temple and the Aaronic Priesthood* when I got waylaid. I even had majorly respected teachers lined up and willing to help me out with it. But then I got different marching orders – to write a children’s curriculum book on honor and shame culture in the Bible.

Writing a textbook was different than anything else I had ever done – it was harder. When you teach adults you can make leaps and ask them to make the jump with you, but with kids you have to take them step by step, not leaving things out. Teaching children requires a more compassionate pace – and it also means not always being able to teach everything you know, but limiting yourself to what they need and what will help them become critical thinkers, someday able to interpret Scripture themselves. So I wrote the ten week curriculum and published it about ten weeks ago and got my first review this week from a man who has a PhD in Biblical Geography, a University Professor – five stars. Wow, that was unexpected.

I also began my youtube channel, *Context for Kids* – you can find the link on my sidebar. I am doing short weekly teachings, starting this year with the first five books of the Bible – no doctrine, just context. Like my book, the videos aren’t for kids – they are for families. I am not a substitute teacher – I think that if the kids learn something then the parents should know it too. My book and videos are designed to get families learning and talking as a unit – to be mini-scholarly communities and not scholarly individuals. I read all those horrid scholarly books and articles and translate them into what I affectionately call ‘normal speak.’ I teach kids the exact same things that I teach adults – well, mostly. This week’s Torah portion was tough since half of it involved sex of some kind so I played it safe. My poor kids are never spared the details but I respect differences in approach and the ages involved. Not everyone is teaching 14 year olds.

I’ll be honest – I enjoy writing for adults but I don’t really

enjoy teaching them. What I enjoy is putting concepts down on paper in as clear language as possible, but presenting those concepts to adults who are often very critical and wanting the Bible to be plainly understandable as it is – well, it can be pretty hazardous work. Some people are hostile to the thought that Bible people were entirely different than we are today. Adults are invested with agendas and sometimes with legends and many read only so that they can react negatively – but kids aren't like that. Kids are still able to learn new and wonderful things without being offended by them – they aren't invested with so much tradition that they can't see clearly yet, the way we are. What I want to do is not to teach kids doctrine – that is a parental responsibility and privilege. I am a teacher of history and character – I believe that when kids get a glimpse of another way of life, the way of life that existed in Bible times, that no one will be able to tell them that the Bible is just a book of fairy tales. They are going to see the Bible for what it is, a history book that reveals God's character, and His redemptive plan through His Son Yeshua (Jesus).

I believe, that in learning the Ancient Near Eastern historical and First Century context of scripture, that all believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and His Messiah can find common ground. We parents see the obstacles facing our kids, we see the terrible character of believers in our real and online lives, we see the needless wars being fought between people who genuinely all want to honor our God but disagree about what that looks like. I think that we can be united around a desire to equip our children to BELIEVE the Bible is true, and to UNDERSTAND in context why Yeshua (Jesus) is the Messiah. The world is going to pelt our kids with loaded questions that quoted Bible verses won't be enough to answer. University professors, and even many believing professors, will tell them that the Bible wasn't written when it says it was or by who it says it was written by. We need to stop that before it happens. Believe me – I used to specialize

in asking those types of questions, and now I answer them.

Right now I am transitioning TAB towards children's ministry. I have nine different curriculum books in my brain and another one on developing Biblical character through the proverbs. I am trying to figure out a way to gather a group of parents together online, in a place where doctrine and agenda are outlawed and we all work together to better educate our kids on the provable context of the Bible. I firmly believe in the Biblical principle of throwing the divisive brothers and sisters out in the name of a healthy and respectful learning atmosphere. I have said it many times – I believe that this generation coming up is THE generation. They're different, and we have the opportunity to undo some of the divisiveness that has characterized the Body of Believers for too long. We may not be able to unite around this or that doctrine, but we can unite as parents who see a desperate need for our kids to be able to prove that the Bible is our history, and our future. You may not agree with my doctrine and I may not agree with yours – but I don't teach mine and I won't question you about yours, I only teach context and character through archaeology and the written Word.

I don't want children's ministry to be an afterthought – I want to teach them grown up context at kid speed. They deserve to be our priority because their spiritual lives are most certainly going to be harder than ours. There are people out there trying to do great kids ministry, but too many are struggling because they aren't considered to be the 'real' teachers (in my case it was actually tragically accurate) – the glory and investment goes to the adults, but that just doesn't make sense to me. I am 46 years old and I don't need to be equipped as badly as someone who is a kid right now. I think we need to re-examine what we have been doing and what it is we value. Kids ministry can be fun, but it has to accomplish the goal of equipping our kids or it is nothing more than daycare. I am taking a break while I get this

figured out – video teaching might be late this week. I don't want to rush in but I don't want to delay either.

I have a few grown up “meme” blogs that I am working on in various states of being finished, but other people are beginning to research this and speak out so I feel the need for me to do it is lessening. I don't know what all this is going to look like yet, but I guess I am eager to find out.

Context for Kids Youtube channel



Well, big dummy that I am – I started my kids channel without mentioning it on my blog.

Here is the [link](#) – I am teaching the same context that I teach adults at an age appropriate level and with age appropriate content.

Next year we will go beyond the first five books and into the “adventure” books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel or maybe into the gospels – still debating it.