

# **THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF CHRIST FROM THE GOSPELS**

A Bible Student's Commentary

By:

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In concert with dedicated Bible students  
choosing to be a part of this work and  
to whom it is dedicated

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This document is subject to revision and change as more is learned and the need for correction is discovered

## **THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF CHRIST FROM THE GOSPELS**

### **Introduction:**

Of the thirty-three or so years of Jesus' life on this Earth, we have in the Gospels a record inclusive of about three years of the total, if that. In actual detail, we have only about one year of time. We have narratives of his birth in Matthew and Luke, and then we jump ahead to a few days when Jesus was a young teen, and then we jump ahead again to the beginning of his and John's ministry when Jesus was about thirty years of age. Only a little time is spent giving glimpses and highlights of his ministry until the last week or two of his life. A significant part of each gospel is dedicated to the last few weeks, in some cases, nearly half. The rest of what happened in Jesus' life outside of the Gospels is a matter of speculation and educated guesswork.

The reason for this is that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not writing full life biographies, but what Mark calls "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". The word "gospel" is taken from the Greek, "εὐαγγέλιον" meaning "good news" or "good message". These accounts are not full histories although they set the "gospel" of Jesus in history. Further, they are not necessarily organized in strict chronological order, but like Matthew's version for example, there are groupings according to subject matter such as the material forming the "Sermon on the Mount". Matthew was particularly focused on a Jewish audience and wished to demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Each of the Gospel writers had their own purpose and order in what they wrote. Exact chronology was not mandated in those days so all four wrote in different ways and often saw Jesus life in a different order. The best "chronological order" would be by Luke as he was a Gentile. The Jewish authors had a more "message" driven purpose depending on their audience. John's work (all of it) finds itself to be aimed at disarming the heretical, yet influential false teachings rampant in his day, especially the growing movement called "Gnosticism."<sup>1</sup>

So, what did Jesus do between his birth and the time he began his ministry? Well, from the gospels, all we know is that he resided at home in Nazareth subject to his parents, and conformed to the Jewish customs of his people. Did he share the work of carpentry with his father Joseph? It would seem likely. The word "carpenter" is a translation of the word "τεκτων" and is best translated "craftsman" which includes work as a woodworker, carpenter, stone-mason, metal smith and so forth. What happened to Joseph? He seems to have disappeared by the time Jesus began his ministry but was present when Jesus was a young teen. We will look at this later.

Nazareth was only a few (5) miles Southeast of the capital of the province of Galilee, Sepphoris (Zippori), but no mention of this city is made in any of the Gospels. Sepphoris was a fine city called the "Ornament of Galilee". At the time of Jesus birth, it already had a history of over two hundred years and many parts of it were still under construction or renovation during the lifetime of Jesus. It was a walled and fortified city, a military and cultural center, and had a fine marketplace. There is little doubt that Joseph and Jesus visited there many times, yet it is never mentioned. In

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<sup>1</sup> See my work on the Book of First John delving into this movement and John's response to it.  
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fact, it is quite possible that Joseph had a home near Bethlehem (Matthew 2:11) and moved his family to Nazareth to land work at Sepphoris. Nazareth was a satellite village of Sepphoris and it is likely that many who worked at Sepphoris lived nearby the city. Is Joseph's disappearance somehow linked to this city?

On the other hand, Nazareth was an insignificant village. Set in the hills of the Galilee, visiting it reminds one of San Francisco with roads and trails all going up or down the hills. There is little flat ground in Nazareth. This small village is neither mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Midrashim, nor in Josephus. Nazareth had only one small spring, and water supplies had to be supplemented by cisterns. Still, it was the home of Mary and Joseph (according to Luke's Gospel). But once Jesus began his ministry He, along with His family, moved to Capernaum, a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee, some 20 miles to the Northeast. Matthew hints at some possible reasons. (See notes below on page 13, paragraph 5)

There are many questions as to the empty years of Jesus life. Writers of false "gospels" (the pseudepigrapha) try to imagine Jesus as a youth and attribute all kinds of power to him. But this is an unlikely scenario as his family was shocked at his work when his ministry began. His youth was probably uneventful as were his years as a young man until his ministry began. The gospel writers duly note the eventful things of his youth, primarily because they bear on prophetic fulfillment. Otherwise, we are left with no information at all. The fact that Jesus was raised like any Jewish infant, ate, drank, slept, worked, played, traveled, went to school and traveled with his parents is unremarkable and so, no remarks are made about these commonplace experiences.

There are a number of literary comments about Jesus outside the gospels giving historicity to the person of Jesus himself. (See: A Short Life Of Christ, Chapter one, by Everett F. Harrison. Eerdmans publishing, 1968)

Jesus lived in a Jewish community as part of a Roman empire having been built on a Greek foundation. Jesus knew about the history of the empire(s) for he was keenly aware of the local, provincial, national and larger political structure. Throughout his ministry he collides with and comments on all of it, including the religious sects throughout Israel. Yet, as far as we know, he spoke only Hebrew, Aramaic and had a passing familiarity with Greek and possibly Latin. Did he speak Latin or Greek when he conversed with the Roman Centurion or Pilate? Or did the Centurion and Pilate, conform to their tongue to the locals or employ a translator? We don't know, but the latter is more likely. Our examination of his life is based on the gospel accounts and we will look at his life chronologically. Yet, we must not exclude the prophecies or even his pre-existent history, for this is not the study of a mere man, but a man who was born into history as the Son of God.

## **His Pre-existence**

Genesis begins with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". John's gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by him and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being". The parallel here is, without doubt, intended. John wants the reader to know immediately that Jesus and God are One, and that the horizon of a new creation is taking place.

In the same vein, Everett Harrison writes, "The first book of the Old Testament in the Greek translation contains the statement: 'This is the book of the generation of men' (Genesis 5:1). The

first book of the New Testament commences with the words: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ' (Matthew 1:1, KJV). Whether or not the latter was intended to be the complement of the former, the parallelism is suggestive. A new beginning for the human race is being made in the person of Jesus Christ".<sup>2</sup>

This new beginning is not something God decided upon somewhere along the way. It was fully in place prior to creation itself. The Apostle Paul writes, "For by him were all things created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). When asked, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus stated, "Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was born, I Am" (John 8:57-58). In John 17:5 Jesus prays, "And now glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was". Jesus' death on the cross as the redemption for all mankind was an accomplished act before creation began. "And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written in the book of life of the lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8)

## **The Birth and Childhood of Jesus**

The prophets foresaw his coming. Please note: Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-10; 53:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Daniel 7:13-14; Micah 5:2-5a; Haggai 2:7; Zechariah 3:8, 9:9, 13:1; Malachi 3:1-3, 4:2 etc. as a few of the prophet's messages.

Only two gospels record the birth of Jesus. One is Matthew, and the other Luke. Matthew spent time with Jesus as a disciple and learned much from family, relatives and friends of the family. Luke came upon the scene later through his association with the apostle Paul. It would be prudent to believe that Luke actually interviewed Mary (Miriam in Hebrew) with regard to her remembrance. There is so much personal information about Mary in his work that one cannot help but presuppose he talked directly with her. About the only time this would have been possible was when Luke enjoyed an extended stay in Jerusalem arriving with Paul at the conclusion of the third missionary journey. In Acts 21:15 Luke writes, "And after these days we got ready and started on our way to Jerusalem"... In 24:24-27 we read that Paul was imprisoned for two years by Felix in Caesarea. Mary was probably living with John at this time in Jerusalem.

The other possibility was that Luke was later able to interview Mary at Ephesus where she accompanied John when he traveled and took up residence and work there. There is ample evidence of her residence there and a tomb bearing her name. John and Mary obeyed Jesus' request recorded by John in his gospel (19:26), "When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He \*said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household."

During this period, Luke no doubt had the time to write both of his works.

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<sup>2</sup> Everett Harrison, "A Short Life of Christ", Eerdmans, 1968, pg. 32

## The author and his Gospel

It is generally accepted that Mark was the first “gospel” written. Mark (John Mark) was a disciple, but not one of the twelve. He was often found in the band that followed Jesus. It may have been John Mark who fled naked at Jesus’ arrest as recorded in his gospel in chapter fourteen. He lived in Jerusalem with his mother, a widow named Mary. He is often referred to as “Mark” rather than “John” due to the commonness of the name “John” which is the English form of the Hebrew “Jochanan” meaning “favored of God”. Their home was near the city and was a meeting place of spiritual gatherings and prayer in the early church (Acts 12:12). It seemed to be a large house, with servants and possibly where Jesus and His disciples gathered for the “Last Supper”. The “120” gathered on the day of Pentecost at this home, and that gathering was probably in the lower section of the house including the courtyard. If it was Mary and John Mark’s home, it evidences some wealth. Acts 12:12 evidences that their home was large enough to host a large number of people and it appears to be a regular meeting place and a safe-house for the disciples. Peter automatically heads there after his release from prison.

John Mark was also a cousin to Barnabas, and Barnabas played an important role in Mark’s experience and maturity as a follower of Jesus and ultimately as an apostle and author. Mary was Barnabas’ aunt. Barnabas was of the tribe of Levi (Acts 4:36) with the proper but common name of Joseph. Mary and Mark may well have been of the tribe of Levi and Mark’s father may have been in the Levitical priesthood. If so, this would help explain their fine surroundings. It is noted in Acts 6:7 that, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” Is it possible that Mark’s father had an influence upon some of these priests prior to his death? Could his faith been cause for his demise? Barnabas was born in Cyprus and his name means “son of encouragement”. His name became his role in the early church and he certainly had opportunity to exercise this on John Mark’s behalf later on.

Barnabas had apparently traveled from Cyprus to Jerusalem for the Feast of First Fruits (or Pentecost) and been converted. He likely stayed at the home of John Mark and his mother Mary as he was family. He stayed on after the feast and drew close to the disciples. It is likely that the first meeting place of the apostles and the church continued to be the home of John Mark and his mother. Soon after the church was born they banded together to share their possessions with each other so that none would be in need. Already persecution was occurring and these “reprobate, traitor Jews” were being denied employment, services, and even family inclusion. Acts 4: 32-37 reads:

“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of *them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

So Barnabas, having some wealth, impressed the apostles by humbling donating the proceeds from his land sale. This was a key sacrifice to make, as land was the heritage of his family and descendants.

He continued to grow in favor among the apostles and stayed in Jerusalem to assist them while many began to take the good news beyond Jerusalem. After the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, and Saul's promise to return with more infidels from beyond the city, the church was under a great deal of stress. But Saul was converted on the road to Damascus and after a couple of months returned to Jerusalem desiring to meet with the apostles. But the apostles were afraid of him, not believing he was now a disciple, fearing it was a trick. But Barnabas volunteered to meet with Saul and, convinced of his story, brought him to the apostles. Saul proved he was telling the truth as he taught in Jerusalem to the point of being arrested himself and put to death. So the apostles spirited him away to the seaport of Caesarea and helped him board a ship to Tarsus.

The persecution to squash the church actually spread the word as people left Jerusalem and brought the word to Jews all over the empire. A great work was being accomplished in Antioch of Syria, a high ranking trade city with a status equaling Rome and Alexandria in its strategic and commercial location. It was at the crossroads of both Mediterranean and Asian trade routes. Acts 11:19-30 tells us of the excitement there:

“So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and *began* speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and *began* to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the *reign* of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.”

When the apostles sent Barnabas to Antioch it showed a great deal of respect of Barnabas but was also a reasonable decision since Barnabas was from nearby Cyprus, and Cypriots were involved with the evangelism in Antioch. During their stay there, back in Jerusalem, Peter was arrested in hopes that his execution would put a stop to the movement (James the brother of John had just been put to death with the sword by Herod Agrippa I which pleased the Jews) and then set free through an angelic intervention (Acts 12). He headed directly for John Mark's house. As the days passed and Herod and the leaders of the Jews could not find Peter and the hunt was given up as Herod went to Caesarea where he died. Meanwhile, Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem completing their mission whereupon the apostles sent them back to Antioch accompanied by John Mark, Barnabas' cousin who no doubt requested to go.

Barnabas was but one of the teachers in Antioch as was Saul. After sometime, the Lord indicated that Barnabas and Saul were to set aside for missionary work. After fasting and prayer they sailed to Cyprus, Barnabas' homeland accompanied by John Mark as their helper. When they left Cyprus

and landed on the mainland of Pamphilia at Perga, John left them and went back to Jerusalem. What happened? We only know that months later Barnabas and Paul came to Jerusalem to report of their work and what God had done through them in Galatia. After the crucial conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15) they returned to Antioch and once again John Mark was either with them or, more likely, accompanied Peter when he came to visit the church at Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14). Here is what Luke records:

Act 15:36-40, "After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are." Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord."

This second journey took place roughly 18 months after the first. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. But Paul's view of John was still skeptical and Barnabas probably felt that Paul was being unreasonable. Paul would have none of it. He may still have been miffed because Barnabas was carried off with the Jews hypocrisy when Peter visited to Antioch just a short time before. See (Galatians 2:11-14) Further, Paul's view was that John was a "deserter", meaning he "stood away from" them. John may have disputed with Paul and Barnabas or more likely, decided to do his own thing while Paul and Barnabas went into the work with zeal. Whatever the details, John Mark either became engaged in separate activities or simply backed out of accompanying Paul and Barnabas as they ministered and preached. In addition, John Mark seems to have drawn close to Peter for support and Peter thought highly of John. This may not have set well with Paul either. We hear no more of Barnabas or Mark in Luke's history. The first time either are mentioned again is A year or two later when Barnabas is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul is not complimentary to Barnabas in that epistle. But some ten years later, when Paul is writing his last epistles from a Roman prison, the tone toward both Barnabas and Mark has changed considerably. In Colossians Paul writes,

4:10, "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas's cousin Mark about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him)"

Tychicus who delivered this letter to Colossae also delivered one to Philemon in the same city. To him he notes,

"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers."

Peter notes his closeness to Mark when he writes at the close of his first epistle,

5:12-13, "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard *him*), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and *so does* my son, Mark."

Something significant has happened to reconcile Mark to Paul and bring about Paul's favor upon him. Here is Mark in Rome with Paul. Barnabas is mentioned in a warm light as a supporting witness to Mark's value. In other words, Mark is to be welcomed because both Paul and Barnabas

can attest to his Christian character. There is no doubt that the time Mark spent with both Barnabas and Peter led to his maturity, strength, integrity and character. Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement" and he certainly ministered to both Mark and to Paul in this way and no doubt was a key instrument in the reconciliation. Soon after this letter was written, Paul sent Mark to Ephesus to help Timothy and Mark may well have made the visit to Colossae as well. In his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Timothy Paul writes,

4:11, "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service."

Here Paul implies that Mark is his eyes and ears. Mark is willing to go where necessary to serve the wishes of the aging apostle. Mark's respect for Paul is easily seen and he is no doubt saddened by Paul's execution so soon after which took place under Nero in the early sixties.

It is no accident that Mark's gospel is dated from about the same time. His maturity and in-site, his growth in Christ, his inspiration from the apostle Paul, his closeness to Peter in Jerusalem after he departed from Paul, the influence of his cousin Barnabas, his commitment to the church and his determination to counteract false teachings about Christ and tell the truth, all added to his drive to write down the gospel story of Jesus for the church to treasure.

It is supposed that Mark got much of his information from Peter. It is also generally accepted that Mark's work was directed to the Church at Rome, but if not, at least to those outside of Palestine, and perhaps even written from Rome itself. He is the only writer to mention Rufus and Alexander whom he references in identifying Simon of Cyrene, their father, who bore Jesus' cross. Paul greets Rufus at the end of his epistle to the church at Rome, but makes no mention of Alexander. This may be due to the fact that Rufus and Alexander were together in Rome when Mark wrote, or at least were known by the church, but later, by the time Paul's communication with Rome was taking place, Alexander was not there. An "Alexander" is mentioned as being in Ephesus, a man Paul has a great deal of trouble with. This may be referencing Rufus' brother and explain why Alexander is not mentioned in Romans. In any case, Mark makes no mention of the birth of Jesus. This may be due to the church's familiarity with the story rendering a re-telling unnecessary. Mark's audience may not have required the account, or, Mark may have not had enough information to justify a narrative.

### **The other writers**

On the other hand, Matthew's gospel is directed definitely to the Jews. He begins with the genealogy of Jesus and his birth, a presentation designed to impact the Jews. He stresses fulfilled prophecy, quoting many Old Testament passages as they relate to Jesus' appearance. He underscores their importance in demonstrating the Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and in Him the long awaited Kingdom of God had arrived.

Luke is the other author including the birth narrative. His audience for his gospel as well as his book of "Acts" was a man named Theophilus. Only conjecture can tell us who this man is. Simply by the language Luke uses in Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1 ff. we can assume that Theophilus was an acquaintance of Luke, held in some esteem by him. He may have been with Luke at Troas, and since Luke was the "beloved physician" may even been one of Luke's patients. Further, Theophilus, having been taught about Jesus, wanted a more exact account of the whole story. It is very probable he commissioned Luke to do the work. He may have helped Luke by paying his



expenses. We can offer a plausible theory that Luke kept in touch with Theophilus as he journeyed with Paul and upon Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem, found opportunity to record the history of both Jesus and the apostles. Theophilus must have been a very astute man recognizing the value of such a report for historical as well as personal reasons. He certainly trusted Luke and Luke wrote a typical Greek account in an exact, historical, classical sense. His comprehensive, orderly and logical manner qualifies his writings as beautifully accomplished in a fine classical fashion.

Both Matthew and Luke contain a genealogy and birth record of Jesus. Their accounts, however, are startlingly different. Let's compare the two.

### **MATTHEW**

#### Audience

Jewish

#### Purpose

To evangelize, proving Jesus to be the promised Messiah according to the Scriptures who announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

#### Birth account distinctives

1. Angel appears to Joseph regarding Mary's pre-marital pregnancy. Joseph complies. Matthew makes no mention of Nazareth.
2. The visit of the Magi to Bethlehem, some two years after Jesus is born.
3. The flight of the holy family to Egypt.
4. Herod's slaughter of the children.
5. The return of the family to Nazareth due to Archelaus ruling over Judea.

#### Birth account similarities to Luke

1. A genealogy – (of Joseph)
2. Bethlehem listed as Jesus' birthplace.

Note: Matthew includes nothing of Luke's account except what is found in the similarities column, and even that is different in detail. Perhaps Matthew strove to impress male Jewish leadership and thus deliberately left out the narrative involving Mary and her leading role following the visit of the angel Gabriel to her to avoid offending their view of women in spiritual matters.

### **LUKE**

#### Audience

Theophilus

#### Purpose

To clarify all the stories and declare the exact truth regarding the many accounts of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection.

#### Birth account distinctives

1. The narrative regarding Zacharias the priest, and husband of Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. The foretelling of Elizabeth's pregnancy and the naming of the child as John.
2. Elizabeth's pregnancy.
3. The angelic announcement to Mary in Nazareth.
4. Mary's visit to Elizabeth.

#### Birth account similarities to Matthew

1. A genealogy-unlike Matthew's after David. Assumed to be Mary's lineage.
2. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

5. The birth of John the Baptist.
6. Zacharias' prophecy regarding John.
7. The decree of Caesar Augustus and the journey Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph.
8. The birth in a stable and Jesus laid in a manger.
9. The angels and the shepherds.
10. Jesus' circumcision and the visit to the temple.
11. Simeon's prophecy.
12. Anna's prophecy.
13. The return to Nazareth from Jerusalem.
14. The visit to Jerusalem when Jesus was a youth.

Note: Luke makes no mention of the Magi, Herod's slaughter of the children, the stay in Egypt, or the return to Nazareth. In fact, Luke makes no mention of anything in Matthew's account and vice versa, except what is in the similarities column and even then, the details vary.

### **MARK**

#### **Audience**

To churches outside of Palestine, perhaps even specifically, the church . at Rome.

Note: It is very likely that Mark was the first Gospel written by a reliable and legitimate source others would recognize and respect.

#### **Purpose**

To inform the church(es), especially the Jewish believers, of the true facts regarding the life of Jesus.

### **JOHN**

#### **Audience**

Hellenistic Jews

#### **Purpose**

To present Jesus as the only true Messiah, and as The Son of God in a style and pattern designed to confront and dismantle false teachings, especially Gnosticism, a Jewish mystical philosophy/religion.

Note: John wrote having been a close disciple of John the Baptist prior to journeying with Jesus. This is important to those who had more confidence in John The Baptist as a real prophet than they did in Jesus Himself at the time. This was especially true of those who left Palestine prior to the appearance of Jesus. We note in Acts 19:1-5 that some had returned home as far as Asia Minor before Jesus' ministry had begun and had only been baptized with John's baptism.

The order of the Gospel references in this study will be basically, Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. This is due to the apparent chronological order in which they were written and due to the conclusion that both Matthew and Luke use Mark's account as a source. The order will be adjusted when appropriate to do so. One further note. John consistently uses the historical present tense in his narration. In other words, instead of viewing the acts of Jesus in the past tense such as, "Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee and saw his disciples casting their nets from the boat", he writes, "Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee and He is watching the disciples cast their nets from the boat". Mark employs this from time to time and this tense is marked in the N.A.S.B. with an asterisk preceding the word, phrase or sentence.

## **CHAPTER ONE - THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS**

### **JOHN, THE BAPTIZER**

The beginning of the ministry of Jesus opens with John the Baptist in all four gospels. John's story is vital to the legitimacy of Jesus' ministry. The prophet Isaiah is quoted in all four gospels, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" (Isaiah 40:3) Mark prefaces it with Malachi 3:1, "Behold I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me..." Matthew not only quotes Isaiah 40:3 to begin the ministry of John but quotes Jesus' reference to it in describing John, noting that indeed John was the greatest of all the prophets and the fulfillment of the expectation of Elijah's return prior to the Messianic appearance. See: Matthew 11:7-19; Malachi 4:5; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 1:76-79, 7:18-35. Luke continues on with Isaiah 40:4-5, "Every ravine shall be filled up, and every mountain shall be brought low; and the crooked shall become straight and the rough roads smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God". The gospel of John places the declaration of Isaiah 40:3 in the mouth of The Baptist himself, "'I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord', as Isaiah the prophet said." Paul himself was acquainted with the ministry of John (Acts 19:1-5). John's life and ministry is more significant than we realize. He is particularly significant to those of Jewish background because of the prophecies. Even today, at the Passover Seder a chair is placed at the table for Elijah, should he come. In addition, there is the special cup of Elijah, filled with wine to honor the spirit of Elijah, who comes to visit every Seder. Today, Jews everywhere recognize that the Messiah's coming will be prefaced by the return of Elijah.

The significant passages regarding John the "Baptist" (The "Baptizer" is a more accurate translation) are as follows: Mark 1:1-8; Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:1-20; John 1:6-8, 15-37. Later we have: Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23 (Mark and John exclude the account) and then Mark 6:14-29; Matthew 14:1-12 and Luke 9:7-9. In John 1:29, The Baptist announces of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Also: 1:36) The term, "Lamb of God" is not found anywhere else, but has ties to Isaiah 53:7 (note: Acts 8:26-40; I Peter 1:18-21; and of course John's references in Revelation 5:6, 8, 12ff. etc.). The term hearkens us back to Genesis 22:1-14, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, as well as to the Passover instituted in Exodus 12:1-13.

The ministry of Jesus begins with He being baptized by John and then being led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. We have this in the synoptic gospels only; Mark 1:9-15; Matthew 3:13-4-12; Luke 3:21-23 (Then Luke includes the genealogy of Jesus through Mary), and Luke 4:1-13. What is the significance of Jesus being baptized by John? Matthew is the only synoptic writer that gives an explanation. When John says to Jesus, "I have need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?" Jesus answered, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." What does this mean? First, it is not necessary that Jesus be baptized for His own sake but because of the time. It is for the present occasion that it is important, as Jesus identifies Himself with the nation or people of Israel as being one with them. Plus, Jesus uses the term "we" and "fulfill all righteousness" which portrays the future when Jesus will indeed do so at the cross. He looks to the future fulfillment of the "Law of Righteousness" He will fulfill for all mankind.

So, Jesus is actually the personification of Israel and all God intended Israel to be (Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:15). His being baptized is a symbolic act, yes, but more. It has actual efficacy for those that will come to repentance and belief and will be baptized in identification with Him as He is with them. In this context, the statement that “all righteousness may be fulfilled” is understood. This expression is found nowhere else in the Gospels. This “righteousness” represented in the baptism of Jesus is a vicarious act representing the beginning of the cleansing reality Jesus is bringing to the world. A death, burial and resurrection is pictured in baptism as well as the beginning of the walk in “newness of life”. Jesus’ coming is the entrance of a complete “righteousness” not based in the works or practices of the flesh (or The Law), but in the inner workings of the Spirit on the heart of every believer. (Note: Mark 1:8; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:29-33). In short, John’s baptism was one of repentance from sin and looking ahead, in preparation, for the One who was to come. Jesus’ baptism was the fulfillment and completion of what John pointed ahead to and prepared others for. In Jesus, all righteousness is fulfilled. It is fulfilled on behalf of the world. The kingdom of God is entering human history in the person of Jesus.

Immediately upon being baptized, as Jesus rose from the water, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove rested on Him and the voice of God from the heavens spoke and said, “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.” At this moment, Israel as a people and a nation ceased to exist as the chosen people. Jesus, as the personification of Israel, now becomes God’s vessel in accomplishing His plan of redemption in the last days. In Jesus we have all that Israel was intended to be. In Jesus we have all that man was intended to be. That is why all righteousness is fulfilled in this moment and why it is fitting, that upon His baptism, a conformation of Jesus’ purpose is made by The Heavenly Father Himself (1:10-11; Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22).

Then Jesus is led out by The Spirit of God into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan [Mark 1:12-13 (brief); Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13]. In John 3:22-30, and 4:1-3 we have an additional note regarding John the Baptist, Jesus and their disciples. We do not know exactly if this was before or after His temptation. What is the significance of the temptation? The baptism and the temptation narratives are intimately joined together in all three synoptic Gospels. As much as the baptism is the beginning of the fulfillment of all righteousness, so the temptation is the initiation of the kingdom of God. Satan’s kingdom has now been invaded by God’s kingdom in the person of Jesus and Satan is now rendered powerless to stop it. As Mark 3:26-27 notes, Jesus, in order to spoil the strongman’s house must first bind the strongman. The temptation is the event where this opportunity avails itself. Will Jesus be able to do so in even a weakened, debilitated state? It brings to mind the idea that the, “Newly baptized Christian must be ready, like his Lord, to immediately face the onset of the tempter”. ( A.E. J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, pg. 12)

This account of the baptism and temptation of Jesus brings to mind the several parallels. First is the story of the garden incident in Genesis, chapter 3. God initiates the stage and sets the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden and prohibits Adam and Eve from eating of it. They succumb to the serpent’s words and fail to trust God’s word. As a result, mankind is cursed. Dominion has been handed to Satan who becomes the "ruler of the world."

Then we have the story of Job. We have, in Job, the announcement of Job’s righteousness both by the narrator (1:1) and by God (1:8; 2:3). Then God permits Satan to tempt (test) Job. Job resists the temptation to blame God and resists all the counsel of Satan represented by Job’s friends. At the end, Job (and God) is vindicated and Satan’s challenge, (“Does Job fear God for

nothing”?) crumbles. We also have a parallel between Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness and Israel’s testing in the wilderness. Not only is Jesus the “second Adam, He is also Israel personified as we have said. Except for Joshua and Caleb, Israel failed the test, which was simply trusting in the promise and word of God. It is not coincidental that Jesus’ name and Joshua’s are the same, and that in Joshua and Caleb we have both Jew and Gentile entering the promised land. Moses, (The Law) can only watch from a distance. The issue is, and always has been, faith.

In Jesus temptation by Satan, the two kingdoms collide. Will Jesus, God’s Son, fall as did Adam, also God’s Son? All hope of redemption rests on the shoulders of Jesus. But God’s confidence is unwavering, as it was with Job, and God initiates the encounter. After a fast of forty days, Jesus was weak and hungry beyond all the understanding of most of us. Death was immanent. Jesus was alone. His only companions were “wild beasts” (Mark 1:13). No doubt these were predators and scavengers including vultures. Although Mark’s account is brief, and without actual description of the event, Matthew and Luke tell us the essence of the story. Their stories vary only a little, in the order of the temptations, and in a few details. Both agree that the first temptation addressed Jesus’ desperate need of food. It does not seem coincidental that the temptation in the garden and this one centered around sustenance. Even in Job, his livestock was the first item destroyed. With Israel in the wilderness, their greatest complaint seemed to be about the lack of good food and they hankered for the leeks and garlic of Egypt again.

The Tempter’s first challenge was simply, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones become bread.” It need not be mentioned that to fill a starving stomach with food is not sinful. The Lord does not minimize the necessity of bread. But it is interesting that the issue of eating was the first temptation delivered to Adam and Eve as well. Again, God was the initiator of the confrontation between Man and Satan. Satan’s words to Jesus were not to simply get him to eat, but to ridicule Jesus’ claim to being not *a son of God*, but *The Son of God*. “Prove it by obeying me”, is the temptation. If Jesus were to succumb, the claim would be voided. To prove He is The Son of God is to trust God as His Father whatever may come. Jesus’ reply is on target as He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, “...man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Later, Jesus stated, “Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone?” Jesus complete dependence upon His Father is demonstrated in the severest of conditions in this temptation.

The next temptation was to bring Jesus, (likely in a vision since Jesus was weakened unto death) to the pinnacle of the temple. This time Satan quoted the scripture as he challenged Jesus (if He is *really* the Son of God) to jump because it is written, “He will give His angels charge concerning you; on their hands they will bear you up lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus answer establishes the definition of faith. He said, “You shall not put The Lord your God to the test.” This points out that true faith, regardless of who one is, does not initiate an action expecting God to respond, but responds obediently to that word God has already spoken.

The final temptation takes place as Jesus is led up and shown all the kingdoms of the world “in a moment of time” (Luke 4:5). This suggests that a series of visions is what is actually happening. Nevertheless, Satan abandons the “If you are The Son of God” line and simply offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will bow down and worship him. There is no indication that Satan did not have the power or authority to do so. The world and all that is in it is his. God had given man the dominion over the world in Genesis one and two, and then man gave his dominion over the world to Satan in Genesis three. He is “the Prince of this world”.

Jesus sees through this temptation quite easily. His proof that He was the Son of God comes in His rejection of Satan's offer. Jesus is aware of bigger things, eternal things. Satan will be destroyed with the temporal things in due time. To bow down to Satan for the material things of this world would negate His total purpose for coming into this world in the first place, which is to accomplish the redemption of mankind and institute the spiritual and eternal blessings upon all those of faith, the foremost of which must be He. His commitment to His Father assures that his work on our behalf will be accomplished. Thus, He answers, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"

Satan tempts Jesus (who is in great physical need) with worldly, temporal things. Jesus responds with the importance of spiritual, eternal things - obviously of greater importance in the long run.

The next act of Jesus was to announce "The Kingdom of God" in the villages of Galilee and to begin to choose His disciples beginning with Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John; See: John 1:35-51 (who tells the story differently adding considerable detail. John, being the one actually chosen likely has a clearer account of the events); Mark 1:14-20; Matthew 4:12-22; Luke 4:14-5:11 (who adds considerable detail and ignores Andrew here although he was included as we see in Luke 6:14).

It appears at first that John's account is at odds with the synoptics. But if one looks carefully at the timing of the encounters Jesus has with His chosen disciples (to be), one can come to the conclusion that the account in John's gospel takes place before the account of the disciples. A possible scenario could look like this. 1. Jesus returns from the wilderness partly recovered from his ordeal to the Jordan River area where He encounters The Baptist again (1:28-34). Was the lack of recognition due to Jesus' appearance after the wilderness ordeal and temptation? 2. Jesus has not yet returned to Galilee. 3. Jesus meets some disciples of John the "next day" (1:35). One of them is Andrew (Simon Peter's brother), and he went and brought Simon to meet Jesus (1:36-42). 4. The "next day" Jesus purposed to go to Galilee. It is not clear whether He meets Philip and Nathaniel before He goes to Galilee, on the way, or after He arrives. Nathaniel is from Cana of Galilee, a city not far from Nazareth (21:2). His name is not mentioned by any of the synoptic writers. Some think that "Bartholomew" might be another of Nathaniel's names. The scene appears to be taking place en-route. To get to Galilee, Jesus would pass through Bethel where Jacob had his "ladder" vision (1:51) and the fact that Nathaniel was under a fig tree indicates he was resting, perhaps due to the journey. What is noteworthy is Jesus' apparent humor at Nathaniel's confession when Jesus stated that he saw Him under a fig tree (1:48-51). 5. Jesus returns to Galilee but does not begin His ministry yet. It is not time. But He does go to the wedding at Cana, and makes comment to this effect (2:1-10). 6. Now we have a general comment by John (2:11-12). It appears his disciples are with Him. 7. Somewhere between the return to Galilee and the wedding, we have Jesus at The Sea of Galilee summoning Peter, Andrew, James and John to go with Him and become "fishers of men". People are often stunned that these men would drop everything and immediately go with Him. But if they already knew Him, and had spent some time with him prior to this event, and were anticipating this moment then it seems perfectly understandable. John's account gives us continuity and sensibility to the entire sequence of events.

Note on "the kingdom of God" message being preached by Jesus at the initiation of His ministry. In studying the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus, we can conclude that the "kingdom of God" is understood to be, "the sovereign reign of God, manifested in the person

and work of Christ, creating a people over whom he reigns, and issuing in a realm or realms in which the power of his reign is realized". (George E. Ladd; "Crucial Questions About The Kingdom of God", Eerdmans, 1952.) This understanding answers the questions regarding whether the kingdom of

The kingdom of God, from Jesus' perspective and ours, is both present or future in that the power and reality of the kingdom became present in the person of Jesus but a final culmination will occur when Jesus, (at the end of the millennial reign, if one understands this literally), turns the kingdom over to His Father (I Corinthians 15:24-25).

Scripture supports the view of the present and future kingdom. John the Baptist came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus began his ministry with the message, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17, 23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43). In Acts 8:12 we have Phillip preaching the kingdom of God and Paul in Acts 14:21-22, 19:8, 28:23, 30-31. Simultaneously, we have the kingdom seen as future. Note: Matthew 25:31-34; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16-18; II Timothy 4:1, 18. The reason for the kingdom to be both present and future is simply that it is not a time/space temporal kingdom. It exists outside of time and thus at all times. Note Jesus' words in Luke 17:20-21, John 18:36-37, and Paul's in I Corinthians 15:50.

(Notice in Matthew we have the words, "Kingdom of heaven" in the above passages but in Mark 1:15 It is "The kingdom of God" Jesus announces, as it is in Luke 4:43). The reason for this is not that Jesus announced two different kingdoms, one for the Jews and one for the Church, but that Matthew, sensitive to his Jewish audience, and their fear of violating the third commandment even accidentally, refrains from using the word "God" much as any Jew would in normal conversation. When he quotes Jesus or a prophet though, he quotes them directly when they use the word "God" and so he is in no danger of violating the third commandment and can't be accused of doing so. Luke and Mark are not concerned about the sensitivity of their audience since both are writing to friends and associates who are familiar with the truth).

The synoptic writers all have Jesus beginning his ministry by teaching and preaching in the synagogues throughout Galilee and the surround districts. Matthew gives us insight (In 4:12-17 and 13:57-58) about why Jesus might have moved from Nazareth to Capernaum.

We have several things that coincide with the beginning of Jesus' ministry including:

1. The announcement of who He is and what this means at His Baptism.
2. His defeat of Satan and the "Binding of the Strong Man".
3. The choosing of His disciples.
4. The proclamation of "The Kingdom of God" as central to His teaching.
5. The miracles that demonstrate His being the "King" of the kingdom, which means that He has come in power over all the forces of evil and temporal realities.

## **CHAPTER TWO - JESUS' TEACHING AND MINISTRY**

Jesus' hearers were astounded at his lessons because he spoke with "authority". (Mark 1:21-22; Matthew 7:28-29, Luke 4:31-32) This word authority is: ἐξουσία, *exousia*; *power to act, authority*: - charge, control, domain, dominion, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right. It comes from

the aspect of one who owns property and has charge over all his household. (See the footnote on pages 111-112 regarding the debate over Jesus' authority)

Accompanying His message about the kingdom of God were deeds of extraordinary boldness, authority and power the people had seldom seen, if ever. This occurred immediately (Mark 1:21-28; Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4:14-15, 31-37). These signs were the demonstration of what he was preaching. The kingdom of God had arrived in their midst in the person of Jesus. In Jesus then, the kingdom manifested its presence in its power over everything that only God could do. Note Luke 4:38-44. (See exercise, "Jesus Demonstrates His Deity").

John tells us that Jesus, early in his ministry, went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (2:13-25). His account places these events early in his narrative whereas the synoptic writers place them later in their narrative. John makes much more commentary about the events he shares than do the other writers and orders his work to affect his readers for his purpose of clarification about God, truth and who Jesus really was (note page 1, paragraph 1) His encounter with Nicodemus takes place there. Jesus' message presented the Kingdom of God to man and the means whereby one may enter it. He did this in both word and deed. He noted that one cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless one is born of the Spirit. This new birth is a result of an individual's repentance (involving conviction and contrition) and then faith in Him whom God has sent. Note: John 3:3-8. Also, John 6:28-29.

On His return to Galilee, He passed through Samaria and came to Sychar (probably Shechem). Several things appear odd about this at first glance. First, He took the less popular route to get to Galilee. Most Jews would travel through Perea in order to avoid Samaria. Second, and following, as a Jew, His welcome in Samaria would be cool at best (see Luke 9:51-56). Third, He sends His disciples into town to buy food and remains at the well so He can talk to a woman. Obviously, these things are not odd at all. He intended to go there all along and speak to this woman. (Recall 2:24-25). There is a lot we can glean from this event. (John 4:1-45) The well site today is the same as mentioned here. Once as much as 250 feet deep, today it is only about 75 feet deep. Much of this shortening has been the propensity for people to throw a stone into the well to determine its depth. Today, due to this change in depth, little water can be drawn from the well. Originally some nine feet in diameter at the base and square, it rose through solid rock until it reached soil and then was built of stone at a diameter of about six feet and, like a square bottle, narrows to the top with a stone cover having a round opening of some 20 inches. Underground streams and the run-off from rainfall fed the well. This was the "living" (or moving) water of which Jesus and the woman spoke. Descending a slope of some 20 feet, one would then draw water by means of a rope attached to a bucket. There are many things of interest in this story.

First, we see in verse six that the King James notes that Jesus was sitting "on" the well while other translations use the word "by". Either translation is acceptable, but in this case, had the translators known of the well itself, they would see that Jesus very likely sat "on" the well.

Second, for Jesus to ask for a drink of a woman was unusual, especially of a Samaritan woman. Men were never to speak to a woman alone, as it cast suspicion upon the motives of both when this happened. There was no doubt that the woman would have given Him a drink since Jesus professed thirst and had nothing with which to draw water.

Third, His encounter with the woman is a delightful example of Jesus' method of moving the conversation from the physical realm to the spiritual. He does this frequently. We see this with



Nicodemus in chapter three and later in chapter four with his disciples. Other examples are found in Mark 8:14-21 and Matthew 12:1-14.

Fourth, the burning debate between Jews and Samaritans is brought up by the woman in verse 19. In doing so, she attempts to change the subject and take the “heat” from herself. In this, Jesus allows her to succeed. He isn’t interested in judging her but in the action she would take. Jesus is quite adept at taking her “sidetracking” comments and turning them once again to a key spiritual point. In this case, as far as the proper place to worship goes, the end of the chapter settles the real issue.

Historically, around 350 B.C. (by some historians and Josephus), a temple was built on Mt. Gerizim as a rival to the Temple in Jerusalem but was destroyed by John Hyrcanus in 128 B.C. Passages like Deuteronomy 27:4-8; Joshua 8:30-35, 24:25-26 give the Samaritans argument for their site.

A comment has been made, that, during Jesus’ discourse about the fields being white for harvest in verses 34-38, Jesus may have seen the Samaritan men approaching from afar. Samaritan men wore a white linen or cotton tunic and turban. When the disciples looked up at Jesus’ direction (verse 35) they may have seen the Samaritan men approaching in a group resembling “fields white unto harvest”. A compelling picture to be sure.

All four gospels have Jesus engaged in a teaching ministry which includes various signs indicating the presence of the kingdom of God in His own person. The order of these itinerant ministries is different, but the purpose and content are consistent with each other. Following the order of Mark, beginning at chapter 1:21-2:13, we encounter the following: Jesus enters the synagogue at Capernaum and teaches, casting out a demon from a possessed man; then he heals Peter’s mother-in-law; heals more people and casts out demons (not allowing them to speak); goes to pray, then travels about teaching and healing until he returns to Capernaum sometime later. At Capernaum, he heals and forgives a paralytic, causing quite a stir. Next comes the calling of Matthew as a disciple.

Matthew summarizes Mark 1:21-39 in three verses (4:23-25) and inserts, in his narrative, the “Sermon on the Mount”, prior to the healing of a leper, the healing of the centurion’s servant, the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, the paralytic and Matthew’s call and subsequent events. Luke includes all the events (except the “Sermon on the Mount” at this time) and adds some others, but in a different order. John excludes most of them. All the accounts have “summary or general comments” to compensate for a lack of specificity regarding timing and sequence. For example note: Luke 4:44, Matthew 4:23-25, Mark 1:45; 2:13, John 5:1, 6:1, (etc.), 20:30-31, 21:24-25.

The “Sermon On The Mount” is not given by Jesus (in Matthew’s account) in order to set the standard for Christian life and conduct. The purpose is to apply the true intent and conviction of the law upon the hearts of the hearers (or readers) so they might come to repentance. The religion of the dedicated Jew was often only external. He assumed that this was in keeping with the spirit of the law. Throughout the Old Testament this idea was discarded, even by Moses and again by the prophets. The issue with God has always been the condition of the heart coupled with faith. The Sermon on The Mount is not applicable to Christians at all for they are not under the law. This is made clear by the conclusion of the so-called “Lord’s Prayer” (6:5-15). The benefit it provides believers comes into play when one conducts himself in a way that is displeasing to God. The words of Jesus are brought to mind as a means of clarifying one’s disobedience.

Further, the “Sermon” is designed to point out the corruption of men’s hearts and in so doing Jesus will receive one of several responses. First is the person who says, “Okay, I will try harder to be as “perfect as my Heavenly Father is perfect” and thereby please God so I can enjoy His blessings. This response is doomed to failure and disappointment, discouragement and defeat will be the portion of he who responds in this way. Second, one may throw up his hands and say, “This is ridiculous, no one can be this perfect” and simply walk away. Third, one may become angry and seek to destroy either the message or the messenger because the words of Jesus make one’s life long religious practice (and that of millions of others) of no account before God. Fourth, one may respond properly and say, “Oh Lord, be merciful to me a sinner”. This is the proper response and the one Jesus desires from His listeners. (See His parable on the Tax Collector and The Pharisee who went up to the temple to pray, Luke 18:9-14)

### **CHAPTER THREE – JESUS’ USE OF PARABLES TO TEACH**

We have seen that Jesus’ message (like John’s) was focused on the kingdom of God. To teach what this meant, Jesus often taught in parables (Mark 4:33-34; Matthew 13:34 (Psalm 78:1-6). A parable is defined as, “A story used as a medium, designed to teach therein, a truth not necessarily contained in the narrative of the story itself”. From the Greek, “to cast or throw alongside”. The truth is alongside the story itself. It is not a simile, metaphor or allegory although elements of these may be found within the parable. Parables are among the multitudes of literary mediums and devises used throughout Scripture. What this means is that the language, imagery or story is the vehicle used to carry the point the story is trying to make. One must ascertain the point of the story from within the elements of the story itself. This is why the disciples frequently had to ask Jesus what the meaning of the parable was. We are much the same. We look at the surface and assume it is the whole truth.

Below we have a list of the parables of Jesus. He told many other stories and illustrations which could be listed as parables but are omitted because they are not noted as such in the text. There are a few exceptions listed which do not identify themselves as parables but the word “comparison” is used of them or they are indisputably parables. The asterisk following the listing indicates that it is a parable about the kingdom of God. (Please see the appendix for more on the types of “story telling” literature used to convey a message and their definitions)

Mark, in chapter four, has Jesus telling the parable of the “sower and the soils”. Mark tells us, in verse two that it is one of many parables Jesus used as a teaching tool. So, in Mark 3:23 we have:

1. The parable of the divided house and, in chapter 4
2. The parable of the sower and the soil\*
3. The parable of the lamp and peck-measure
4. The parable of the measure
5. The parable of the seed\*
6. The parable of the mustard seed\*
7. In Mark 12:1-12 the parable of the vine-growers
8. In Mark 13:28 the parable of the fig tree

Matthew includes all these (except the parable of the seed) and adds, in chapter 13:

1. The parable of the tares\*

2. The parable of the leaven\*
3. The parable of the hidden treasure\*
4. The parable of the pearl\*; and
6. The parable of the dragnet\*
7. The parable of the householder\*
8. In 18 the parable of the insolvent debtors\*
9. In 20 the parable of the laborers in the vineyard\*
10. In 21 the parable of the two sons
11. In 22 the parable of marriage supper\*
12. In 24 the parable of the fig tree and
13. The parable of the stone
14. In 25 the parable of the ten virgins\* and
15. The parable of the talents\*.

Luke includes only a few from the above lists (sower and soils\*, mustard seed\*, leaven\*, lost sheep, marriage supper\*, talents, fig tree and vine-growers, but adds the following:

1. In chapter 6 the parable of the blind guiding the blind
2. In chapter 7 the parable of the two debtors and
3. The parable of the moneylender
4. In chapter 8 the parable of the lamp\*
5. In chapter 10 the parable of the good Samaritan
6. In chapter 12 the parable of the rich man
7. In chapter 13 the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard
8. In chapter 14 the parable of the guests\*; and
9. The parable of the dinner\*
10. In chapter 15 The parable of the lost sheep; and
11. The parable of the lost coin; and
12. The parable of the prodigal son
13. In chapter 16 the parable of the unrighteous steward; and
14. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus
15. In chapter 18 the parable of the widow and the judge; and
16. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector; and
17. The parable of the rich ruler (not young but old)

John includes no parables in his book at all, but adds in chapter 10:

1. The story (parable?) of the Good Shepherd; (not mentioned by John as a parable, but as “a figure of speech”).

In total, excluding many other stories that could be termed “parables” we have 41 different parables remembered by Jesus’ followers.

Selecting some parables to study.

Mark 4:26-34, we have the parables of the seed and the mustard seed. In what way are these parables like the kingdom of God? First, is the parable of the seed (26-29). It is probably no coincidence that Mark puts all these seed and ground parables together. They are similar in theme and the understanding of them is made clearer as we look at the together. In this parable, we can

pose the question, “Is the kingdom of God being likened to the farmer, the seed, the soil or the growth or a combination of several elements in the parable?” In 26, the farmer does what is necessary to get a crop. He casts seed upon the soil. It, of course is fertile and prepared. The rest is up to a mysterious force of which he has no knowledge (27). As he sleeps and rises each day, (time passes) as does the seed. It rises from the soil and grows. The process is “automatic”. There are no external forces acting to make the seed grow. It grows from the ground as any plant does, first the sprout (blade), then the head or stalk, then the fullness of the grain for which it was created in the first place (28). When it is ripe, the farmer prepares to harvest the crop (29). He must wait for the seed to be ready before he inserts the sickle. This note further underscores that man has no mandate or power in the matter.

The kingdom of God is like this. “Seeds” are cast upon the ground and a “mysterious” force acts upon them. The seed still appears to be God’s Word, His seed as it were. The ground still could be the hearts of people. Germination takes place and the growth becomes apparent. No earthly force can cause or create this phenomenon. When the grain is ripe, (at the proper time), the harvest occurs. This harvest may be an allusion to Joel 3:13 which is reflected in many other passages, (Revelation 14 for example). The parable seems to teach that the kingdom of God is a spiritual process analogous to the parable images. When God’s word is sown in the (fertile) hearts of people, it germinates and grows due to the combination of fertility of heart and the ministry of, say, The Holy Spirit until it finally reaches maturity. In a larger sense, the analogy is not of an individual, but of a field, a kingdom in the process of developing.

The parable of the mustard seed again pictures the kingdom of God, a spiritual reality involving many but pictured by a single mustard seed rather than the casting of many seed by the farmer in the previous parable. A common rabbinical opening to a parable is used here by Jesus. He begins with a question, “How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?” The R.S.V. translates it, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God.” The seed is definitely the object analogous to the kingdom of God. Mark calls the plant a “shrub, bush or herb”, while Matthew calls it the same but notes that it “becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches”.

Commentators and students of this parable are constantly in debate as to its meaning. The argument often centers on Jesus’ description of the seed as “the smallest of all seeds” and the size of the tree it becomes hosting nesting birds. The inaccuracy of these descriptions has sent investigators hither and yon trying to discover a physical reality to support Jesus’ statements. Their success has been questionable. Some have concluded that the parable simply teaches that “tiny beginnings and the eventual magnitude of the result”. The parable is far more than this and the very fact of the exaggerations in both “size” directions gives us insight as to the meaning of the parable.

The mustard shrub and its seed were viewed, in general, as a weed, an unclean thing, disturbing the order of “holiness” in all of Israel’s planting and harvesting activity. It could not be used as an offering at “First Fruits” or for any other purpose associated with the holy feasts or the family table on the Sabbath. So it was not desirable, but undesirable except where some may have a small crop used for herbal purposes wherever that particular product might be desired.

The Greek word for “smallest” is from the root μικρός, ( μικροτερος) - mikros; a prim. word; *small*, *little*: - least (4), less (1), little (13), little ones (6), little while (10), short (1), small (8), smaller (2), smallest (1). Apparently a primary word, including the comparative (second form); *small* (in size,

quantity, number or (figuratively) dignity): - least, less, little, small. We get our word “micro-“ from it. It can also be translated “of least importance”, “insignificant”, “humble” (note: Matthew 10:42, 11:11, 18:6; Mark 15:40; Acts 8:10, 26:22; I Corinthians 5:6; Hebrews 8:11, etc)

Due to its reputation then, Jesus likely intends to describe the mustard seed as insignificant and undesirable, a seed to be ignored, discarded or rejected. In fact, in order to plant worthy crops like vineyards, grain, olives trees and the like, the farmer would often have to clear the stubborn mustard weeds out of the way.

I can imagine a secret smile on Jesus’ face when He began to tell this parable and asked the question, “Hmm, I wonder what picture we can use to describe the kingdom of God? Oh, I know, a mustard seed!” This would have set his disciples off pretty good. “A mustard seed???” they would have thought, “This is unheard of, incomprehensible.” Exactly!

Now he tells them that this inferior, unappreciated seed grows up into a magnificent tree, able to host and shade a collection of birds in its branches! First, the mustard bush rarely got more than three or four feet in height and rarely had substantial branches. Of course, there are aberrations. It is to these that the commentators turn to try to justify the difficulty. Apparently there are mustard shrubs that grow along the Jordan North into Galilee that form hedges, some of which can be 10-12 feet in height. But they really don’t fit the picture Jesus is describing. The reference to images found in Ps. 104:12; Ezekiel 17:23, 31:6; Daniel 4:12, etc. are unmistakable. In spite of those who would like to interpret the birds as “agents of the Evil One”, the image is that of glory. In this case, the kingdom of God is a glorious tree granting refuge, shelter, safety and rest to its inhabitants.

The meaning is now easily gleaned. Shocked that it is so contrary to the expectation, ideas, dreams and understanding of the Jews, the disciples had to now come to understand the kingdom of God in terms totally different and in full contrast to what the Jews had been taught and had come to expect for a thousand years (and still do today). Jesus teachings describe the unforeseen, the unexpected, the incomprehensible. The kingdom of God begins as a small, insignificant even undesirable constituency. It is essentially ignored, looked down upon and discarded. But it grows anyway, here and there, where the “holy ones and chosen of God” (as Israel saw themselves) choose not to walk, and ultimately, to the shock and disbelief of all, it grows into a glorious reality none have ever seen or expected. Perhaps, while it is growing and passersby chance a look at it curiously, they might think it is an unusual way for the “plant” to be growing. An oddity, to be sure that a mustard seed would look so stately and be so large. To understand the true nature of the kingdom of God, Jesus’ disciples are forced to “think outside the box” of traditional teaching regarding this matter.

In this parable, can we see the “mystery” of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s redemptive plan, and even sinners and outcasts like Levi (Matthew), Rahab, Ruth, Mary of Magdala and even the one, “despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and like the one from whom men hide their face...despised and not esteemed?” (Isaiah 53:3)

In Matthew 13 we have these “kingdom” parables and others as well. Let us examine another parable using seed and soil. This would be the parable of the “Tares Among The Wheat” found in verses 24-30. The explanation is given in verses 36-43. Meanwhile, we have another kingdom parable, The Parable of The Leaven” (verse 33).

“He spoke another parable to them, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took

and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

A peck is 8 quarts and 4 pecks is a bushel. The woman put the leaven into three pecks (24 quarts) or 6 gallons of dough. The amount of leaven (starter) is relatively small in comparison. How is this parable likened to the kingdom of God? The woman, The meal, and The leaven? Since leaven is used often of evil (Matthew 16:6, 12; I Cor. 5:6-8), why did Jesus employ this simile? We also have, (as in Luke 15:8-10), the employment of a woman as the agent initiating the action. Was this done, in likeness to the use of the mustard seed, simply to startle his listeners and get them off their traditional, but distorted basis?

We are forced to consider, in this parable, the dynamic effect leaven has on a lump of dough. This small, even imperceptible, amount is “hidden” in the lump of dough. It can’t be seen from without and goes about its work devoid of any assistance from without. In this aspect, the parable of the seed and the sower comes to mind. As the beginning is unimpressive, so the lump now enlarged to an impressive size, is ready to be baked. It is now 38 gallons of dough, enough to feed over 150 people. In this manner, the parable parallels the one about the mustard seed.

The parables of the “Hidden Treasure” and “The Pearl of Great Price” are found in Matthew 13:44-46. They have a similar theme regarding the kingdom of Heaven (God).

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Like the parable of the lost coin in Luke 15, the man was filled with joy at finding a treasure in a field. He knew that his total worth was expendable for this far more valuable treasure and sold all he had to buy the field. The kingdom is likened to the treasure. The man may have been a laborer in this field when he came upon the treasure. This still actually happens today, and it was not unusual to bury treasure (Tel El-Amarna tablets, etc. Also note Proverbs 2:1-5). One might argue that the man should have told the owner of the field about the treasure. But the man didn't steal it, he reburied it. Upon the offer to buy his field, the owner's curiosity could have been raised and he could either have made inquiry or gone out to see what it was all about. None of this is the point. It is the overarching value of the kingdom that is illustrated here. One could say of the nature of the kingdom that it is present but not perceived. Many have trod over the field. One could speculate that the identity of the owner is Satan and the field is the world. But this is not necessary to achieve the point.

In the next parable, we have a pearl merchant who knows the genuine article, seeking pearls for his business. Pearls, in the ancient world, had a greater value than gold. Finding one of exceptional value he sells his entire worth to have it. The theme is identical. Both men find something of such great value that they are willing to give up everything they have to possess it. Such is the kingdom of God. One student, who joyously “thinks outside the box” saw Jesus as the merchant and those who respond to the gospel as the costly pearl.

In Matthew 13:47-50 we have the parable of “The Dragnet” along with the explanation. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering *fish* of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good *fish* into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come

forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then, in Matthew 13:51-52 Jesus adds, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes." And He said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

It appears that Jesus is commenting on all the parables (use of plural). Let us break His comment down. A scribe, first off, is a scholar trained in the interpretation and copying of the Torah. Secondly, the community utilizes his skills as documents become necessary within business or personal affairs. The scribe who also becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is now, like the householder, able to utilize both old and new in his work. In other words, this scholarly disciple is able to pull from the Torah material relating to the kingdom of God as Jesus has described it. Using both old and new, the scribe is able, then, to bring clarity and understanding to the gospel message.

Jumping to Luke 15:1-32, we have parables not directly describing the kingdom of God. All are parables regarding things that go astray and are lost and the joy when they repent. In verses 1 and 2, the reason these parables are told is given.

Luke 15:1-2, Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So He told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

"Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And He said, "A man had two sons. "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" "So he got up and came to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. "And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' "But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. "But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

"And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.'"

The hearers of this parable have difficulty escaping the implications regardless of whom they identify with. In the previous parables, the grumbling scribes and Pharisees could easily dismiss the parable by thinking, "how quaint, but what has this to do with me"? In this parable however, the identification with the elder son is inescapable. Jesus, like Amos, has set them up to not identify with the "lost" but with those who "need no repentance". But now, the impact is unavoidable. If they identify with the elder son, they must consider their own attitude toward the lost who repent and the fact that the father rejoices more over this than over the one who never rebelled in the first place. The anger of the elder son at the father is easy to identify with in the flesh, but the consequences of such an attitude and the exposure of a heart so inclined is uncomfortable at best. They now know that it isn't just the prodigal who needs repentance. If they come to identify with the prodigal, they now know what works will truly please the father. Since the prodigal is a member of the family, they can't exclude themselves by thinking that these are simply lost tax collectors and sinners. But they could be, if one conceives the concept of the "larger" family. After all, Levi was a tax collector, and probably his brother also. They both became Jesus' disciples. And Jesus rejoiced over the repentance of Zaccheus, another tax collector. If they identify with the feelings of the father, they can't reconcile them with their identity with the elder son. Thought provoking indeed.

The discussion held identifying each of the personages took on other delightful colors. We could easily see, from the ancient Jewish point of view, the father being Abraham and the two sons Isaac and Ishmael. Oh no! Not the welcome reception of the Ishmaelites (Arabs and Palestinians). What if the father is Isaac and the sons Jacob and Esau (who sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew). The acceptance, with rejoicing, of Esau and Edom and Ammon, etc.? Could the prodigal simply force us to think that the entire human race is loved by God regardless of lineage and that Heaven rejoices when anyone, Gentile or Jew repents and is recovered from the ranks of the lost?



In Luke 16:1-18 we find the parable of the unrighteous steward and a comments about it made by both the Pharisees and Jesus. This parable needs to be examined closely so it is not misunderstood.

“Now He was also saying to the disciples, ‘There was a rich man who had a manager, and this *manager* was reported to him as squandering his possessions. And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ The manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management people will welcome me into their homes.’ And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he *began* saying to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’<sup>2</sup> And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light.”

"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.”

This parable and especially its internal explanation have caused some consternation for interpreters for millennia. It is a strange parable in many ways. But we will examine the characters and elements carefully to see if we can understand what The Lord is teaching his disciples and those among the Pharisees who scoffed at it. Using the original language (Koine Greek) we can give some texture and color to the characters. It can be said of none of the personages in the parable that they are of sterling character. This precludes one from making direct character parallels with God, the disciples, the Pharisees, Christ, or anyone else.

Characters:

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<sup>2</sup> The quantities here are massive showing that this is a commercial venture. A hundred measures of oil (olive) are roughly 875 gallons and a hundred measures of wheat is about a thousand bushels (over 30 tons).

The Rich Man – This man, in an arrangement with several people, had loaned or furnished materials, financial backing in their enterprise as an investment or land and lodging for their families or their enterprise which appears to be agricultural. The repayment of the debt was to be in goods derived from each individual's enterprise which the rich man could sell to make up the amount of the debt as well as secure a profit. This avoided the imposition of usury on the transaction, looked down upon and often illegal in the Jewish community when dealing with a countryman.

The Financial Manager (Steward) – This man was the C.F.O. of the operation and indeed his title means “household law” or the company lawyer regarding financial or business matters. He is called “unjust” or “unrighteous” in verse 8. What this means is that the rich man called him by a name that means, “wrongdoer”, “dishonest”, “corrupt”, a failure to meet the test”, “unqualified”, and “evil”. Yet at the same time, the rich man noted that his closing action was “Shrewd” and had to praise him for his cleverness. The word φρονιμῶς, *phronimōs*; translated “shrewd” means “having keen insight”, “cleverness” and denotes, in this case, a remarkable ability to create a self saving solution out of self destructive conduct. The mammal the English word is taken from, the shrew, is a small mouse like rodent that has a voracious appetite and whose sole purpose in its conduct is to fill its own belly. Shrews must eat three times their own weight every hour because of a high metabolic rate. In this quest, there is no regard for the needs of others and any means is employed to feed its stomach. The shrew's diet consists of insects, snails and small mammals.

The Debtors – These people, χρεοφειλετῆς, *chreopheiletes*; represent those the rich man has invested his funds with. They have borrowed from or been furnished with the rich man's resources so they could build their own business. Their agreement is to repay in goods. This may be periodic repayments or lump sum repayments. We are not told. It is irrelevant to the story as are all the curious details we would like to know.

The Manager is the central figure of the parable and his stewardship (or management) is the focus of the parable. Somewhere along the line, either one of these debtors or someone else in the rich man's household brought an accusation against the Manager. The accusation was that the manager “squandered” the rich man's means, property, resources or possessions. More specifically, the manager had used the rich man's resources or even perhaps his name and authority in a manner which skirted around the “rules” or “policies” established for him by the rich man. He authorized transactions outside of his authority and job description. The manager may have even been generous to others without putting anything in his own pocket considering the rich man unwilling to do so himself. If the manager enriched himself, he would not have been as concerned about his future livelihood.

Upon being confronted by his rich employer regarding the misappropriation of funds or resources, he has nothing to say in his own defense. He is told to give an account of his stewardship and after that is done, he is terminated. Note verses three and four regarding his thought process. It is this thought process that is commended later. He forsakes taking the time to prepare a report of his stewardship, but instead summons each and every one of the master's debtors to his office. He then proceeds to reduce their debt to his master\*. New letters of indebtedness are substituted for the originals. He has ingratiated himself to the debtors and made his master look like the generous soul. When his termination is final, he can claim he was treated unjustly and appeal to some of the debtors for assistance. The master is stuck with the loss and cannot correct the error without causing damage to his own reputation and offense to those who own him the discounted debt they were offered in what they believed was goodness and mercy on the part of the master fully authorized through his manager.

The rich man could not but help admire the cleverness of the manager. Did he actually terminate him then? Probably, but there was no way to explain it or prevent the manager from procuring another position without damaging his own reputation and his business.

What did Jesus intend to be learned from this parable? His first comment is found in verse 8, “And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind (generation) than the sons of light [(are to their own kind (generation))].” The parable has to do with how ways of the sons of this age can be applied to the ways of the sons of light. And, it has to do with how money is thought of, managed and to what use it is put.

So Jesus elaborates in verse 9, “And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

The “friends” and the “they” are the same people. Money is not intrinsically unrighteous, but unrighteousness within the community of men often has money at the core. Men crave money to the point of placing it ahead of God and therein it reveals the true (unrighteous) heart of man. Jesus’ counsel is to use money in this life to make “friends” in the same way as the steward, but for a different reason and outcome. True shrewdness which receives the approval of the “Owner” is to use money, not for worldly gain, but on behalf of those who are “in debt” who will be benefited with eternal gain where money has no value or use any more. Using temporal means to achieve eternal gain is shrewd indeed. Those who are so benefited by your generosity in this life will welcome you into the eternal dwellings in the next life.

This recalls Jesus’ teaching:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. (Matthew 6:19-21)

Thus, the mammon so often used unrighteously, can be put to a righteous use, which really means that the heart, so often unrighteous, can be put to a righteous use (or put money to a righteous use). So:

“He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the *use of* unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true *riches* to you? And if you have not been faithful in *the use of* that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?”

This directly reflects on the stewardship (management) we have over another’s goods or resources in likeness to the manager of the parable. The other person Jesus is referring to may be God in this case. Note: “Stewardship” generally refers to the management of resources belonging to someone else. Christians developed the attitude that everything belongs ultimately to God, that is, that everything they have stewardship over needs to be managed the way God would have them do it. In this parable, Jesus isn’t concerned with ownership, only one’s management of the resources and the heart that makes the determination as to how the resources will be managed.

Bottom line, the way one manages money in this life will reveal where his heart really is. "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." As the manager did what was shrewd in his own realm (among the sons of the world) to receive a warm reception in the world, so the sons of light can employ the same shrewdness in matters relating to their realm and receive a warm reception in the eternals. Saying it another way, the works of the sons of men are oriented to achieving a worldly goal. The works of the sons of light should be to achieve an eternal goal.

"Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God."

The Pharisees were scoffing, perhaps because they thought they themselves were shrewd. But to be commended by the master for "shrewdness" entails a different application of "shrewdness" that the Pharisees were exercising. What they were actually doing was mixing the management principles together and spoiling both. Their works were set to achieve the same goal as sons of this age all the time expecting to be rewarded in heaven. They had justified their own actions as acceptable. Jesus makes it clear that God does not approve of the actual dealings of the manager as did the rich man. Note verse 15, ... "that which is esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Also, please note the conflict of Jesus and the Pharisees over Corban, in Mark 7:1-13). The Pharisees were double minded to say the least, "unstable in all their ways" as James puts it.

"The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it." (Note: Matthew 11:12-19; Luke 9:60-62, 13:24; 14:25-35) In Matthew, Jesus says, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and violent men take it by force."

Both Matthew and Luke use the same word to describe this action. It is "βιάζω". *biazo*; *to force*: forcing his way, suffers violence, reflexively) to *crowd oneself* (into), or (passively) to *be seized*: press, suffer violence.

To understand this phrase takes some work. The central figure around which this saying is focused is John the Baptist. In Matthew's account, Jesus begins in verse 7 to speak of John. John was in prison. A deputation from John came to Jesus to ask about the "Expected One". In Luke, this visit from John takes place in chapter 7 and this phrase is not used there. Rather it is placed in this parable and the text is changed slightly. At this point in Luke, John the Baptist has already been beheaded. This placement of the phrase in Luke means one of two things. The parable of the rich man and the manager ends at verse 15, or that Jesus repeated this idea in a different form as a tag to the parable. Only these two gospels have this phrase.

In any case, what is the meaning? In Matthew, the context is John the Baptist. Verse 11 helps us. The context here is the kingdom of heaven and the point is two fold. First, it is clear that Jesus is talking about a kingdom that is now present. He is also talking about John being the greatest of the prophets and yet, the most insignificant person in the kingdom is greater than John. (Possibly a reference to the theme that the "last shall be first and the first shall be last" showing God's dismissal

of what people think to be greatness in His sight. John initiated the kingdom by being the forerunner, “preparing the way of the Lord” of the predicted Messiah, but that is no greater than the miraculous faith of those who reject the strict Jewish tradition and teaching and grasp the truth).

Then, verse 13 helps us as well. The prophets and the Law spoke to the people until John and what has been done to John was done to both the prophets and the Law. The kingdom (especially as exhibited in word and deed by the prophets, the Law and John) endured violence, corruption, distortion, and rejection. In the remainder of the passage in Matthew, Jesus makes it clear that regardless of the manner the truth is presented, it receives a violent response or at least is rejected and disregarded in the most unpleasant manner.

Now, what about Matthew and Luke’s recording of “And violent men take it by force” (Matthew), “And everyone is forcing his way into it” (Luke)? My best guess is that people are treating the old traditions and attitude to the truth the same way in which the truth has been treated until John. In other words, men are forcibly setting aside the works of the “manager” and the Pharisees and their worldly and hypocritical goals, twisting of the truth to their own advantage and their oppression of the people to their own will and seizing the kingdom instead. In Matthew 11:20-30, there is some justification for this viewpoint. So, a forceful party, probably “the least of them” as perceived by the Pharisees and Scribes, was seizing the kingdom and in so doing was wreaking havoc on a millennium of tradition and interpretation in their view, much as they saw John and Jesus wreaking havoc on their stronghold. The following phrase lends support for this view,

“But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.”

Jesus makes it clear that He is not undermining the Law (perceiving, perhaps, that they thought He might be doing so) but making it also clear that the understanding of the Law, by its teachers, was incorrect and warped. After all, how can people be praised for seizing the kingdom and at the same time not be violating the Law? Because, in their seizing, they are fulfilling the purpose for which the Law and the prophets were given. One student pointed out that, the hearts of the Pharisees, scribes and others of like mind were so hard that, “heaven and earth will pass away” before the true intent of the Law and prophets finds any welcome in people of hardened hearts like these.

“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.”

I would have expected the tenth commandment here as a more consistent thought with the parable, but nevertheless, Luke may be quoting Jesus here as pointing out the inconsistent application of the Law by the Jews. Note: Matthew 19:1-12.

“The Parable of the Ten Virgins” - Matthew 25:1-13. Note also: John 14:1-3

The setting is a wedding, an illustration frequently used by Jesus. The characters are the five wise (prudent, prepared and alert) virgins, the five foolish virgins and the bridegroom and his attendants. The broader context of the parable is the end of the age and the coming of the Son of Man. The narrower context is that it is another parable about the kingdom of heaven. We have learned that Jesus often includes something unexpected or unforeseen when He tells these parables. The point is

that the timing or nature regarding the culmination of the promise of the kingdom and the end of all things, must not be assumed upon by the thinking, tradition and understanding of men - that it may be immediate and militant - but in actuality is unknown, demanding that those who anticipate its arrival must be prepared for any eventuality regarding the culmination of all things.

The fathers of the bride and groom, through negotiation and a final documentation called the “Ketuvah”, completed the legal marriage. It is signed and witnessed and binding once a handshake between the fathers is completed and a toast to the bride and groom is honored. There is no record of an “official clergyman” making a pronouncement of the marriage. A date for the wedding is set (normally a year or so away) and the bridegroom begins to prepare for the taking of his bride away to his new house.

Normally, once the bridegroom is nearly completed with his preparations, word is sent by his best man to the family of the bride, or her attendants that he will be coming at such and such a time (John 3:28-29). It could be at anytime of the day, but mid-morning was the most appropriate. Because there is much adornment of special attire, bangles, beads and jewelry as well as a veil, it took time for the bride and her entourage to get ready to meet the bridegroom. Both the bridegroom and the bride had a party of friends or attendants who were a special part of the ceremony and festivities (Note: Matthew 9:15). It was a joyous occasion and brought light and life to the community.

A procession was planned as a part of the wedding festivities and both the bride and bridegroom and their parties met at an agreed upon place, often the bride’s home, and, with the accompaniment of music (tambourines and a band), singing and laughter, they processed to the place of the ceremony, often the bridegroom’s father’s home and gathered in the courtyard, or in some cases an indoor hall. A parent's level of wealth often dictated the extent and lavishness of the festivities. Now comes the “chuppah”. A feast was prepared and all participated in the festivities (Genesis 29:21-23). Love songs were sung and speeches made in honor of the couple. The bride wore her veil the whole time. Symbolic ceremonies may be included such as the spreading of the bridegroom’s cloak over the bride symbolizing the faithful protection and covering of her husband only. This feast could last up to seven days or more. The bridegroom was king for the week and the bride the queen. They observed and participated in dance and song, food and wine for the whole week doing no work but waited upon by their attendants. After the feast, the bride’s parents conducted their daughter to the nuptial chamber to consummate the marriage with her new husband. Once the marriage was consummated, the wedding bed-covers were removed by the bride’s parents confirming their daughter’s virginity by the blood present on the covers. The feasting may continue through this time and on into several days of further celebration. Some festivals went on for two weeks.

### Application

The ten virgins are the attendants of the bride. The fact that they are virgins attests to their righteous life according to tradition and law. At the time they are told the bridegroom is supposed to be ready, (the time assumed to be the initiation of the kingdom) they take their lamps (oil lamps on staffs) and go out to meet the bridegroom where they anticipate the best man will make the announcement that the bridegroom is ready to meet his bride (Israel), and proceed to the house of the bride where the meeting of the bride’s party and the groom’s would occur. Then they would all

go to the place of the feast and celebrate the wedding (the culmination of the promise of the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of all the prophecies).

The anticipated time for all this was at dusk so they took lamps. This pictures the people honestly and properly expecting the coming of the kingdom, possibly as things were turning dark for them. There was always a rise in eschatological teachings when things began to look grim for the nation and people of Israel. Five of them trusted in the traditional understanding of this event. Five others were not so sure, so they took extra oil along in case the information they had was inaccurate. As it turns out, they were prudent. The bridegroom was *delayed* for a long time. This word “*delayed*” (κρονιζω - chronidzo: to take time, linger, delay, tarry) tells us that there was an expectation of an arrival time but it passed. All ten of the girls got drowsy waiting as it got later and went to sleep. At the unexpected hour of midnight, when no one would think a wedding feast would take place, the best man comes shouting, “Behold the bridegroom! Come out to meet him”. (Note: 24:42-44)

Now comes the key point of the parable. As they trimmed (adjusted the wick and relit) their lamps, five did not have enough oil left, (because they were sure of their information about the time of the bridegroom’s arrival) to keep their lamps lit. They pled with the other five to give them some of their oil. But the prudent five refused because meeting the bridegroom and getting to the feast was more important, at that moment, than all of them failing to make it because the foolish five were stubborn in their thinking. So the foolish five went away to find an oil merchant open at midnight. The bridegroom comes and *meets* the five prudent girls and the procession continues as planned. When they come to the house where the wedding feast was held, the door was shut and the feasting begun.

Later on, the five foolish virgins, alone, without the bride and the bridal party knock on the door and say, “Lord, Lord, open up to us.” The Lord answers and says, “I do not know you”. You see, he had never met them because it is incumbent upon the bride, not the bridegroom to be ready when He is ready. To limit His ability, by the tradition of men, to be free in this regard is to miss the true understanding of the things (and ruler) of the kingdom. He is not bound by our tradition, understanding or interpretation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – JESUS DEMONSTRATES THE POWER OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Mark 4:35 and following brings us back again to Jesus’ ministry of power, casting out demons, miracles and healing. In 35-41 we have the calming of the storm at sea. The gist of this event is not that the disciples fail to have enough faith to calm the storm, but that they have such little faith in Jesus and who He is. They even have to ask the question, “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

The stories in Mark 5 go a long way in revealing the truth of Jesus’ identity to the disciples. Verses 1-20 contains the account of the Gadarene demoniac. We saw the power of Jesus over the weather and the sea, here we see the power of the King over Evil, Satan and his demons. The account provokes some interesting thoughts. It is unlikely that the disciples would be eager to cross

The Sea of Galilee to the gentile land of the Decapolis. This region was comprised of ten Graeco-Roman cities, and the Jews avoided going into this area as much as they avoided going into Samaria.

Could it be that the reluctance of Jews going to this region, plus the fact that the boat was owned by and under the control of Peter and Andrew, plus their lack of faith and understanding in Jesus and the true nature of the kingdom of God was overcome by the storm over which they had no power? After Jesus calmed the storm, they found themselves near the land of the Gadarenes. The following accounts prompt the question, “Did their lack of faith relate to the person of Jesus, the nature of the kingdom or their reluctance to comply with his requests and teaching – or all of these things?”

On the enclosed maps, we can see that the Decapolis included both the cities of Gadara and Gerasa yet neither of these cities really matches the point of contact between Jesus and “Legion”. There is, however, a small city on the seaside named Gergasa which hosts caves nearby, once used as tombs, as well as a steep hillside, both matching the description in Mark 5:2 and 13. Mark notes that Jesus entered the “country of the Gerasenes” as does Luke, and Matthew calls it “the country of the Gadarenes”. There are many early manuscript variants of this name which is understandable looking at their similarity. The plausible answer as to where this took place is that the chief city was Gerasa, and the country could be described by its chief city. On the other hand, Gadara was also identified, as it appeared to be the hometown of the demoniac. But the village of Gergasa complies with the account. The similarity of names and closeness of the cities offers credence to the idea that the Gospel writers were only identifying the territory in a general sense and that the identification was secondary to the importance of the event itself.

The tragic circumstances this man had to endure were heart wrenching. Plagued by scores of demons, he had been cast out of the city, bound with chains (probably to protect himself and others, especially children) and set to dwell among the tombs. He had many self-inflicted wounds and had to be a scabbed, bloody, hairy, stinky, awful sight. At Jesus arrival, he ran to him and bowed down before Him exclaiming, “What do I have to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore you by God, do not torment me!” He recognized who Jesus was and basically claimed that the two of them had nothing in common and had no business with each other. Yet at the same time, he implored Jesus not to “torment” him, that is, not to send the demons out of the country, perhaps to the abyss. Jesus’ response demonstrates that he has full charge over Satan and his demons, and that they do nothing without the express direction or permission of God. This is evidenced throughout the scriptures. Another observation is that Jesus did not condemn the man for “deserving what he got due to his conduct”.

Jesus sent the demons into a large herd of swine feeding on the mountain. The gentiles of the area raised pigs as a sellable food source and had no compunction in doing so. This was; of course, highly objectionable to the Jews, as the pig was one of many “unclean” animals the Jews were forbidden to eat. After Jesus sent the demons into the herd, they went mad and plunged themselves into the sea and drowned. Once the townspeople realized what had happened, they entreated Jesus and his disciples to leave the area. No Gospel records the reason why they did so. Perhaps the loss of revenue due to the destruction of the herd caused them to seek Jesus’ departure before more damage occurred. Perhaps the general suspicion Gentile and Jew had of each other came into play. Whatever the reason, the people feared the power of Jesus and did not want him to disturb them further. No doubt they were grateful for what had happened to the possessed man, but that was enough for now.



The formerly possessed man sought to accompany Jesus, but was directed by Jesus to return to his home town and “report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you”. The man followed Jesus’ instructions and everyone marveled as he told the story to them. Jesus’ telling the former demoniac to report all these things to everyone was unique in that Jesus was open to the Gentiles hearing about Him, but he wanted His miracles kept quiet from the ears of the Jews. His explanation is that He knew the Jewish leadership were not receptive to Him and would seek His life. So he instructed His disciples and others to “keep it quiet, because His time had not yet come”.

Interestingly enough, this visit to Gergasa was the only thing for which Jesus had come to the region. Could the storm have played a significant part in this? We read next that He, “crossed over to the other side”. Once He had arrived (either near Magdala or Capernaum) Jesus is greeted by a “great multitude”. Two things occur. One, Jairus, a synagogue official pleads with Jesus to come to his house and lay hands on his dying daughter so she might live. His unwavering faith in Jesus is apparent in this story, and a contrast to Jesus’ own disciples. Second, while on His way, Jesus is touched by a woman having suffered hemorrhaging for twelve years. She is healed and Jesus continues to the house of the official and is met by people claiming that the little girl has died. Jesus proceeds on into the house with Jairus, Peter, James and John and possibly the little girl’s mother and grasps the hand of the girl commanding her to rise. She is raised to life and Jesus tells everyone to keep quiet about the miracle.

The most notable thing accompanying these miracles is that all three follow Jesus’ teaching in parables about the kingdom of God...that its nature is unforeseen, unexpected, incongruous, and radically different than the ingrained expectations of the Jews. And to demonstrate, as it were, the composition of the kingdom before their eyes Jesus, without prejudice, ministers to three people who each had a significant “uncleanness” about them: The demon possessed gentile man along with the unclean pigs used as a means of cleansing, the hemorrhaging woman who shouldn’t even have been in the crowd, let alone touching a “prophet” because she was “unclean”, and then Jesus’ reaching out and grasping the hand of the dead child, an unclean act forbidden by Jewish law. Truly the total picture contained in chapters four and five clearly define the nature of the kingdom of God and its King, our merciful Lord Jesus.

## **CHAPTER FIVE - EXCURSUS ON JAMES**

Mark 6 tells of events relating to his ministry in Nazareth. We are also given some insight as to the attitude of his immediate family and neighbors. See also Matthew 13:53-58, 12:46-50; (Mark 3:31; Luke 8:19-21, John 4:44); Note especially Mark 3:20-21 (“people” is “οἱ παρ αὐτοῦ”)

ἐξίστημι - existemi; to displace, to stand aside from, translated as: amazed, beside ourselves, lost His senses.

At this point, we can insert a brief excursus on James, the oldest child of Mary and Joseph, first born after Jesus. There are a number of verses relating to the apostle "James", writer of the book bearing his name, including how those around Jesus viewed Him:

Matthew 1:18-25, 12:46-50, 13:53-58, 27:50-56; 2. Mark 3:20-21, 15:37-40, 16:1; 3. Luke 8:10-21, 24:1-10; 4. John 2:12, 7:1-13; 5. Acts 1:14, 12:13-17, 15:1-21; 6. I Corinthians 15:7; 7. Galatians 1:19, 2:9, 2:12; 8. James 1:1; 9. Jude 1:1

In Mark 3:20-23, Matthew 13:53-58 and John 7:1-10 we are given insight regarding the attitude of those closest to Jesus. We also see that James is the oldest son of Mary and Joseph after Jesus. We can speculate with some accuracy that the home life of Jesus in relationship to His siblings was reflective of any normal home. With the disappearance of Joseph from the scene sometime in the 17 or so years between Jesus' visit to the temple and the beginning of his ministry, we know that the support of the family fell to Jesus and then to James as well as to any close relatives. When Jesus left home to begin his ministry, there may well have been some resentment of at least question arising from the siblings as to their welfare. There was certainly a strong sense of skepticism and dishonor as we see from the texts. Assuming James to now be the head of the family, he would have certainly been a key influence in the family and the community regarding the feelings surrounding the ministry of Jesus. Mary is exempted from this, of course, and has little to say. But from the wedding at Cana recorded in John, chapter 2, we can tell that she was fully involved with him and supportive of his work. But the decisions in the family fell to James and the advice of other closely related men.

James (Jacob), along with his brothers and sisters did not follow the ministry of Jesus and were not present at the crucifixion. The only family member present was their mother. It is noteworthy that Mary is identified in the gospels as the "mother of James" most frequently, rather than as "the mother of Jesus". This identification comes in the gospels because at the time of their writing, James had undergone a miraculous transformation and was the chief apostle of the church.

This came about because, as Paul tells us, in I Corinthians 15:1-8, Jesus made a personal one on one appearance to James. This is not recounted in the gospels, but it is apparent that James himself told Paul, or Luke of this occurrence. The effect was astounding to say the least for at the time of Jesus' ascension, James and his siblings are present and are found among the 120 who gather in the upper room awaiting Pentecost (Acts 1:1-14).

From this point onward, James is found to have an increasingly more influential position in the church in Jerusalem. In Acts 12:1-19, we read of the account of Peter's arrest. At his miraculous release he arrived at the house of Mary, John mark's mother, and told them to report his release to "James and the brethren". James came to have prominence early on. In Galatians chapter one, Paul relates his meeting with Peter and James, "the Lord's brother". Paul had not yet begun his ministry.

But this was probably three to five years after Paul's conversion. In the same epistle, chapter 2, verse 9, Paul notes that "recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reported to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas, the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles...". This account coincides with Acts 15, the famous "Jerusalem conference" where James is unquestionably in charge of the church and leader of the apostles. Notice in the Galatians verse that James is listed ahead of Peter (Cephas) and John. This also indicates the prominence James held in the church.

James stayed in Jerusalem at a time when persecution was at its height. While people scattered throughout the empire under the heavy persecution (Acts 8:1-5) including some apostles (verse 6) the rest of the apostles and James remained in Jerusalem. Jewish believers were in a difficult way.

Their businesses suffered, many lost jobs or homes to unbelieving Jews, and others were unable to buy food or provide for their families. Some of the Christian men and women were dragged off to prison leaving their children without a family. James and some of the other apostles and Christian women dedicated their lives to assisting and taking care of the poor, widowed, disenfranchised and orphaned.

James wrote in his own epistle, “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (1:27). His whole epistle is framed around the idea of putting action into one’s faith in this manner, regardless of the threat to personal safety and without resorting to worldly or ungodly means to support oneself.

James had asked Paul to “remember the poor” on his journeys (Galatians 2:10, Acts 11:28-29, 21:15-19; 24:17; Romans 15:22-33; I Corinthians 16:1-4; II Corinthians 8:1-9:15; etc.) Paul did so and upon his arrival at Jerusalem at the end of his third journey, he was soon arrested and, after several interrogations, on his way to Rome. James remained on in Jerusalem. Shortly after Paul’s arrest, James was seized and executed. This may have occurred sometime between the death of Festus and the arrival of the new governor. Josephus notes that the high priest, Ananias, took advantage of this period and had James arrested and ultimately stoned to death. This was around 62 A.D.

James’ courage and heroism, as well as the great respect he achieved among the Christian Church made him the man with whom the gospel writers identified his mother, Mary. When the name of James was mentioned, people took courage and realized that the brother of our Lord modeled and lived the faith they stood for. This brought encouragement to the church as they remembered the kind of person James had become in contrast to what he had been prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection.     End of Excursus

## MIRACLES OF OUR LORD

(Figures in Parentheses Refer to Section in THE GOSPELS PARALLELED)

MIRACLE	BIBLE PASSAGE			
Water Turned to Wine (23).....	.....	.....	.....	John 2:1
Many Healings (34).....	Matt. 4:23	Mark 1:32	.....	.....
Healing of a Leper (35).....	Matt. 8:1	Mark 1:40	Luke 5:12	.....
Healing of a Roman Centurion's Servant (42).....	Matt. 8:5	.....	Luke 7:1	.....
Healing of Peter's Mother-in-law (33)	Matt. 8:14	Mark 1:29	Luke 4:38	.....
Calming of the Storm at Sea (51).....	Matt. 8:23	Mark 4:35	Luke 8:22	.....
Healing of the Wild Men of Gadara (51).....	Matt. 8:28	Mark 5:1	Luke 8:26	.....
Healing of a Lame Man (36).....	Matt. 9:1	Mark 2:1	Luke 5:18	.....
Healing of a Woman with a Hemorrhage (52).....	Matt. 9:20	Mark 5:25	Luke 8:43	.....
Raising of Jairus' Daughter (52).....	Matt. 9:23	Mark 5:22	Luke 8:41	.....
Healing of Two Blind Men (53).....	Matt. 9:27	.....	.....	.....
Healing of a Demon-possessed Man (53).....	Matt. 9:32	.....	.....	.....
Healing of a Man with a Withered Hand (40).....	Matt. 12:10	Mark 3:1	Luke 6:6	.....
Feeding of 5,000 People (57).....	Matt. 14:15	Mark 6:35	Luke 9:12	John 6:1
Walking on the Sea (58).....	Matt. 14:22	Mark 6:47	.....	John 6:16
Healing of the Syrophenician's Daughter (61).....	Matt. 15:21	Mark 7:24	.....	.....
Feeding of 4,000 People (62).....	Matt. 15:32	Mark 8:1	.....	.....
Healing of an Epileptic Boy (68).....	Matt. 17:14	Mark 9:14	Luke 9:37	.....
Healing of Two Blind Men at Jericho (110).....	Matt. 20:30	.....	.....	.....
Cursing of the fig tree (114).....	Matt. 21:18-19	Mark 11:12-14	.....	.....
Healing of a Man with an Unclean Spirit (33).....	.....	Mark 1:23	Luke 4:33	.....
Healing of a Deaf, Speechless Man (62).....	.....	Mark 7:31	.....	.....
Healing of a Blind Man at Bethesda (64).....	.....	Mark 8:22	.....	.....
Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (110).....	.....	Mark 10:46	Luke 18:35	.....
A Miraculous Catch of Fish (163).....	.....	.....	Luke 5:4	John 21:1
Raising of A Widow's Son (43).....	.....	.....	Luke 7:11	.....
Healing of a Stoopd Woman (93).....	.....	.....	Luke 13:11	.....
Healing of a Man with the Dropsy (97).....	.....	.....	Luke 14:1	.....
Healing of Ten Lepers (102).....	.....	.....	Luke 17:11	.....
Healing of Malchus' Ear (136).....	.....	.....	Luke 22:50	.....
Healing of a Royal Official's Son (30)	.....	.....	.....	John 4:46
Healing of a Lame Man at Bethesda (39).....	.....	.....	.....	John 5:1
Healing of a Blind Man (79).....	.....	.....	.....	John 9:1
Raising of Lazarus (101).....	.....	.....	.....	John 11:38

Returning to Mark as the basis for our study, we recall that Jesus' teaching regarding the nature of the kingdom of God is revealed by both His words and by His ministry. The kingdom of God is:

1. Past, present and future, and is of a spiritual rather than a corporeal or temporal nature.

2. Comprised of citizens who have, from their hearts, a deep faith in God and His Word. These citizens are citizens without regard to whether they are Jew or Gentile. These citizens may include outcasts, rejects, diseased, demon possessed, prostitutes, and all peoples who repent in their hearts and simply place their faith and trust in the Savior.
3. In a form unexpected and incomprehensible to those steeped in Jewish tradition and expectation created by distortions of the Word over many centuries.
4. Good News to all peoples, for God's has sent a Savior who is Christ The Lord. His mercy extends to all who call upon His name.
5. Present in the person of Christ.
6. Demonstrated in His power over evil (Mark 1-3), in His parables (Mark 4), In His ministry to the unclean and outcast (Mark 5), And in His power over all creation.

Continuing in Mark 6:7-13 we have Jesus sending out the twelve on a mission which displays the power of the kingdom. Introduced by 6:6b: "And He was going around the villages teaching" we have:

Mar 6:7-13 "And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, except a mere staff--no bread, no bag, no money in their belt-- but *to* wear sandals; and *He added*, "Do not put on two tunics." And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. "Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." They went out and preached that *men* should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them." (Also: Matthew 10:1, 9-14; Luke 9:1, 3-5; 10:4-11)

There comes a time when those who are fired up to be the person God has motivated them to be must put into practice what they have learned. It is said that a person remembers far more what he does than what he hears. Jesus' spoken lessons about the nature of the kingdom of God were visually demonstrated and now could be applied through the disciples themselves as a "never-to-be-forgotten" teaching device. He sends them out in "pairs" (verse 7) suggesting the idea of mutual encouragement and to bolster their credibility, perhaps even for protection. From Jesus' word "come" they are now instructed to "go". It appears that He spent time with each pair. How they were chosen we do not know, but their mission is clear. They are to (Luke 9:2), "proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing". Mark quotes Jesus as giving them authority over "unclean spirits". This is obviously His authority, or "authority in His name" (Luke 10:17). According to Matthew, they were not to go to the cities or homes of the Samaritans or Gentiles, but to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6).

Their dependency for shelter and sustenance was to be upon God alone as they were either welcomed or turned away from the homes they visited. They were to take "no bread, no bag, no money in their belt" (verse 8), nor to wear sandals and only one tunic (verse 9). This was to insure that their provision would come from God alone through others who welcomed them. This further displayed that they were men of faith, and compelled the seriousness of their message and of the nature of the one who had sent them. They were equipped like those who had to flee when the Passover was complete in Egypt, and as a memorial, the Jews were to, "Eat it (the Passover) with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste-it is the Lord's Passover". (Exodus 12:11) Very likely this brought to mind is Deuteronomy 29:5-6 reflecting the miraculous provision of the Lord for Israel in the wilderness,

"I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am the LORD your God."

The sandals spoke that they were on a pilgrimage. When they arrived in a town and found hospitality, they were to remain in that house until their mission there was complete. It was a sign that the whole town was receptive to their mission. If they arrived in a town and found no one to grant hospitality to them, they were to leave the town with a symbol of warning. This warning was in the form of shaking the dust off their feet. It simply indicated that there was no one there willing to wash their feet, a common sign of hospitality and welcome in those days. The shaking off of the dust symbolizes a separation from everything associated with the residence or town. It further indicated that God was separating Himself from them. "He who welcomes you, welcomes Me" Jesus taught (Matthew 10:40). The converse is also true.

They had success and demonstrated to many the nature of God's kingdom and the mercy of the King. Mark 6:14-29 reflects Herod's response to what he had been told about Jesus and the ministry of the disciples. The passage "flashes" back to his encounter with John and his ordering John's execution.

Mark 6:30 continues from 6:13.

Mark 6:30-46 "The apostles \*gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught." How long were they gone? I suggest around 40 days. They are now called "apostles" by Mark.

And He \*said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many *people* coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves." We don't know where this was, but it took a trip to the "other side" across the Sea of Galilee to reach Bethsaida later in the evening (verse 45).

"*The people* saw them going, and many recognized *them* and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them." Since this was a trip by boat that could be made faster on foot, it is likely that the boat journey was brief. If it left Capernaum, they might have made for a place near Magdala, about 3 or 4 miles West of Capernaum by boat, or even Tiberias. They rowed the boat and their headway was slow. They were tired and had a full craft.

When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But He answered them, "You give them *something* to eat!" And they \*said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them *something* to eat?" And He \*said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they \*said, "Five, and two fish."

The disciples appear to be done with the matter of the crowd. Their mind is on their need for food and rest. It has been denied them by the crowds. Finally, they interrupt Jesus and point out the

obvious, as if Jesus was unaware. "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." Send them away! There was small chance of the crowds finding food at the late hour. They were more interested in Jesus' words than in food at the moment. The disciples, on the other hand, were fatigued and hungry. "Fatigue makes cowards of us all" someone wrote. The cost of discipleship was being illustrated. God's word was the "bread" the crowds needed.

So Jesus told the disciples, "You give them *something* to eat!" And they \*said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them *something* to eat?" This is about eight months wages. Did they have this much on hand? Unlikely. They were not to take a purse or money with them. And He \*said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they \*said, "Five, and two fish." Was this was what they were going to eat themselves? (On the other hand, note: John 6:1-14) Jesus told them to bring Him the loaves and fish. I wonder if they were reluctant to do so. Perhaps they thought they would not eat at all. Or perhaps they anticipated something exciting was about to happen. Perhaps they were just too tired and hungry to care.

"And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties." This was simply to make serving them easier.

"And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed *the food* and broke the loaves and He kept giving *them* to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all." This is the focus of the story, why it is told. Not that Jesus fed 5000 men (plus women and children perhaps) but that the provision always comes from God and that the disciples now had the privilege of giving it to all the hungry. Giving God's provision through Jesus to all the hungry. A physical demonstration of the manner and nature of the kingdom of God and how one becomes satisfied. "They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. There were five thousand men who ate the loaves." The abundance of God's provision is clearly demonstrated. The message from ancient times that God arranges provision even before people need it, is reiterated. There is promise that comes with each of Jesus' miracles.

Further, Jesus resisted Satan's challenge to turn stones to bread when Jesus himself was starving. That He could have done so is clear from this account. And though the conditions were similar, the consequences were quite different in that act. It would not be God's provision that was the source of all things...and, Jesus made it clear that God's Word was the true bread and took precedence over all else. That lesson is illustrated here as well.

One student noted that the 12 baskets of bread suggests the 12 tribes of Israel and that the 7 baskets at the feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8:1-10) suggest the concept of completion, because Jesus may have been in the Decapolis at this occasion.

Mark 6:45-52 (Also Matthew 14:22-34) "Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw

Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and said to them, 'Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid.' Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*, but their heart was hardened."

It is now late at night, going on into the early morning. Exhaustion has beset Jesus and the disciples. To make matters worse, the boat the disciples were rowing, was faced into a strong headwind. They made little progress. After His prayers, Jesus looked out to sea from the mountain. He saw them having great difficulty in rowing against the wind, being driven back as they tried to progress. This was somewhere between 3:00 A.M and 6:00 A.M. in the morning. Then Jesus stepped out onto the sea. This is a phenomenal event. We are told He intended to pass by the disciples while walking on the water. Why? We are not told, but the possibilities are that He felt the urge to get to the other side because dawn was soon to arrive and He had a concern for the people awaiting Him. Also, at dawn, storms on the sea tend to calm, winds shift and turn to breezes and the disciples would make good headway at that time, perhaps even raising a sail to help. Secondly, He may have felt that the disciple's faith was yet so small that they again would not ask for His help, depending on their own resources. It simply may have been to illustrate that the disciples were going "nowhere" without Him. In any case, He came to them and His appearance on the water terrified the disciples and they cried out. They didn't recognize Him. He was, in their mind an omen of disaster, a "φάντασμα" (fantasma) a "ghost". No doubt their efforts in rowing were curtailed and the progress they had made about to be nullified. Jesus hearing their genuine terror and seeing their plight stopped and spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid". These are the constant word from heaven's guests to the people of God. "Φάντασμα" is not the same word as "πνευμα" or "spirit". This word stems from ancient times and describes an apparition or disembodied spirit of one who had died. The modern term "ghost" is quite close here. Their appearance was not a good thing and brought dread and terror to anyone who saw them. Their appearance was view as a portent of disaster or judgment.

At this point, Matthew (14:28-33) inserts an additional element to the story we don't want to exclude.

"Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and \*said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

The common understanding of this story of Peter's faith adventure is probably pretty good. Depend on Christ or count on sinking is the obvious message. Peter's words, "Lord save me!" are a model for everyone seeking God's answer to their innermost need. At a time when Peter was walking on the water he found "doubt" flooding his mind and began to falter. The obvious reason is that his confidence was, it appears, first in himself, and second, shaken by the stormy conditions and the danger they presented to himself. And so he cried out for the Lord to save Him. The immediacy of Jesus' response demonstrates the truth of His eagerness to reach out to all who call upon His name. One can easily speculate that the direction of his eyes played a part, first on Jesus and he walks on



water, second on the stormy conditions and he begins to sink, and third on Jesus again as he cries out and is given the Lord's hand.

Both Matthew and Mark note that when Jesus got into the boat the wind stopped. The conclusion of the story is different however. In Matthew's account the disciples were moved to worship and proclaimed, "You are certainly (truly) God's Son!" In Mark, they were utterly astonished but failed to grasp the significance of the loaves and their hearts were hardened. This is an odd response Mark places here on their behalf. He wasn't there but had pretty good information. Perhaps he is reflecting on the feeding of the four thousand and inserts this comment here to point out the condition of their hearts. (See Mark 8:1-21, Matthew 16:5-12)

Back to Mark 6:53-56.

"When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret (just North of Magdala-not Bethsaida), and moored to the shore. When they got out of the boat, immediately *the people* recognized Him, and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured."

The end of a very long day and an exhausting ministry experience. The disciples are absent from the text. Perhaps they simply couldn't go on anymore. The text moves from a specific activity at Gennesaret (verses 53-55) to a general description of Jesus' activities in verse 56 as Mark concludes this section.

The fringe or tassel which every Israelite man was to wear at the four corners of his upper mantle (Numbers 15:38-41) was being touched by those who were in need of healing and they were healed. The prayer shawl also had these tassels as we see in modern times. The reason for the attaching cord's requirement to be blue seems to be that the robe of the high priest was blue. The phylacteries, the mezuzah, and the tassels were the three reminders of a man's duties to God and others.

Mark 7:1-4 It is interesting to note Mark's detailed editing as he explains Jewish tradition to his readers. This lends credence to the thought that many of his readers were indeed Gentile, and the tradition that he wrote to the young church at Rome.

"The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders; and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)"

Another fact-finding delegation of religious types from Jerusalem. Jews became ceremonially defiled during the normal circumstances of daily life, and were cleansed by pouring water over the hands. The open street market place is where Jews would come into contact with Gentiles, or with other Jews who did not celebrate the ceremonial law, and thus they would become unclean..

7:5, "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

The tradition of the elders was considered to be binding.

7:6-And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

Jesus clearly contrasts the two, the traditions of men and the commandment of God. The traditions of the elders refers to centuries old practice of observance. The elders of the Old Testament period were men who had achieved not just age and wisdom but respect in the community. They often would sit in the city gates and render judgment over civil disputes. From time to time, elders judged by who paid them the highest bribe (Amos 5:10-12) and were called to account for their corruption by prophets of God. Their role often led to higher decisions of what we would call capital crimes and were often the ones to advise punishment, even death. They were called upon to assume religious leadership, interpret the law and set religious guidelines for the people. Sometimes they were even involved in the selection of kings. In the times of Christ, the elders were leaders in the synagogue and played a major role in the local councils and the Sanhedrin. They were placed in these respected roles by the way they conducted themselves religiously, personally and cognitively. To illustrate how many Jews twisted the will of God by choosing corrupt traditions of the past, (verses 9-13)

He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH'; but you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),' you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

The word "Corban" is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "offering". By using this word in a religious vow an irresponsible Jewish son could formally dedicate to God (i.e. to the temple) his earning that would otherwise have gone for the support of his parents. The money, however, did not necessarily have to go for religious purposes. The Corban formula was simply a means of circumventing the clear responsibility of children toward their parents as prescribed in the law. The teachers of the law held that the Corban oath was binding, even when uttered rashly. There was always a caution given toward any who would make this oath. Jesus taught His disciples to make no oaths, no swear by heaven or earth. The practice of Corban (that is to say, "given to God") was one of many traditions that adhered to the letter of the "law" while ignoring its spirit. (Note: Numbers 30:1-2 – which was used to justify the practice, and then note 3-16) Mark 7:13 "invalidating the word of God..." Jesus rejects the practice of using one Biblical teaching to nullify another, especially if the motive for doing so is corrupt. Numbers 30:1-2 satisfied the letter of the passage but missed the intent of the law as a whole. The Jews had distorted the Law to their own benefit. This tradition was later included in the Mishna, some 200 years after Christ's teaching. Apparently the Jews disagreed with Jesus.

After He called the crowd to Him again, He *began* saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."] When he had left the crowd *and* entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (*Thus He* declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

True defilement is now before us. It is not in what can be seen, but in what is unseen. Yet, sooner or later, the unseen matters of the heart surface and display openly, for all to see, the defilement we all have in our hearts. Praise God for His mercy and grace which negates this defilement, not counting it against us because of Christ. And, because of Him, we can allow His Spirit to scrub away at these things so that they have less and less impact on our lives and conduct.

7:24 Escaping Galilee.

"Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know *of it*; yet He could not escape notice.

We now close in on the conclusion of the first half of Jesus' ministry. His fame has now spread throughout Israel and beyond. Even Herod Antipas had Him in his sights. It is likely that the antagonistic Jews from Jerusalem could betray Him to Herod before his ministry was complete. His disciples accompanied Him on the journey. Rest and refreshment at last. Tyre was about 35 miles away on the seacoast of The Mediterranean. It was in Gentile country. Here the crowds did not follow. But, His fame had reached even that Gentile city and soon after entering a house,

Mark 7:25 "a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophoenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ("kept asking" – "ἠρώτα" imperfect active of "ἔρωταω"– third person singular) This indicates a pleading, a begging attitude on her part as she was on the floor at His feet. Jesus' response startles us at first, but He has His reasons for responding in such a manner.

Mark 7:27 "And He was saying to her, 'Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'"

His answer reflects several things within a complex situation that had to be settled. Bottom line, this entire discourse is designed by Jesus to do two things beyond granting the woman's request. One is to teach a critical lesson to His disciples (as usual) and two is to illustrate, once again, the nature of the kingdom and of the King who rules over it. His time to teach these lessons is drawing to a close and he does not want His disciples to forget the lessons. So he, as one puts it, makes a fuss, or stages the discussion for purposes that will ultimately reach out beyond His own timeframe through the disciples.

The Jerusalem conference in Acts 15 becomes the pivotal point of early evangelism to the Gentiles and the decision rendered by James reflects Jesus' lesson here and in other places. Jesus again seeks to shake the disciples out of their box. Then, Jesus can little afford to raise the ire of anyone to the point that they report Him and prematurely seek His arrest. Jesus first gets the disciples attention and support by His conduct toward the woman. He ignores her and she persists. Finally the disciples are forced to come to Him and ask that she be sent away (Matthew 15:23). Jesus, in their presence, addresses her. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

He is dealing with a Greek, in a Gentile city, [called by Matthew a Canaanite to directly enhance the hostility between Jew (his primary audience) and this particular type of Gentile], and those observing, especially His disciples. His answer reiterates to them what he told them about their mission, that it is first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to the Gentiles. This serves not only to cement the disciples' attitude to Him, but also to deflect any criticism on their part as they were still hard of heart and conflicted over ministry to the Gentiles (Matthew 15:21-25). Matthew makes it clear by his use of "Canaanite woman" that Jesus' ministry ultimately is without prejudice even though Jesus is using terminology one could mistakenly take for prejudice on His part. The language, I suggest, of Matthew and Jesus here in Mark verse 27 is used to deliberately reflect Jewish prejudice as most Jews, including His disciples, would use. After all, the term "dog" was one derogatory term the Jews used of the Gentiles.

Second, Jesus is dealing with a woman, and though his compassion is toward the woman, and He has already planned to grant her request (Mark 7:29) He maintains the social propriety so no one can complain, and His ministry be curtailed.

Third, He places the woman in a position of needing to be persistent, and employs a typical Jewish style of bantering as He did in John four with the Samaritan woman, in order to draw from her a statement He couldn't refuse. With the life of her daughter at stake, there is no doubt that the woman would persist as long as it took. It is clear from her words and attitude that she believed Him, not just to be some sort of snake oil salesman or a possible help, but the Lord Himself. This is even more that the disciples were willing to admit at this time.

These are a few suggestions and there may be other reasons as well for Jesus' response in this manner.

Mark 7:28: "But she answered and said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, *but* even the dogs under the table feed on the children's crumbs.'

Jesus used the term for "little dogs", or pets, those belonging to the household and to the family. She understood the implication that the "bread" was first to be given to the Jews, but was willing, as a stranger or a stray, to settle for the crumbs under the table like a dog

Mark 7:29 "And He said to her, 'Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.'

Jesus' answer is revealing.

First, it affirms that the ministry of God is to all peoples without leaving out the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Second, He includes her within the family structure, even as one of the “dogs” if necessary, to make it clear to the disciples that the power and blessings of the kingdom of God are not limited to Israel alone.

Third, the lesson to His disciples is unmistakable. They have been set up, and were even a party to it. Now they have nothing to say except to wonder and meditate on the episode. We know, from the existence of the account, it was impressed upon them. For once, there is nothing to be said by them at the conclusion of this astounding event.

Mark 7:30 “And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left. And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having departed.”

What a blessing this story is. Not only does it teach us the true heart of The Savior for all peoples, but it teaches us something about the proper heart of people as well as revealed in this woman. There is something about the seriousness of our inner turmoil that pushes us to plead persistently with The Lord regarding a need. He then knows that our commitment toward that person’s need is rising toward that of His own. Prayer needs to be this way, rather than flinging off some words of routine that vaporize into the wind never to be recalled or remembered. (Dave Swanson illustration)

His compassion and desire for the healing of the Gentile woman’s daughter was as genuine as any He had for a Jewish mother (Such as for the widow at Nain in Luke 7). But in this case, He needed to pursue this course of dialogue for His own reasons as suggested above. (Note: Matthew 15:21-28)

Mar 7:31: “Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.”

Jesus then traveled about twenty-five miles north from Tyre to Sidon and then southeast through the territory of Herod Phillip to the east side of the Sea of Galilee. The circuitous route may have been to avoid entering Galilee, where Herod Antipas was in power, (See Mark 6: 17-29 where Antipas thought that the beheaded John had risen from the dead in the person of Jesus and intimated a hostile interest in Him) and where many people wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king after the feeding of the five thousand. (John 6:14-15)

“They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue *with the saliva*; and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ that is, ‘Be opened!’ (“Ephphatha” - an Aramaic word that Mark translates for his hearers). ‘And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he *began* speaking plainly. (Note: Isaiah 35:5-6) “And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it. They were utterly astonished, saying, ‘He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’”

The danger of the reporting lay in the possibility that Jesus’ ministry might be cut short. (Matthew 8:4, 16:20, etc.) This fear is revealed in the next episode as well.

We are now into the second half of Jesus' ministry as reported by the Gospels. We have the feeding of the four thousand at this point which we have already reviewed. The account closes with Jesus' question to His disciples, "Do you not yet understand?"

Mark 8:22-26, "And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. (These friends of the blind man had a true sorrow for their friend. Again, the historical present is used "are imploring"). Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, 'Do you see anything?' And he looked up and said, 'I see men, for I see *them* like trees, walking around.' (The blind man knew of the shape and size of tree, having, perhaps bumped into them, touching them and feeling their girth) Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and *began* to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village.'"

This second laying on of hands is unusual in Jesus' ministry. No doubt he could have done a complete healing at the first touch, or even at a word. But there is usually a lesson in His method. It is interesting to notice in chapter 7 that Jesus speaks of one's hearing with the words, (although a questionable Markan source), ["If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."] Then he comes to the Decapolis where He heals a deaf mute and the man is able to hear and speak clearly. Then in chapter 8, just prior to this passage and after feeding the four thousand we read,

"Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They *began* to discuss with one another *the fact* that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, \*said to them, "Why do you discuss *the fact* that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "When *I broke* the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." And He was saying to them, "*Do you not yet understand?*" (Italics mine)

Now, he comes to Bethsaida and it takes two touches to heal the blind man's vision. Perhaps the Point is for his disciple's benefit. Perhaps it will take more than one touch for the "blind" to see clearly. Again note the fulfillment of Isaiah 35:5-6, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah." His prohibition against entering his village on the way to his house again illustrates Jesus' concern over the authorities being made aware, at this time, of His presence and ministry. People already looked to Him as a king (Messiah) and, as we know, this designation was ultimately used to have Jesus arrested and crucified. (Note Matthew 11:21-24, Luke 10: 13-15) Apparently, Jesus had brought the blind man "out of the village" so his ministry would cause less reaction.

It is not an accident that Jesus, at this time, desires to know what the general public thinks about Him so He can plan His future routes. In fact, He has now gone to Caesarea Philippi, out of the territory of Galilee again. Caesarea Philippi was rebuilt by Herod's son Phillip and renamed for Caesar Tiberius and himself. It was originally called Paneas in honor of the Greek god Pan. (It is called Banias today) The shrine of Pan was located there. The region was especially pagan. Pan is

portrayed as more or less bestial in shape, generally having the horns, legs and ears of a goat and was the god of flocks and herds and he is seen as the shepherd, calming them with his flute.

It appears that the dialogue Jesus engages in with His disciples at this point is to accomplish two things. One is to determine what his fame has brought to the mind of the general populace in terms of how they perceive who He is at this point. This seems to indicate another time that Jesus was concerned as to how close He was to being pursued and captured by His opponents. Second, He asked His disciples the same thing. If His disciples are not yet clear as to His identity and mission, then perhaps He can rest a little easier for yet a little while.

Mark 8:27-30 “Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do people say that I am?’ They told Him, saying, ‘John the Baptist; and others *say* Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.’ And He *continued* by questioning them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ.’ And He warned them to tell no one about Him.”

From this point on we enter a section (8:31-10:52) where Jesus is predicting His death and resurrection and the geography moves from Galilee toward Jerusalem and the closing days of Jesus’ earthly work. The true meaning of “Messiah” or “Christ” is defined and we see how Jesus applies this to Himself. The English word “Christ” is transliterated from the Greek “Χριστος” (Crees-tos). “Χριστος” stems from the root word for “to lightly rub with oil”, “Χριω”, (chreeo), or “to anoint”. The Greek word is chosen because it means essentially the same thing as the Hebrew word “Messiah” or “xvm” – “ma-shach”, “to *rub* with oil”, that is, to *anoint*; by implication to *consecrate*; also to *paint*: - anoint, paint. The “anointed one” referred primarily to the king of Judah whom was selected by God and “anointed” with an olive oil compound by a prophet or seer. Note: I Samuel 10:1 and 16:13 for example.

Popular Jewish ideas associated with the term “Christ” were largely political and national rather than spiritual, Jesus seldom used the term or applied it to Himself.

Mar 8:31-32a “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly.”

Jesus’ most common title for Himself was “Son of Man”. He uses it 84 times in the Gospels and it is never used by anyone else. In Daniel 7:13-14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure who, in the end times, is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power. It is Jesus way of trying to get His disciples to see the link between “Messiah” and “Son of Man”. Again, He is shaking their preconceived notions. The suffering is in accordance with the predictions in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The Elders, already discussed, are lay members of the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews.

Mark 8:32b-33 “And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and *said*, ‘Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’”

Peter is still envisioning, here and in verse 30 above, the role of the Messiah in popular terms.

Peter's confession is soon followed by a strong rebuke from Jesus. This illustrates clearly that Peter's confession of Jesus as the "Christ" was stated with traditional views in mind and so when Jesus spoke of His impending death, Peter felt that this was a total contradiction with what Jesus had already said. Peter's rebuke probably went something like this, "Oh no Lord, this can never be. How can you say such a thing Lord, you just got through admitting you are the Messiah, the anointed king, and now you are contradicting yourself by saying that you will be taken and killed. The long awaited Messiah will not suffer and be killed. That's ridiculous, you are not going to suffer and die. We will see to it that you don't."

Peter's attempt to dissuade Jesus from going to the cross held the same kind of temptation Satan plied Jesus with at the outset of His ministry. So Peter was severely rebuked.

Jesus encountered this kind of expectation wherever He went. In John chapter 6, for example, after the feeding of the 5,000, we read, "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.'" So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone." (John 6:14-15). Shortly thereafter, reflecting on the feeding of bread to the masses, Jesus was in a debate with the Jews regarding His statement, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst", we are told in verses 66-69, As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. 'We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.'"

The dilemma of the disciples and His followers is clear by the constant clash of their preconceived ideas about the Messiah with what Jesus said and taught. The church today still finds itself in a similar dilemma as we see in the following excursus.

## **CHAPTER SIX - EXCURSUS ON THE "SERMON ON THE MOUNT"**

The Gospel by Matthew includes an extensive teaching of Jesus we term "The Sermon on the Mount". It is only found in this Gospel and in this fashion, comprising three chapters (5:1-7:29). It is not found in this fashion in any of the other three Gospels, and it would be appropriate to suggest that Matthew's account is a collection of Jesus teachings, which agrees with his style (see the introduction on page 1). In Mark and Luke, we have many of the verses from the "sermon" scattered throughout their Gospels and Jesus uses these in various places and at various times to amplify His point. Compare, for example, Matthew 5:1ff. with Luke 6:20-49, 12:58-59, 14:34; Mark 10:4-12, 11:25 etc. This is one of five lengthy discourses in Matthew (chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25).

Whether these teachings apply to the Christian and, if so, how, needs to be examined. We will see as we progress through this and other teachings of Jesus that a discernment which sees His words as applying to His hearers under the Old covenant (The Law) as opposed to those which transcend the Old Covenant with a view to the New.

Bottom line, if a person, be he Jewish or Christian, attempts to apply and exercise these principles by the effort of his own strength and will, he will fail because the normal human condition and



predisposition is not in accord with the character Jesus presents. The whole point of attaining righteousness and blessedness actually begins in the heart and spirit, not in works and efforts of the flesh driven by a prideful mind that says, "I can do all this and more!" Most Christians attempting to add all this as another set of responsibilities or works to perform so they can be blessed will fall into the sad state of discouragement, depression, despair and disillusionment common to those burdened by the demands of the Law itself. Jesus' teachings are clear, even from this passage in Matthew. The opposite is true – it is not of works! However, Christians who know they have been born anew should, as they grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus, begin to see a growing change of heart, mind and thus experience the characteristics in their personal lives that result in the blessings Jesus spoke of. Paul made it clear that, "...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13) For His hearers at the time, much of what Jesus told them was difficult to grasp. And as He progressed, it became even more difficult. Jesus begins with how blessedness is achieved.

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit!"** This first "beatitude" defines the source of "blessedness". Blessedness is not simply a state of happiness due to everything going right, but the sense of ultimate Well-being that flourishes within those whose faith extends out beyond themselves and the things of this world...to God. It is the distinctive spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God. Social, economic, or religious status is of no consideration.

This state can only be achieved through spiritual "poverty" (being "poor in spirit"). The original term used here is πτωχός, *pto-khos*, from πτώσσω *pto-ssō* (to *crouch*; a *beggar* (as *cringing*), that is, *pauper* (strictly denoting absolute or public *mendicancy*), literally (often as noun) or figuratively (*distressed*): - beggar (-ly), poor.

From Jamison, Fausett and Brown's Commentary:

"All familiar with Old Testament phraseology know how frequently God's true people are styled "the poor" (the "oppressed," "afflicted," "miserable") or "the needy"--or both together (as in Psa 40:17; Isa 41:17). The explanation of this lies in the fact that it is generally "the poor of this world" who are "rich in faith" (Jam 2:5; - "Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" compare 2Co 6:10; Rev 2:9); while it is often "the ungodly" who "prosper in the world" (Psa 73:12). Accordingly, in Luk 6:20-21, it seems to be this class--the literally "poor" and "hungry"--that are specially addressed. But since God's people are in so many places styled "the poor" and "the needy," with no evident reference to their temporal circumstances (as in Psa 68:10; Psa 69:29-33; Psa 132:15; Isa 61:1; Isa 66:2), it is plainly a frame of mind which those terms are meant to express. Accordingly, our translators sometimes render such words "the humble" (Psa 10:12, Psa 10:17), "the meek" (Psa 22:26), "the lowly" (Pro 3:34), as having no reference to outward circumstances. But here the explanatory words, "in spirit," fix the sense to "those who in their deepest consciousness realize their entire need" (compare the Greek of Luk 10:21; Joh 11:33; Joh 13:21; Act 20:22; Rom 12:11; 1Co 5:3; Phi 3:3). This self-emptying conviction, that "before God we are void of everything," lies at the foundation of all spiritual excellence, according to the teaching of Scripture. Without it we are inaccessible to the riches of Christ; with it we are in the fitting state for receiving all spiritual supplies (Rev 3:17-18; Mat 9:12-13).

**"...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"**--(See on Mat 3:2). The poor in spirit not only shall have--they already have--the kingdom. The very sense of their poverty is begun riches. While others "walk in a vain show"--"in a shadow," "an image"--in an unreal world, taking a false view of

themselves and all around them--the poor in spirit are rich in the knowledge of their real case. Having courage to look this in the face, and own it guilelessly, they feel strong in the assurance that "unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Psa 112:4); and soon it breaks forth as the morning. God wants nothing from us as the price of His saving gifts; we have but to feel our universal destitution, and cast ourselves upon His compassion (Job 33:27-28; 1Jo 1:9). So the poor in spirit are enriched with the fullness of Christ, which is the kingdom in substance; and when He shall say to them from His great white throne, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you," He will invite them merely to the full enjoyment of an already possessed inheritance.

(End of Commentary)

This is why Jesus' teachings were so hard to grasp. His Jewish hearers were looking for something to do rather than for something to be! Even in the church today we have the Jewish mind-set applied by Christians as the means to achieving this state of "blessedness". Notice that the beatitudes refer to an attitude and state of the inner heart and mind. It is not Jesus intention that these attributes be faked in some sort of obligatory work believers suppose they must muster.

Skipping ahead with Jamison, Fausett and Brown;

**Matthew 5:7 – "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"** --Beautiful is the Connection between this and the preceding beatitude, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." The one has a natural tendency to beget the other. As for the words, they seem directly fetched from Psa 18:25, "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful." Not that our mercifulness comes absolutely first. On the contrary, our Lord Himself expressly teaches us that God's method is to awaken in us compassion towards our fellow men by His own exercise of it, in so stupendous a way and measure, towards ourselves."

Paul wrote, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). And in Colossians 3:12-15, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."

It becomes clearer as one reads the teachings of Jesus in this section that He is talking about attributes rote obedience to the law could not provide. And yet, when one comes face to face with the intent of the Law, one realizes he is indeed unrighteous before God and in need of mercy and an inner transformation. He is driven to a search so he will know the answer as to how he can become truly righteous before God. He knows, that by the works of the Law, these attributes cannot be achieved by self-righteousness at all! Not that obedience to God is dismissed, but the "why" one is obedient to God comes into question – that is the motive and purpose for the obedience. In other words, is one seeking to achieve righteousness and blessedness through obedience? Or is one obedient because he has already achieved righteousness and blessedness through faith and the recognition of his severe need of mercy from God himself?. So one comes to the proper place, after hearing Jesus of seeking, "...first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

From JFB once again, "According to the view given in Scripture," says TRENCH most justly, "the Christian stands in a middle point, between a mercy received and a mercy yet needed." Sometimes the first is urged upon him as an argument for showing mercy--"forgiving one another, as Christ forgave you" (Col 3:13; Eph 4:32): sometimes the last--"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy"; "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven" (Luk 6:37; Jam 5:9). And thus, while he is ever to look back on the mercy received as the source and motive of the mercy which he shows, he also looks forward to the mercy which he yet needs, and which he is assured that the merciful--according to what BENGEL beautifully calls the "benigna talio" ("the gracious requital") of the kingdom of God--shall receive, as a new provocation to its abundant exercise. The foretastes and beginnings of this judicial recompense are richly experienced here below: its perfection is reserved for that day when, from His great white throne, the King shall say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and thirsty, and a stranger, and naked, and sick, and in prison, and ye ministered unto Me." Yes, thus He acted towards us while on earth, even laying down His life for us; and He will not, He cannot disown, in the merciful, the image of Himself.

It is critical to note that Jesus was born under the law, keeping and applying the law as it was intended to be kept and applied. Note Galatians 4:1-9. "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"

"At that time" in verse 8 refers to the time prior to the redemption provided by God in Christ at the cross. Jesus' taught under the Law and most of what He taught applied the Law in its fullest intent to the lives of the people He confronted, especially the self-righteous religious leadership of Israel. His intent was to prompt self-examination of one's own heart and thought regarding the source of true righteousness. He did not come "to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it" (Matthew 5:17). And He did so through His life, teachings, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. He was circumcised, kept the Sabbath, and all the feasts and holy days because He was born under the Law.

It is important to note that "law" of any kind would not be necessary if people were perfect and righteous. Law is created to restrain evil and the breaking of the law involves penalties. The existence of law therefore, illustrates, by the very necessity of its existence, that people are corrupt and unruly. Rules, regulations, ordinances, stipulations, and all other forms defining proper, righteous and "fair" deportment among peoples exist to channel otherwise chaotic and anarchistic humans into a community in which people may live with some measure of peace. Without law, people would, like the boys in "Lord of the Flies", become a law unto themselves and the carnal, evil and depraved nature of every human would be allowed unfettered expression.

Contrary to what many teach these days, people are not born "good" and with "goodness" and "righteousness" and "innocence" stamped upon them from the outset. If this were the case, people would have to be taught to behave and think in an evil fashion, since they are filled with goodness from the outset. Quite the opposite! We have to continually teach people what the "right" is and work hard to keep our children within its parameters. Those who fail to do so with their children inflict unruly, undisciplined and often violent citizens upon society. We spend billions and billions

of dollars every year on controlling or stifling the evil people inflict on each other and our world. As much as 90% of our national budget is spent on securing our nation from people at home and abroad attempting to wreck havoc upon our citizenry.

There are no laws that apply to animal behavior and conduct. Animals are not held responsible for being what they are. But, for some reason, people are. This fact is worthy of discussion all on its own, but let us leave this point with this thought...the millions of laws this society has imposed upon itself reveals the depth of the corruption and evil within the human heart. No one had to teach us to be this depraved. We just are. Thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of laws are passed each year through this nation's various governmental agencies. Many are legislated to close loopholes in existing laws that people, with questionable motives, seek to drive through to their own benefit. Others repeal laws supporting righteous and godly conduct in favor of licensed depravity and godlessness. This should give us an indication regarding the future of this nation and what we will have to endure in short order.

God's Law not only reveals the evil, depraved and corrupt nature of man, but the source as well – the human heart. Jesus teachings in this monumental passage underscore this truth.

The answer to the condition of mankind lies neither in passing more laws, nor in education, medicine, psychology, genetics or in any human endeavor, but in the change of human nature itself in each and every heart of each and every human being. This, according to the Word of God and the teachings of Jesus in this monumental passage and others is a change that only God Himself can accomplish. It is possible to begin the change by a simple act of faith in the truth and person of Jesus Christ.

His teachings, for the most part therefore, do not apply to the Christian as additional qualities to aspire to through the effort of the flesh, since it is the work of The Holy Spirit to stamp the parameters and nature of righteousness on the heart. Empty ritual is not what God wants, and this was the gist of Jesus' teachings. The issue is not one of outward obedience, but obedience that comes gladly from a changed heart, desire and mind. Those who produce outward righteousness without regard to inner righteousness have missed the intent of the Law and the intent of Jesus teachings. On the other hand, the godly attitude of the heart Jesus illustrates in the "sermon" is certainly something desirable for the Christian to possess, but again, the outward façade or works described as "self righteousness" are condemned here. The point of the "sermon" is to illustrate the futility or "works" as the means of attaining righteousness and drive the hearer to understand his need of the mercy of God as so clearly taught by Jesus in Luke 18:9-14 in His parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Illustrating the point that keeping the letter of the law does not fulfill the intent of the law are statements such as:

Matthew 5:20-22: "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. *You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'* But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the Supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell."

The italics illustrate the law or the tradition. Requiring rote obedience to achieve righteousness is not the point of the law. That is why Jesus contrasts what He says to the law and spotlights the heart as the key and source to true faith and righteousness.

Another example of Jesus contrasting the outward obedience with the true condition of the heart is found in Matthew 5:27 and 28. "*You have heard that it was said, 'you shall not commit adultery';* but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

Here there is no mistake. Under the law, lustful ogling is not mentioned, but is it okay since it doesn't violate the specific commandment? Adultery is a capital crime under the law. But lusting? What is the problem? Further, how many are ripping their eyes out over this common sin? None. The application of the severity of the Law is made clear here when applied to the heart as well. But even Christians who think they must abide by every literal word Jesus' spoke balk at his command to tear out one's eye if it offends. For those who believe that the Christian is obligated to do as Jesus directs and that His teaching is for those under grace as well as for those under the law, either shape up and rip out the eyes or recognize that your theology and hermeneutic is probably badly flawed (an admission, by the way, no less difficult than that of ripping out one's eye for most of the fundamentalists and literalists). It is important to note here that Jesus is teaching with the flavor of the Middle-Eastern, Western-Asian concrete expressions and forms of pedagogy, not with the Western-Greek-European- American abstract literalism we are so used to. That is why it is sometimes so hard for us to grasp the point and intent of the teachings of Scripture.

Again, Jesus contrasts the letter of the law with the intent of God, to convict the heart. The italics are supplied highlighting the statements of the law or tradition.

Matthew 5:31-32 "It was said, '*WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE*'; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Matthew 5:33-37 "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, '*YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD*.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is *THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING*. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil."

Matthew 5:38-42 "You have heard that it was said, '*AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH*.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, '*YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy*.' "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous."

Matthew 5:48, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The word "perfect" here is a translation of the Greek "τέλειος" meaning complete, whole, mature, from the root "τέλος", the end, the termination, time is no more. This indicates not perfection as we think of flawless, but having reached one's ultimate finished end or result."

People will have one of four responses to these teachings:

(1) "Yes, Lord, I will try harder and grit my teeth to never lust, break my word, make false promises, and I will never resent the offense and evil of others and I will love my enemy and give him the coat off my back, as well as be perfect as God is."

This is the response of the fool. Will he also accept the punishment of failure? This is the response of the supremely ego driven self-righteous who love to look down their noses at others who are not so worthy. Many Christians, unfortunately enough, fall into this category. The failure that will surely occur from this understanding and application of Jesus' teachings will often lead one into discouragement, depression, and defeat. The life of a Christian will be a chore, neither a light load as Jesus promised, nor a blessing, just a burden.

(2) "I can't manage this kind of a life. Bye-bye!"

This response is of the honest man, yet he doesn't understand the real intent of Jesus' teachings. The reason he is saying "bye-bye" is that he is saying it to the self-righteous or deceiving fools up in response one who are trying to foist this righteousness of works on others even though they can't accomplish it themselves and only hope to justify their position by sucking in the innocent through this version of "The Gospel". Yeah, "bye-bye" is a better answer than "okay, I can do that". But, the sad note is that a soul who is seeking may well be lost due to the foolishness of these misguided Christians. "I'll think about it" is another way of departure.

(3) "Hey, Jesus! You're throwing a monkey wrench into our little system of control over the innocent but ignorant people. Off with your head!"

This is the response that Jesus finally received from the religious folks who didn't want their tradition and power messed with. "Kill Him". They may really understand what He is talking about and realize that if everyone did, their power and control base, let alone their own "righteous" standing with God (by their own definition) would be lost. "Woah!"

(4) "Oh God be merciful to me, a sinner"

This is the only and properly appropriate response to the point Jesus was making throughout this "sermon".

An example of how His teaching is properly to be understood is found in Matthew 6:5-15, the "Lord's Prayer". In verses 14 and 15, Jesus makes an application to His hearers. "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." Is this true under The New Covenant of Grace through faith in Christ? Paul answers this in Ephesians 4:32. "And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you". So when did our forgiveness occur? In chapter 1 verse 7, Paul writes, "In Him we have redemption

through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us.” Also in Colossians 3:13, Paul notes, “...forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

Those who believe that Jesus teachings apply to the Christian are inconsistent. For example, Jesus told the man He healed from leprosy to, “Go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, for a testimony to them.” Yet Christians admit that this is actually not required. Why? Because they divide the Old Covenant into sections, “some of which we are supposed to keep, and some of which we are not supposed to keep”. They make a distinction between “ceremonial law” and “the moral law or the commandments”.

However, Christians are not under the “Law”, which includes everything. The above account in Luke, chapter 5 makes it clear that Jesus was still under the law and instructing the proper application of the law to the hearts of all peoples. There are many such examples.

In Galatians 4:21-5:6, Paul makes the case for those who still want to be under the law even after Christ has fulfilled it in His own blood. Paul concludes, “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” This does not mean that a born again believer has lost his salvation. What it does mean is that his life has tumbled from the blessings, freedom and leading of grace down to the bondage, guilt and condemnation of the law again. When Christ fulfilled the law, it means that every demand of the law was met and the ultimate sacrifice to satisfy the law’s demand for every sin was made and was infinitely applicable to all peoples, past present and future.

Tithing, Sabbath keeping, and all of the commandments etc. all fall under the law. It is not as if the law is now awful or horrible. We have already seen that it is perfect, holy, good and righteous. But once one is born by the Spirit through faith in Christ, the law has done its work by bringing us to our knees in recognition of our own un-holiness, corruption and need of a savior. The Law has done the perfect job of being a mirror to our true selves (James 1:22-25). It is not, however, able to produce life, righteousness, joy, love etc. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. So the Christian must let go of the hand of the law which can bring us only so far, and grasp the hand of The Holy Spirit who will lead us further on.

The purpose of the law, especially as it is explained by Jesus in this “sermon” is to bring us to repentance leading to faith. Paul states it this way:

Galatians 3:24-29 “Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.”

In Matthew 7:1-6, Jesus teaching is for those under the law, especially 1 and 2.

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own

eye? "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Jesus makes it clear that believers do not come into judgment.

John 3:17-21 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

For a fuller understanding of the role of the law, read the book of Galatians carefully. Also one may reference this author's work on "The Old and New Covenants".

### **END OF EXCURSUS**

## **CHAPTER SEVEN - THE EVENTS LEADING TO THE TRANSFIGURATION**

The scene is still in the region of Caesarea-Philippi where the transfiguration is about to occur. They appear to be yet several days from Mount Hermon. After His exchange with His disciples over who people think Him to be along with Peter's confession. Peter is set off by Jesus' statement that, "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." After the exchange of rebukes, Jesus calls the people to Himself.

Mark 8:34-9:1, "And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? "For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." 9:1, "And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.'" (See also: Matthew 16:24-28; Luke 8:18-27)

Here, Jesus lays it out for plainly for all to see. Peter, as the chief disciple, along with the others had made it clear that their understanding of who the Messiah is to be and what he will do has not wavered. Peter finds himself in the position of expressing the viewpoints of the others and Jesus decides to firmly set the matter clear. Following Jesus will not bring the glory they suppose. They, as dedicated followers, may be severely disappointed when their expectations of being the loyal subjects to the conquering Messiah, reaping reward and position because of their faithfulness, are dissipated. We have already seen the expectation of the people (in John 6:14 ff.), "Jesus, perceiving



that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.” And, “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.” Many of his followers must have thought that their loyalty and support would result in some personal gain or position. In chapter 10 of Mark, yet to come, we can see the outright and shameless expression of this motive as well as the repression of the thought of a suffering and dying Messiah. James and John approach Jesus (in Matthew it is their mother) saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on *Your* left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. "But to sit on My right or on *My* left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Hearing *this*, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.” Of course they did. James and John beat them to the punch. This is what is called “chutzpah.” In all fairness to the disciples, there are few of us, if in their shoes, who would think or act differently.

In any case, the plain statement Jesus makes here must have caused another sifting of the followers. He is forcing them to a decision. “Will they continue to follow Him on His terms forsaking the iron grip of their own understanding of these things? Or, will they turn away from the clear image Jesus portrays for them and leave Him?” For Jesus invokes the image not of a Roman defeat, but of a Roman torture stake He and his followers will need to be willing to submit to. Then, He draws the line in the sand. If you are ashamed of a crucified Messiah, then He will be ashamed of you when He does return in power and glory. The decision is theirs, right here and right now. One’s eternal life depends upon rejecting the popular ideal and believing in Jesus as the true Messiah. Not only that, one must realize that one’s physical life may be saved by denying Jesus, but eternal life will be lost. Conversely, discipleship may mean the cross losing physical life but gaining eternal life. Jesus calls them to a decision. It is a stiff challenge. Then He follows with a solemn affirmation;

9:1, And Jesus was saying to them, "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power."

There are two main interpretations of this verse: 1) It is a prediction of the transfiguration occurring a week later, demonstrating the glory of the kingdom; or 2) It refers to the Son of man’s authority and kingly reign over His post-resurrection church.

But, considering the context, we could also suggest that Jesus may again be speaking about “insight” or “understanding” in those in whom the “light is dawning”. We have determined that the kingdom of God has become present in Jesus, and that His miracles to date and onward demonstrate the glory and power of the kingdom.

Another view of some is that it may reflect on John’s future vision we have as the Book of Revelation, where John is given the vision of the Kingdom and all that leads up to the culmination of Christ’s reign. In addition, all those privileged to read it are included. Then, the words of this text may not just apply to His present hearers, as millennia of believers become included in the vision and are among those “standing here today”.

Perhaps those who were gathered together on Pentecost experienced this fulfillment.

The most important element is that the kingdom of God is spiritual and eternal (without reference to time) in nature, not temporal or corporeal. as Paul later taught, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." ( I Corinthians 15:50) This recalls Jesus' recent statement to Peter when Peter recently confessed that Jesus was, "The Messiah, the Son of the Living God". Jesus responded, "Blessed are you Simon Bar Jona, because flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.". Jesus also said to Nicodemus in John 3:5-8, "Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The spiritual nature, as well as the entire nature of the kingdom as Jesus taught and presented it was baffling to His followers. But some, standing there, (or here) today will experience the insight and understanding about the kingdom and "see" it having come and coming in the person of Jesus in all His glory and power.

At this point, Jesus strikes out for a "high mountain". There He will put a caper on their doubts. One can visualize Jesus turning on His heel and departing leaving the disciples wondering what to do. Peter, with his brash, but timid, courage must have decided first, and followed Jesus. After all, earlier when Jesus asked if the disciples would also leave him as did the crowds (John 6:66-69) Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" Peter, even with his stubborn misunderstanding of Messianic things knew that Jesus taught, not as the scribes and Pharisees, but with authority. Jesus had words of life in an environment of death. So, Peter steps out. James and John, long time partners with Peter, perhaps shared a mutual glance, a shrug of the shoulders, and followed. The rest, with some head scratching and discussion to be sure, trailed after. For the next few days we can be certain that discussions took place within the disciples. There is no note of any response or comment to what Jesus had said after 9:1. But these were not the kind of men who kept quiet for very long. Jesus alone may have been silent. When they approach their destination, Jesus leaves his remaining disciples near or in a village at the foot of the mountain to arrange for lodging and arrange for provisions for the night and the time ahead. Then He chooses Peter, James and John to accompany Him on a special journey.

Mark 9:2-13 "Six days later, (Luke 9:28, "some eight days later) Jesus \*took with Him Peter and James and John, and \*brought them up on a high mountain by themselves (Luke adds, "to pray"). And ("while He was praying"-Luke) He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. (Luke: "...who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.") Peter \*said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. They asked Him, saying, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And He said to them, "Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?" But

I say to you that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."

This account corresponds with events found in the Old Testament. But first it may be appropriate to point out that the traditional site of the transfiguration, Mt. Tabor, may be in error. Mt. Tabor's distance from Caesarea Philippi, its height (about 1,800 feet) and its occupation by a fortress make it an unlikely site for this event. Mount Hermon fits the context better by being both closer and higher (over 9,000 feet). When they arrived at their destination on the mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them (the word "transfigured" is "metamorphosis" to "change form"). His being and garments were transformed into a gleaming, radiant, white brightness, not of this world. Then, before them, stood Elijah and Moses, who conversed with Jesus.

The correspondence shows it self, first in Exodus 24:14-16,

"So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. But to the elders he said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them." Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.

The second shows itself in I Kings 19:1 ff.

"Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

"Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake *baked on* hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God."

So, on another mountain, Peter, James and John, witnessed the meeting of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Elijah personifies the prophets, Moses the priests/law, and Jesus the divine Messianic King. Peter responds to the vision with a thought. He volunteers himself, James and John to create three tabernacles. The three privileged observers were no doubt caught off guard, but at the same time were entranced and frightened. Perhaps they thought this was the fulfillment of what Jesus had said six days before and they were those who are now seeing the kingdom of God come with power. "The culmination of all things was at hand", they may have thought.

How long will Elijah and Moses want to speak with Jesus? Forty days as God did with Moses on Mount Horeb? Even for a shorter time, lodging would be in order. If perhaps, (but unlikely) the

time of year was September-October, near the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the thought of building “booths” would be appropriate. The responsibility of the Jew on the first day following the priestly sacrifice for the people was to return to the temple grounds to demonstrate that his devotion to God was not based on his cleansing alone but from the heart. This time is celebrated as “Succoth”, or “The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles). Leviticus 23 describes the feasts of Israel for the year and what they are for. In this case it says, 23:42 ‘You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’” These booths were simple structures made of wood or stone with thatched roofs.

Peter may have felt that, under the circumstance, regardless of the time of year, this offer was appropriate. It is likely that the time of year was not “Tishri”, because Mark makes the comment, “For he (Peter) did not know what to answer, for they became terrified. The term in verse 6 as in 5 (“he answered”) is a typical Aramaic stylism we see constantly in Jesus responses to others. We also see, once again, that Peter as the leader and first disciple was expressing the fears and thoughts of the other two as well.

Most likely, Peter made his proposal out of fear after all. The fear of the three was exacerbated by the appearance of the two dead patriarchs. To the Jews, the appearance of a spirit from the dead portended a terrible disaster to come (Note: I Samuel 28:1-21 for example). Thus they were terrified and no doubt sought to appease whatever anger they felt this event may have held toward them.

Perhaps they had been chosen alright, but for something other than what they had been envisioning. In any case, they were completely in disarray. Then, to make matters even more difficult, a cloud surrounded them and a voice came out of it saying, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!” All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.”

“As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant.”

Perhaps with a great sense of relief that they were still alive, and discussing all that had transpired and what it could mean, Jesus tells them to be quiet about it. So they seized upon his comment about being raised from the dead. The state of the departed dead was and has always been a stumbling block for the Jews. Different teachers and schools of thought had presented their viewpoint and commentary on the scriptures and traditional thought for centuries. There was no consensus. The disciples were discussing the views of the scribes, Pharisees and perhaps others among themselves. And, in fact, the New Testament witnesses to the debate several times. Note: Acts 23:6-10, where Paul is defending himself before the council in Jerusalem as an example of this hotly contested subject,

“But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!” As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel

has spoken to him?" And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks."

Finally, they asked Jesus, "Why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" This question tells us of their discussion and their talking about the teaching of the scribes. It also reveals that the disciples are thinking. The Jewish understanding is, that, prior to the appearance of the Messianic King, and The Day of The Lord Elijah himself will come first (Malachi 4:5-6).

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Jesus' response as they descend the mountain is warm but leaves the disciples, pondering, once again, the meaning of His words. His view differs from that of both the scribes and the disciples. What's new? It doesn't take them long to agree that Jesus is speaking of John the Baptist. But Jesus question to them, in turn, "And *yet* how is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?" must have sent them off on another discussion. His inference is that if the teachings of the scribes is that the Messiah's coming will be prefaced with the coming of Elijah, and that the Messiah will be the conquering King immediately following, then what about the written Word that speaks of the suffering Messiah. Where does that fit in? Off they go again. Note Luke's comment about this in 18:31-34,

"Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said."

Somehow, they have got to feel like all they had been taught, and the teachers they had respected in and trusted had fallen short. Did they still have the idea that Jesus was somehow still faulty in his teaching, or that they had a lot more to learn – or all of the above? Was the jury still out? Did it dawn on them that Jesus had now spoken of the suffering of not only Elijah, but of John the Baptist, Himself and now, all who would believe and follow Him? One would think, after this epiphany and after the exchange in the territory of Caesarea Philippi we just reviewed, that Peter, James and John would have a better idea about shelving their old preconceived ideas regarding the Messianic event after this mountain top experience. This remains to be seen.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT - EXCURSUS – THE “SON OF MAN”. WHAT DOES THIS TERM MEAN AS JESUS APPLIED IT TO HIMSELF?**

It is incumbent upon us to figure out where these things are written about “the Son of Man” and “Elijah”. Did the Jews ever apply these writings to the expected Messiah and Elijah? How was it possible for the disciples to answer this question? Further, Jesus’ question was not “Where” is it written (οπου), but “how” (πως) is it written, (or, “in what way”) and this question is only found in Mark. The manner in which this question is asked may indicate that there is no direct reference to a passage answering the question in Jesus mind, but that some thinking about how one arrives at this answer is required. This fits well with what is actually required in the search for the answer.

The solution to these questions is not easy to come by and Jesus’ use of the term was as confusing to His hearers as it is to us. The reason for this is the odd way He applied it to Himself. On the one hand, He used it as it is used in Daniel 7:13, as Daniel notes, “I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.” This idea is reflected by Jesus when He said in Mark 8:38 (and in many other places) "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." In Acts 7:55-56 it tells us of Stephen as he concludes his witness, “But being full of the Holy Spirit, He gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." He clearly designates Jesus in this role. Eusebius, quotes Hegesippus regarding James, the brother of Jesus crying out at the time of his martyrdom, “Why do you ask me about the Son of Man since He sits in heaven at the right hand of the mighty power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven”.

On the other hand, He used it of Himself as in Mark 8:31, “And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again”, and in Mark 9:31, “For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later”, and again in Luke 18:31-34, “Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. "For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.”

These two ideas clashed in the thinking of the disciples, and so His question about how it is written that the “Son of Man” should suffer and be treated with contempt. Jesus is stating quite clearly in good Jewish fashion that in Himself is the personification and fulfillment of all the term “Son of Man” entails. We need to look closely to find an exact Old Testament reference to the “Son of Man” suffering many things and treated with contempt if we are to understand how to answer His question to the disciples.

Finally, the Greek does not tell us if Jesus is using the term as “Son of Adam”, or “Son of Man” (שׂוֹן אָדָם), (eesh) or both. The LXX gives us no help as it translates both as “ἄνθρωπος” (“anthropos”- Greek for “man”). But investigation will show that He likely used the term “son of adam”.

Outside of Jesus’ use in the gospels, the term “Son of Man” is found some 90 times in Ezekiel, and three times in Daniel, once in Numbers (23:19); in Job 25:6, 35:8; Psalm 80:17, 144:3, 146:3, Isaiah 51:12, 56:2, in Jeremiah 49:18, 33 and more. But the suffering “Messiah” is linked more closely to Isaiah 52-53, and to passages like Psalm 22. These passages were seen in the early church, after Christ’s death and resurrection, as Messianic, applying to Jesus. We’ll come back to these later.

In Ezekiel, the term בֶּן־אָדָם, (ben-adam) is used most frequently and used as God’s address to Ezekiel. When the term “man” is used apart from the address to Ezekiel and apart from the term “son of man”, the word שׂוֹן אָדָם, (eesh) is used. In the use of “son of man” in Ezekiel, it appears to simply indicate Ezekiel as simply a descendent of Adam, weak and in sin as he is contrasted with, and set before the glorious Creator. 1:28-2:1, “As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!” Is Jesus identifying with humanity in this fashion through use of the term “Son of man”? Perhaps. In Numbers 23:19, we read, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” Here, man is “eesh” and “son of man” is “adam”. In Job 25:6, Bildad says, “How much less man, *that* maggot, And the son of man, *that* worm!” Here, man is “vyna” (enosh- a form of “eesh” indicating man or mankind) and son of man is again “adam”. So one begins to see that there is a picture forming linking the two into one image. Job 35:8 gives us a fine contrast and more of the idea that Jesus could be linking the two together in one image. Elihu speaks, “Your wickedness is for a man like yourself, And your righteousness is for a son of man.” But, we still need to find the idea of suffering.

Psalm 80:17 says, “Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.” Again, the Hebrew is used as before. “Man” is “eesh” and “son of man” is “adam”. The context of the entire Psalm bears examining. Israel is spoken of as a “vine” (verses 8-15a) in an allegory and then personified as “the son whom Thou hast strengthened for Thyself” (in verse 15b), and finally as the “son of man” (adam) in verse 17. This is reminiscent of Jesus metaphor, “I am the vine” in John 15. These terms and others, describing Israel are rampant throughout the Old Testament and often used by New Testament persons and writers as well. In Psalm 80, we find the term “son of man” in the context of suffering. Further, it is plain in the New Testament, that Jesus is the personification of Israel, in all that Israel is as well as what Israel was supposed to be. (Note Matthew’s use of Hosea 11:1, for example, “When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son”. Matthew applies it to Jesus in his gospel, 2:14-15, “So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. *This was* to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.” It was the suffering of Israel in Egypt that prompted them to cry out to God for deliverance. And God heard them and responded.

Further, let us not forget that Israel became the given name of Jacob and the a singular term for the 12 sons of “Israel” later seen as the tribes of “Israel” then finally, the land upon which they settled was called “Israel” as it is today. So the word “Israel” is used in many ways, but became a collective noun, a personification, a designation of both a tribal family and a of person. The Hebrew language does this because terms often have plurality because of the Hebrew notion of the “solidarity” of the family or the race or the people. Even today, at Passover, the words, “when we were in Egypt” are used showing the solidarity of a people without regard to individuality, independence or time as we are used to describing ourselves.

Few will debate the role of “Israel” as the suffering servant. This leads us to Isaiah. But first, Psalm 144, verses 3 and 4 the terms are reversed. In a question, answered later in the Psalm, David asks, “O LORD, what is man (adam), that You take knowledge of him? Or the son of man (enosh), that You think of him? (4) Man (adam) is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow. David, in this psalm, identifies with the “son of man” in this psalm, and the “son of man” is singular as now “adam” is plural in a personification form of the collective noun expressed in English as “man”- plural. Verse 7 confirms this, “...Stretch forth Your hand from on high; Rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, Out of the hand of aliens...”. Psalm 146:3-4 gives us further insight, “Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, (ben-adam) in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish.” “Adam” here is once again plural the antecedent being “princes” in the parallelism, and the term, “mortal man” is “son of man” in the Hebrew linking suffering and mortality to the term Jesus in identifying Himself.

Now, we come to Isaiah. The verses in Jeremiah referenced above speak of a “son of man” (adam), and refer to the destruction of Edom and Hazor in which “a son of man” will never reside again. In Isaiah, however, we come to the conclusion of our search with further confirmation of our direction and hermeneutic. In Isaiah 51, the prophet looks ahead to the future of Israel (and Judah) after the destruction Assyria brought upon Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B. C., and Babylon upon Judah in the 6<sup>th</sup>. In an exhortation to hope and faith in the God of Israel, Isaiah prays (verses 10-13),

“Was it not You who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a pathway For the redeemed to cross over? So the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, And everlasting joy *will be* on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, And sorrow and sighing will flee away. “I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies And of the son of man who is made like grass, That you have forgotten the LORD your Maker, Who stretched out the heavens And laid the foundations of the earth, ...”

Here, both the terms “man” (enosh) and “son of man” (adam) are parallel and seen suffering death. The same is true in 56:1-2, both the terms “man” (enosh) and “son of man” (adam) are seen as one and the same, “Thus says the LORD, “Preserve justice and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come And My righteousness to be revealed. “How blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who takes hold of it; Who keeps from profaning the sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

Jesus applied the term “son of man” to himself. In this study, we have seen that He incorporates the Biblical dual images in the use of this term and challenges His disciples to figures it out. All they understand is the apocalyptic and eschatological use of the term as it applies to the “Messiah”. So, we come to Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where the term “son of man” is not used. However, the images and



application we have looked at to apply.

52:13-15, “Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men. Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.”

53:1-3, “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

53:4-5, “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.”

53:6-7, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.”

53:8-11, “By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.”

53:12, “Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

So, here we have the central passage illustrating the suffering of the Messiah as quoted or alluded to in the New Testament as fulfilled by Jesus suffering and death. John 12:37-38 quotes Isaiah 53:1, as does Romans 10:16-17; Jesus uses the word “scourged” in Mark 10:34 and Luke 18:33, but it is not exactly the same word used in Isaiah 53:5 “scourged” in the LXX. Still the allusion to Isaiah 53 seems apparent. Matthew 8:16-17 quotes 53:4, Hebrews 9:28 alludes to 53:5, and Paul, in Romans 4:25 makes an unmistakable reference to Isaiah 53:4-5. Paul alludes to this also in I Corinthians 15:3. I Peter 2:24-25 reference 53:5-6; Acts 8:32-35 quotes 53:7-8 as Philip taught the Ethiopian eunuch; I Peter 2:22-24 quotes 53:9 and alludes to verses 7 and 5 of Isaiah 53; II Corinthians 5:21 reflects 53:11; and Luke 22:37 quotes 53:12 as does Mark 15:27-28, to name some of the references.

Did they understand that Isaiah 53 was Messianic because this was a teaching of the rabbi's prior to Jesus appearance? Or did they interpret Isaiah 53 to be Messianic after the suffering and death of Jesus, seeing it clearly fulfilled in Him? Or was it both?

Unable to find rabbinic teaching about this passage prior to Jesus appearance, (at this time) there is evidence of Isaiah 53 being taught as Messianic by Jewish Rabbis and scholars after His coming. This would indicate that they had difficulty breaking with previous tradition. Only in later centuries did they begin to hedge on this interpretation. (see documentation)

We are told in Acts 5:33-42 that Gamaliel, a respected teacher of the Jews and head of the school of Hillel the Elder (perhaps his grandfather) gave sage advice to the council regarding the spread of the gospel and that the council heeded his advice. In 22:1-1-3, Paul, when arrested stood before the people and noted he was taught by Gamaliel. What did Gamaliel and the school of Hillel believe about Isaiah 53? Gamaliel is quoted often in the Mishnah, the rabbinic commentary on the Torah, and he was given the highest rabbinic title of respect, "Rabboni", a title given to Jesus in John 20:16 by Mary Magdalene. A disputed medieval document stating that Gamaliel embraced Christianity around 70 A.D. near his death, has no other support.

Josephus (37 A.D.-95 A.D.) makes no reference to Isaiah 53 specifically, or to Hillel or Gamaliel, but does note the following about Christ in the disputed passage in Antiquities XIII, III:

"Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again after the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day".

His reference to the prophets does not name Isaiah specifically, but one could hardly mention the prophetic fulfillment regarding Jesus' death without having a mind to Isaiah 53 or to some other passage indicating that the Messiah would be put to death.

The following references include quotations from ancient sources. Brief definitions are necessary:

Targum – The Aramaic translation of the scriptural books, as delivered orally in the synagogue during the period of the second temple and later (6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. after the return from Babylon) in accordance with a generally accepted but by no means fixed tradition of interpretation. The written Targums now extant were written around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. in Palestine and Babylonia and are, for the most part, renderings of the traditional.

Talmud – The written interpretations of Biblical stories and accounts both in Hebrew and Aramaic including the making of bylaws, and the adding to the store of wise counsel, covering a period of nearly a thousand years from the time of Ezra to the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D..

Midrash – The earliest method of teaching the oral law, in the form of commentary. Explanations of rabbinical notes and commentaries on the scriptures. Used from the time of Ezra well into the first century A.D.. Rejected by the Sadducees who stood firm on the written text when it opposed the oral tradition. Both Shammai and Hillel were the last of a succession of "great teachers"

employing the Midrash as well as other methods of teaching until their deaths near the end of the first century A.D..

Mishna – The first part of the Talmud, containing traditional oral interpretations of scriptural ordinances, compiled by rabbis around 200 A.D..

Yalkut – A collection of Midrashim published in 1687, which quotes older and accredited writings from at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century and perhaps prior.

On the next page, we have a document from the appendix, “The Scriptures Messianically Applied In Rabbinic Writings” from Edersheim’s “The Life And Times of Jesus The Messiah”.

We also have copies from Rabbinical commentaries following that.

clause of *verse 2* is one of the passages quoted in the Midrash on Lamentations (see *Is. xi. 12*).

APP.

IX

The well-known Evangelic declaration in *Is. lii. 7* is thus commented upon in Yalkut (vol. ii. p. 53 c): In the hour when the Holy One, blessed be His Name, redeems Israel, three days before Messiah comes Elijah, and stands upon the mountains of Israel, and weeps and mourns for them, and says to them: Behold the land of Israel, how long shall you stand in a dry and desolate land? And his voice is heard from the world's end to the world's end, and after that it is said to them: Peace has come to the world, peace has come to the world, as it is said: How beautiful upon the mountains, &c. And when the wicked hear it, they rejoice, and they say one to the other: Peace has come to us. On the second day he shall stand upon the mountains of Israel, and shall say: Good has come to the world, good has come to the world, as it is written: That bringeth good tidings of good. On the third day he shall come and stand upon the mountains of Israel, and say: Salvation has come to the world, salvation has come to the world, as it is written: That publisheth salvation.

Similarly, this passage is quoted in Yalkut on Ps. cxxi. 1. See also our remarks on Cant. ii. 13.

*Verse 8* is one of the passages referred to in the Midrash on Lamentations quoted above, and frequently in other places as Messianic.

*Verse 12* is Messianically applied in Shemoth R. 15 and 19.

*Verse 13* is applied in the Targum expressly to the Messiah. On the words 'He shall be exalted and extolled' we read in Yalkut ii. (Par. 338, p. 53 c, lines 7 &c. from the bottom): He shall be higher than Abraham, to whom applies Gen. xiv. 22; higher than Moses, of whom Num. xi. 12 is predicated; higher than the ministering angels, of whom Ezek. i. 18 is said. But to Him there applies this in Zech. iv. 7: 'Who art thou, O great mountain?' 'And He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.' R. Huna says, in the name of R. Acha: All sufferings are divided into three parts; one part goes to David and the Patriarchs, another to the generation of the rebellion (rebellious Israel), and the third to the King Messiah, as it is written (Ps. ii. 7), 'Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.' Then follows a curious quotation from the Midrash on Samuel, in which the Messiah indicates that His dwelling is on Mount Zion, and that guilt is connected with the destruction of its walls.

In regard to *Is. liii.* we remember, that the Messianic name of 'Leprous' (Sanh. 98 b) is expressly based upon it. *Is. liii. 10* is applied in the Targum on the passage to the Kingdom of the Messiah.

*Verse 5* is Messianically interpreted in the Midrash on Samuel (ed. Lemberg, p. 45 a, last line), where it is said that all sufferings are divided into three parts, one of which the Messiah bore—a remark which is brought into connection with Ruth ii. 14. (See our comments on that passage.)

*Is. liv. 2* is expected to be fulfilled in Messianic times (Vayyikra R. 10).

*Is. liv. 5.* In Shemoth R. 15 this is expressly applied to Messianic days.

*Is. liv. 11* is repeatedly applied to the Messianic glory, as, for example, in Shemoth R. 15. (See our comments on Ex. xii. 2.)

So is *verse 13*, as in Yalkut (vol. i. p. 78 c); in the Midrash on Ps. xxi. 1; and in other passages.

*Is. lv. 12* is referred to Messianic times, as in the Midrash on Ps. xiii.

## ***Isaiah 53:How Do the Rabbis Interpret This?***

**Rabbi Moses Alschech(1508-1600)** says:

"Our Rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah, and we shall ourselves also adhere to the same view."

**Abrabanel (1437-1508)** said earlier:

"This is also the opinion of our own learned men in the majority of their Midrashim."

**Rabbi Yafeth Ben Ali ( second half of the 10th Century):**

"As for myself, I am inclined to regard it as alluding to the Messiah."

**Abraham Farissol ( 1451- 1526)** says:

"In this chapter there seem to be considerable resemblances and allusions to the work of the Christian Messiah and to the events which are asserted to have happened to Him, so that no other prophecy is to be found the gist and subject of which can be so immediately applied to Him."

**Targum Jonathan ( 4th Century )** gives the introduction on Isa. 52:13:

"Behold, my servant the Messiah..."

**Gersonides (1288-1344)** on Deut. 18:18:

"In fact Messiah is such a prophet, as it is stated in the Midrasch on the verse, 'Behold, my servant shall prosper...' (Isa. 52:13)."

**Midrash Tanchuma:**

"He was more exalted than Abraham, more extolled than Mose, higher than the archangels" (Isa.52:13).

**Yalkut Schimeon ( ascribed to Rabbi Simeon Kara, 12th Century )** says on Zech.4:7:

"He ( the king Messiah ) is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, 'My servant shall be high, and lifted up, and lofty exceedingly' (Isa. 52:13)."

**Maimonides (1135-1204)** wrote to Rabbi Jacob Alfajumi:

"Likewise said Isaiah that He (Messiah) would appear without acknowledging a father or mother: 'He grew up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground' etc. (Isa.53:2)."

**Tanchuma:**

"Rabbi Nachman says: ,The Word MAN in the passage, 'Every man a head of the house of his father' (Num.1,4), refers to the Messiah, the son of David, as it is written, 'Behold the man whose name is Zemach'(the Branch) where Jonathan interprets,'Behold the man Messiah' (Zech.6:12); and so it is said,'A

man of pains and known to sickness' (Isa.53:3)."

**Talmud Sanhedrin (98b):**

"Messiah ...what is his name? The Rabbis say, 'The leprous one'; those of the house of the Rabbi (Jehuda Hanassi, the author of the Mishna, 135-200) say: 'Cholaja' (The sickly), for it says, 'Surely he has borne our sicknesses' etc. (Isa.53,4)."

**Pesiqta Rabbati (ca.845) on Isa. 61,10:**

"The world-fathers (patriarchs) will one day in the month of Nisan arise and say to (the Messiah): 'Ephraim, our righteous Anointed, although we are your grandparents, yet you are greater than we, for you have borne the sins of our children, as it says: 'But surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him and through his wounds we are healed'(Isa.53,4-5)."

**Rabbi Simeon Ben Jochai (2.Century), Zohar,, part II, page 212a and III, page 218a, Amsterdam Ed.):**

"There is in the garden of Eden a palace called : 'The palace of the sons of sickness, <, this palace the Messiah enters, and summons every sickness, every pain, and every chastisement of Israel: they all come and rest upon Him. And were it not that He had thus lightened them off Israel, and taken them upon Himself, there had been no man able to bear Israels chastisement for the transgression of the law; this is that which is written, 'Surely our sicknesses he has carried' Isa.53,4).- As they tell Him (the Messiah) of the misery of Israel in their captivity, and of those wicked ones among them who are not attentive to know their Lord, He lifts up His voice and weeps for their wickedness; and so it is written, 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (Isa.53,5). Midrash (on Ruth 2,14): "He is speaking of the King Messiah - 'Come hither', i.e.">Draw near to the throne<; 'eat of the bread', i.e.>, The bread of the kingdom.' This refers to the chastisements<, as it is said, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities' (Isa.53,5). Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (16.Century) :

"The meaning of 'He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities' is, that since the Messiah bears our iniquities which produce the effect of His being bruised, it follows that whoever will not admit that Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities must endure and suffer for them himself."

**Siphre:**

"Rabbi Jose the Galilean said, 'Come and learn the merits of the King Messiah and the reward of the Just - from the first man who received but one commandment, a prohibition, and transgressed it. Consider how many deaths were inflicted upon himself, upon his own generation, and upon those who followed them, till the end of all generations. Which attribute is greater, the attribute of goodness, or the attribute of vengeance?'- He answered, 'The attribute of goodness is greater, and the attribute of vengeance is the less.' - 'How much more then, will the King Messiah, who endures affliction and pains for the transgressions (as it is written, 'He was wounded,'etc.), justify all

generations. This is the meaning of the word, 'And the LORD made the iniquity of us all to meet upon Him' (Isa.53:6)."

**Rabbi Eleazer Kalir (9.Century)** wrote the following Musaf Prayer:

"Our righteous Messiah has departed from us. Horror has seized us and we have no one to justify us. He has borne our transgressions and the yoke of our iniquities, and is wounded because of our transgressions. He bore our sins upon His shoulders that we may find pardon for our iniquity. We shall be healed by His wounds, at the time when the Eternal will recreate Him a new creature. Oh bring Him up from the circle of the earth, raise Him up from Seir, that we may hear Him the second time."

**Rabbi Moses, 'The Preacher'(11. Century)** wrote in his commentary on Genesis (page 660):

"From the beginning God has made a covenant with the Messiah and told Him, 'My righteous Messiah, those who are entrusted to you, their sins will bring you into a heavy yoke'..And He answered, 'I gladly accept all these agonies in order that not one of Israel should be lost.' Immediately, the Messiah accepted all agonies with love, as it is written: 'He was oppressed and he was afflicted'."

**Pesiqta (on Isa. 61:10):**

"Great oppressions were laid upon You, as it says: 'By oppression and judgement he was taken away; but who considered in his time, that he was cut off out of the land of the living, that he was stricken because of the sins of our children' (Isa.53:8), as it says:'But the LORD has laid on him the guild of us all'(Isa.53:6)."

Summarizing the issue and its resolution:

When Jesus asked His disciples “How” is it written of the Son of Man that He will suffer many things and be treated with contempt?”, we must ask,

- 1) Was the question reasonable?
- 2) Was it answerable?
- 3) If the disciples didn’t know, was the answer even obtainable?
- 4) Were resources available with which to find the answer?
- 5) Did others have knowledge with which to answer the question that the disciples did not?
- 6) Can we think Jesus’ thoughts after Him in terms of what He was thinking about?

One of the accusations critics level at the church, whether early on or late in history is that the “church” reads back into the gospel narration the things it wants to underscore, even if they were not originally there. Is there evidence to contradict this assumption?

Let’s examine the situation and answer questions 5 and 6 first. The text in Mark 9:9 that, “As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. They asked Him, saying, “*Why is it* that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

Peter, James and John reveal that their education and what they were taught apparently came from the Scribes. Growing up in Capernaum, they would have had access to schooling in the synagogue, but not necessarily access to the scrolls of the scripture themselves. These copies were rare and provided, by hand written copy, solely to teachers and officials of the Jewish community. What the disciples knew about the scriptures came through a second hand resource. Since the return from the Babylonian exile, the scribes were capable teachers. Their intent was not to distort the scriptures but interpret them to their students in a fashion that would help their pupils hold a steadfast faith in the God of Israel. The Markan text suggests that they taught the people, so often under foreign domination and rule, that God would bring forth a Messiah to deliver, once and for all, His people from the oppressor. In this regard, they may have described this “Anointed One” this “Son of Man” (as Daniel 7 names Him) solely in terms of His glorious revealing and glorious domination over the oppressors, establishing His rule and reign forever, delivering His people. Thus, hope was constantly instilled in the people of Israel over the centuries and the disciples of Jesus looked to Him for this fulfillment.

The text also suggests that Jesus had a much broader understanding of this term “son of man” and challenged His disciples to consider not “where it was written” but “how” (in what manner, or in what way) it was written about the suffering and contempt the “Son of Man” would suffer. If this is true, then what was He thinking of?

We know that the understanding Jesus had (as we have studied above – assuming we have thought Jesus’ thoughts after Him) was available both in the scriptures and in the understanding of the scribes

in Israel. In fact, studies show that the early scribes from the time of Ezra in the Midrashim, The Targum, and The Talmud saw Messianic prophecies everywhere. As long as there was hope for an oppressed people, the oppression was bearable because of God’s promises of Messianic deliverance, replete in the Old Testament as the scribes pointed out. But there is evidence that they



saw Him as a suffering deliverer as well. The rabbinic commentaries early in the first century demonstrate this, and Philip makes this understanding known to the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts chapter 8:25-35. The text bears reproducing here:

“So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans. But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, "Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert *road*.) So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH. "IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY; WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH." The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

We also see in the New Testament, dozens of references not only to Isaiah 53 but also to other Old Testament passages attributing the terms "Son of Man", "Messiah", "Suffering Servant", "Israel", and others to Jesus. In using this term, Jesus incorporated the entire description of all that this entailed and incorporated it as well in His own being. As He descended the mountain with Peter, James and John, He must have enjoyed their struggle in answering this question. But in a more serious vein, He, since the encounter at Caesarea Philippi, was preparing them for what lay ahead, so they could understand and believe the whole truth God had revealed to His people through the centuries. As we know now, they finally got it because it is revealed in their writings and supported by the teaching of the very Scribes and Pharisees that called for the death of Jesus Himself (as well as their predecessors and successors).

Therefore, questions 1-4 above can be answered in the affirmative. The disciples were just totally unaware of the abundance of information the scriptures provided about the "Son of Man" outside of the passage in Daniel 7 and the commentary thereon. Not all the Christian era rabbinic commentators support the Messianic application of Isaiah 53 to be sure and there has been debate between the various schools of thought from that time to this. But what we do have is a consistent thread of rabbinic thought from the time of Ezra onward that sees Isaiah 53 (and other passages like Psalm 22) as clearly Messianic.

## **END OF EXCURSUS**

## **CHAPTER NINE - RETURNING TO THE NARRATIVE OF MARK 9:14-29,**

“When they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them. Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and *began* running up to greet Him. And He asked them, “What are you discussing with them?” And one of the crowd answered Him, “Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him *to the ground* and he foams *at the mouth*, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not *do it*.” And He \*answered them and \*said, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!” They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he *began* rolling around and foaming *at the mouth*. And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. “It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” And Jesus said to him, “If You can?” All things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.” After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and *the boy* became so much like a corpse that most *of them* said, “He is dead!” But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. When He came into *the house*, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?” And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.” Jesus has turned His face toward Jerusalem. Luke puts it this way,

9:30-31, “And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.” 9:51, “When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem”. (The King James translates it accurately as, “He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”)

Here we have the aforementioned Scribes arguing with the remaining nine disciples and a crowd of people as Jesus was approaching with Peter, James and John. Their discussion centered around why Jesus’ disciples could not cast a demon out of a possessed child. One can imagine what the argument was like between The Scribes and the crowd along with Jesus’ disciples. No doubt there was some derogatory things said about Jesus, because suspicion and opposition were on the rise. Jesus had already been careful to keep out of the way of Jewish teachers of the Law and other officials.

Listening in to this argument we might hear something like, “If Jesus’ is this and that”, the Scribes would be saying, “Then how is it that His own disciples cannot cast out this demon? They claim to have done this once before when their teacher was not with them, so, if they speak the truth, why is it they are helpless against the demon now? Perhaps we are all being told lies?” Those in the crowd, having seen and experienced many of Jesus’ miracles would of course be defending against these accusations. “Well, if these things you say are true,” The Scribes would retort, “where is the demonstration of these signs and wonders now?” The record of their work against demons is found in Mark 6:13 “And He \*summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits”; and 6:17, “And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.” So the Scribes could properly wonder about

the authority of both Jesus and His disciples.

As Jesus approached, some people saw Him and began running up to Him. He asked these what the discussion was about. The answer comes from the father of a poor boy. At first, the father appears somewhat indignant (verses 17-18). Jesus response to “them” seems to carry a feeling of frustration with it, “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?”

Bring him to Me!" Meanwhile, the rest of the crowd was still haggling over the issue with the Scribes and the disciples. This scene reminds us of Moses experience as he descended the mountain with the tablets of the law only to find the people celebrating and dancing around the golden calf in Exodus 32.

The direction of Jesus’ response is general, but is He addressing the skepticism of the Scribes, the inability of the disciples or simply a general frustration in light of the recent discussions and experiences He has had with these followers Himself? Perhaps all of the above. A whole world of disbelief, it seems, stands in the way of the boy’s restoration. Jesus, it seems has come to the end of His ability to endure the constant lack of faith and the barricade of entrenched tradition He has attempted to breach. His comment also looks ahead to Jerusalem. His time is growing short.

Without further comment, they brought the boy to Jesus. The demon within the boy, upon seeing Jesus, responded violently, throwing him onto the ground in convulsions with foaming at the mouth and rolling about. Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" Jesus may have asked this question of the father to demonstrate a genuine concern and care for the father and his son. It no doubt began the process of softening the father’s heart toward Jesus. The father stopped and answered Jesus’ question. And he said, "From childhood. "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" And Jesus said to him, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes."

Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." The father has now moved from a place of being indignant to realizing that Jesus may not grant his request either. A change in the father’s demeanor begins to take place.

The father’s plea and Jesus’ response, “If you can?!” no doubt springs from the inability of Jesus’ disciples to cast out the demon and reflects the criticism and doubts of the Scribes upon Jesus Himself (who – the Scribes, that is- were not able to cast it out either it appears). [The possession of the boy had been from childhood, which means that the boy is somewhere between 14 and 30 years of age, possibly mid twenties.] Jesus continued comment, (“All things are possible to him who believes.”) repeats His point regarding faith and emphasizes it. The father’s answer is poignant, he now fears he has not come to Jesus in the right tone and spirit, and cries out, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

It’s not that God is not willing to heal and make whole, but whether people believe God is willing and has the power. It is not man’s power or words, or beliefs, but God’s. This story reflects that truth as nowhere else. Man’s self importance, in all the different representations gathered together on this day is of no help whatsoever. Without Him, they (and we) can do nothing. A lesson for us all. The father’s response is the genuine thing and a heartbreaking plea of desperation, “βοηθηστω ημιν, σπλαχπισθειξ εφ νμαξ.” Help us!, have mercy (or compassion) upon us!” He

cries out not for just his son alone but for himself and perhaps the boy's mother and other members of the household as well. What they have had to endure is unbearable. Then, as if to discard anything that would dissuade Jesus from casting out the demon and healing his son, he cries out again, "πιστευω", "I believe", then in humility confesses, "βοηθει μου τη απιστια", "help my unbelief". Like this father, we know that our faith is often in the grip of doubt, confusion, and lack of understanding. "Have mercy on us as well, Oh Lord!"

Verse 25 reinforces how we have set our scene. "When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and *the boy* became so much like a corpse that most *of them* said, "He is dead!" But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.

Jesus hastens to cast out the demon and restore the boy to his father. The remainder of the crowd is approaching. Again, He wants to avoid further publicity. So Jesus gathers His disciples to Himself and leaves the boy and his father to deal with the crowds and the Scribes.

When they entered the house the disciples had arranged for, they had privacy. The disciples wanted to ask Him a personal question in private, no doubt to avoid embarrassing themselves publicly. "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Jesus answer, at first, causes us to ask, "What do you mean by that". The disciples asked no such question. Perhaps they realized that they had no power of their own and that recognition of their true source of ministry comes from God. In this matter they had both failed in faith and in prayer. Jesus Himself, had demonstrated that only in a sustained communion with God does one's life become viable to minister to the needs of others.

Mark 9:30-32

"From there they went out and *began* to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know *about it*. For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.' But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him."

Jesus and His disciples now return to the province of Galilee, and, as we have seen He is definitely wanting to avoid public recognition. We have discussed the reason for this. When He arrives at Capernaum, He enters a house, perhaps the house of His mother, Mary, or that of Peter and Andrew, where He stayed before and brought healing to Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15). After refreshment and rest, (a common courtesy of the hostess) There He asks the question of His disciples again, "What were you discussing on the way?" But He already knew because we read, (34-37)

"But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them* was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and \*said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me."

The theme of the leader/servant (or of the leader placing himself last and others first) is a major theme of Jesus. In this discussion with His disciples Jesus begins to clearly outline the role of those who would be first. The ensuing chapters stem from this theme and illustrate it. Further, we have a parallelism between verse 35 ("If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.") and the illustration Jesus uses with the child. The parallelism continues on in His further teachings. He has already spoken of this theme before (8:35 for example) but begins to both speak of it and illustrate in Himself as they travel to Jerusalem.

The child is possibly one of the younger siblings in His own or Peter's family. Here, as He often taught, those given to leadership are to be the servants of all rather than to be served by all. Jesus will underscore this again when the mother of James and John requests that her two sons be given seats on Jesus' right and left hand in the kingdom. He states in 10:43-45, "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Community status was an important thing to the Jewish people of Jesus' day, but it had no place in Jesus' value system. But to the Jews, it was important to command respect, and in the patriarchal family and community structure, the man was in the leadership role. So the disciples, in their earthly frame of mind, began to think in terms of who was going to be among the rulers of the kingdom when Jesus established it. This discussion culminates in Mark, chapter 10, but the whole debate over which of them is the greatest and who will rule stems from here. Chiefly, it was Peter, James and John who thought they would be the first chosen to rule, spurred on no doubt by the invitation to accompany Jesus to the mount of transfiguration. As the lead disciples, their ambition seems natural. Also, James and John may have taken a dim view of Peter's role because of Jesus' stiff rebuke of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. Perhaps in soliciting opinions from the other disciples, the debate, no doubt, became heated. The idea of a servant ruler was foreign to them and, as with nearly everything Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, outside their box.

So, again, they fail to listen to Jesus' description of what it takes to be a ruler in the kingdom. Still, in each lesson and ministry Jesus describes the nature and character of the kingdom of God, but the disciples continually failed to grasp it. The next discussion is no exception.

The rest Jesus enjoyed in Capernaum did Him well. We find His patience and tolerance of the disciples restored.

Mark 9:38-41 John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us."

After the disciple's failure to cast the demon out of the boy in the village near the foot of Mount Hermon, they were in consternation about a perfect stranger successfully doing so. The difference, as Jesus tried to pound into the disciples, was simply in whose authority these things are done. That is what doing something in "the name of", means. "We come in the name of the king" means we come with the king's authority, not our own. Obviously, the disciples still thought they had come into supernatural authority themselves somehow. Their attempts to cast out demons may have been with the words "I, or we, command you to come out of him" or something of the sort.

So later, they debate which one of them is the greatest, as if without Jesus they have some greatness of their own. And now, they debate and complain about a person freed from demonic possession

because they didn't do it, rather than praise God and marvel at the power of Jesus name. They even tried to prevent the man from doing so, displaying no care at all for the possessed man. One would begin to wonder what Jesus saw in these men in the first place. But we do know. We see what transpired as we look back. Jesus was able to see ahead.

"But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.

Acting in the authority of Jesus, rather than in one's own authority, displays the contrast between the two and forces one to see that Jesus' ability to defeat evil and its minions, disables one from speaking any evil of Jesus. After all, "a house divided against itself cannot stand". Jesus' authority must, therefore, come from God. "For he who is not against us is for us." Jesus graciously uses the word "us" which no doubt had a positive effect on the disciples. In Matthew 12:22-30 (and Luke 11) we have this account:

"Then a demon-possessed man *who was* blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" But when the Pharisees heard *this*, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? "If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? For this reason they will be your judges. "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong *man*? And then he will plunder his house. "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

Jesus' inclusion of the disciples at this time in ministry and in himself could not but have helped calm the disciples. It also shows Jesus' compassion on these very weak and ignorant men who, (although they may not have realized it) needed Him far more than He needed them.

"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as *followers* of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward."

Because they belong to Him, whoever gives them a "cup of water" will not lose his/her reward. This is quite similar to Matthew 25:34-40.

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'"

And in Matthew 10:42 we have, "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little

ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." These teachings emphasize, once again, the concept of service to others as the primary role of those in authority.

The concept of rewards deserves mentioning here. Jesus' prefaces this comment with, "Truly I say to you,".... This preface is a solemn assertion both to underscore Jesus' authority to make this promise and to strengthen its content. But what is the "reward" He is speaking of? Generally, can we assume God's approval? On what basis? Beyond that? Position in the kingdom? Or the privilege of suffering as Jesus did? Or perhaps simply receiving from God based on selfless giving to others which expects nothing in return?

Perhaps considering rewards for our deeds is a faulty mindset. Could this taint our motives, thus turning our good deeds into a means for our own reward and blessing? Is it proper to motivate our children to good deeds based on the reward they will get verses the discipline they may receive for not doing them? Are not the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant", enough in themselves? What would a pure motive involve? Does the thought of rewards taint this? But chiefly, do our deeds reflect the direction Jesus gives in terms of service to others at the expense of oneself?

The mention of "little ones" brings us back to Mark. We are still in the context of authority as the Servant. The action of causing "stumbling" is the opposite of what Jesus taught regarding the role of authority.

Mark 9:42-50 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, (44) [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, (46) [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. "For everyone will be salted with fire. "Salt is good; but if the salt becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty *again*? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

The issue of being a stumbling block or causing one to stumble in their faith is a major theme, stated frequently and strongly throughout the New Testament as well as the Old. The result of being a stumbling block is pronounced as well. Paul spends several chapters on this issue (I Corinthians 8-10; Romans 14-15, for example).

Contrast the idea of "stumbling" with its corresponding judgment.

- A1. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble,
- A2. It would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. (a "millstone" is a flat grinding stone turned under ox or ass power. It could weigh as much as a thousand pounds)

B1. If your hand causes you to stumble,

B2. Cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire,

C1. If your foot causes you to stumble,

C2. Cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell,”

D1. If your eye causes you to stumble,

D2. Throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, be cast into hell,

The judgment for causing this is inescapable. It is permanent. It is horrible. So what is this “stumbling” we need avoid causing? This entire passage talks about “stumbling”. To cause someone to “stumble” in regard to their faith means to set up an impediment or object that causes a person to miss his or her goal or target. This might be a diversion, a distraction, a doubt cast into the heart or mind of a person regarding their faith in the truth. To cause someone to sin, violate or give up their faith. It is the direct opposite of putting oneself last and others first. “Stumble” is a translation of the word, “σκανδαλιζω”, skandalizo; (we get our word “scandal” from this) *to put a snare* (in the way), hence *to cause to stumble, to give offense*: - cause to fall away, to lead into sin, to offend, to “scandalize”; to *entrap*, that is, *trip up* (figuratively *stumble* [transitively] or *entice* to sin, apostasy or displeasure). The root is “σκανδαλον”; a *trap stick* (*bent sapling*), that is, *snare* (figuratively *cause of displeasure or sin*): - occasion to fall (of stumbling), offence, thing that offends, stumbling-block, hindrance.

### **From ISBE - Stumbling-Block; Stumbling-Stone**

The literal meaning of the Hebrew words - an object which causes one to stumble or fall - appears in such passages as Lev 19:14 : “Thou shalt not ... put a stumblingblock (*mikhsho* 7) before the blind” (compare Jer 6:21). But the expression is ordinarily **figurative**, referring to that which causes material ruin or spiritual downfall, which were closely connected in Old Testament thought (Psa 119:165; Eze 21:15). The things that lead astray are silver and gold (Eze 7:19); idols (Eze 14:3; Zep 1:3, etc.).

In the context of this passage, with the disciples constantly fixated on the theme of “who is going to be the greatest in the kingdom of God, and with Jesus frequent example of a child, perhaps we can postulate a fair definition of what a “stumbling block” consists of in the context. We offer the following definition: “Manifesting conduct or speech demonstrating that ‘I’ am more important than ‘you’ (or others –like a child) drawing attention to ‘me’ rather than to God.” The stumbling block is anything that causes a person to fix his mind on something contrary to God and God’s will or purposes.

Now, before we discuss “hell”, First, notice the verses in this context repeated from Matthew 5: 29-30;



“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. “If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

And again from Matthew 18:1-9

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. “Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. “If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.”

Aside from the disciples persistence to be great in the kingdom, Jesus pronounces in the strongest possible terms the conditions for both greatness and entering the kingdom of heaven. The repetition in Matthew of this theme regarding causing someone to stumble, causes us to recognize its importance. The theme is spoken of some 50 times in the Bible, many in lengthy passages. What we might say and do, as it relates to causing a brother stress or doubt in his or her faith must be curtailed. The proper action toward others is to put them first and to serve them.

## **CHAPTER TEN - EXCURSUS ON “HELL”<sup>3</sup>**

“Hell”! Here is an English word needing definition and clarification. The idea of “Hell” as a place of torment comes from modern literature combined with a distortion of Biblical terms. In Old England, the word “Hell” was a translation of the New Testament words Hades, Gehenna, and Tartaros. But the word “hell” actually meant something different to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Englishmen than it does to 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans. The words hell, heel, heal, hill, hole, hall, hull and more are from the same ancient root meaning “something covered over or buried”. Even as a child I heard about Englishmen, “planting their potatoes in hell”. So in the original sense of “hell”, Hades is properly understood. However, we have lost the sense of the original English word, and substituted a totally different sense to it. That is why modern translations do not use the word “hell” to translate Hades any longer.

In the New Testament, the word “hell” may be a translation of one of three words.

(1) “ταρταρον” (used one time), From, “Ταρταροζ”, Tartaros, II Peter 2:4 (the deepest *abyss* of Hades); to *incarcerate* in eternal torment: - cast down to hell.

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<sup>3</sup> See a full explanation of this topic: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org) under "Bible Studies". "Controversial Issues and Studies, Topic XV.

(2) “αδηζ” (used ten times) hades, Matthew 11:23, 16:18; Luke 10:15, 16:23; Acts 2:27, 2:31; Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13, 20:14. From the roots “not able to be seen”, properly *unseen*, that is, “Hades” or the place (state) of departed souls: - grave, hell. Translated “grave” in the NASV.

(3) “γεεννα”, (used twelve times) *gheh'-en-nah*, Matthew 5:22, 5:29, 5:30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33; Mark 9:43, 9:45, 9:47; Luke 12:5, James 3:6. Of Hebrew origin; *valley of* (the son of) *Hinnom*; *gehenna* (or *Ge-Hinnom*), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment: - hell.

Our traditional concepts of “hell” come mostly from western literature such as Goethe’s *Faust* where *Faust* sells his soul to *Mephistopheles* for wealth and wisdom. We also read of “Dante’s *inferno*” in his “*Divine Comedy*” where a vivid depiction of the damned is portrayed. John Milton’s “*Paradise Lost*” adds more imagery to the mix. From this came many of the images and tales of *Satan* and *Hell*, and thus Biblical teachings have been supplanted by these images derived from modern stories and pictures.

In the Hebrew mind, the origins of “*tartaros*” is “*min*” or “*minay*”; “*Beneath*”, “*Beyond the depths*”, and “*hades*” is “*sheol*”. The world of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*), including its accessories and inmates: - grave, “hell” (KJV), pit.

The word “hell” is not used to translate either “*sheol*” or “*hades*” in the NASV. Only in the KJV and other older English versions will you find this translation. In old English, “hell” was simply a word to define burial in dirt or “depths”.

But there is no western sense of “hell” in the Bible. In our text, the word is “*gehenna*”, from the Hebrew, “*Valley of (the sons of) Hinnom*”. This mention of this deep ravine, located out side the walls on the south side of the city of Jerusalem, brought terrible images to those who knew its history. Early in the Israeli settlement of Canaan, the valley was the border between Benjamin and Judah (Joshua 15:8, 18:16). But in the time of the monarchy, from Solomon onward as the Judean kings followed the evil practices of paganism, this valley was used for the worship of *Molech*, (also called *Milcom* and *Baal*) and included child sacrifice by burning. [See I Kings 11:4-8, 33; II Kings 16:2-4 (II Chronicles 28:1-4); II Kings 23:4-20 (Josiah’s reform); II Chronicles 33:1-9; Jeremiah 7:27-34; 19:1-15; etc.]. This practice and worship was in force when Canaan was invaded and occupied. (Note: Judges 2:11-13) It also involved cult prostitution, worship of both male and female idols and was, in essence, a fertility cult. Mass burials and burning of bodies and debris led to this place as the picture of where the wicked would be cast in the judgment. The place of *Topheth* is near the junction of the *Kidron* and *Hinnom* Valleys.

On the south side of the valley is the “*Potter’s field*” where Judas’ thirty pieces of silver was used to buy a burial place for paupers and where the tombs of early Christians (Jewish) are buried. After the restoration to Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile, the valley became used as a sort of perpetually burning city dump. The occasional floodwaters would wash the ashes into the adjacent *Kidron* Valley and on down to the desert.

The quotation Jesus uses in Mark 9:48 is from Isaiah 66:22-24,

"For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So your offspring and your name will endure. "And it shall be from new moon to new

moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD. "Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind." \*

The Valley of Hinnom is referred to by Jesus in mark 9:42-49 and as He quotes this passage. Without established archaeological evidence a popular concept is that the continual burning of trash and debris, plus the images of the worship of heathen gods including human burnings in the history of Israel brought forth a grisly image to those who heard Jesus express God's judgment on those who caused others to stumble in their faith in God. The passage needs to be read with the word "Gehenna" in the place of "hell". In this view, worms were always present in the rubbish dump and the fire was kept constantly burning as the need to dispose of trash and carcasses became constant as the city grew. Further, the bodies of dead criminals were supposedly disposed of here, left unburied. This act of failing to bury the body and its subsequent "burning" brought ultimate disgrace to the person and, in the Jewish mind, was such an abomination that the soul was prevented from entering Sheol and, with the burning, all hope of an afterlife was lost. Again, this view lacks substantial evidence and has its origins in legend.

Does this image mean, however, that the judgment of the wicked is defined as an eternal torment, or does it mean that the fire of torment is eternal but those thus cast into it are destroyed without hope of life again, in contrast to the righteous who live in bliss eternally?

Let's look at some key passages carefully, reading their contexts. Do they cross interpret or relate? If so how? If not, then what do we conclude? Can we be definitive about our traditional view?

**Hades** - Matthew 11:23, 16:18; Luke 10:15, 16:23; Acts 2:27, 2:31; Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13, 20:14.

**Gehenna** - Mark 9:43,45,47. Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33. Luke 12:5. James 3:6.

**Tartaros** - II Peter 2:4

**Bottomless Pit (Pit of the Abyss)** - Revelation 9:1,2 Luke 8:31; Romans 10:7; Revelation 9:1; 9:2, 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3

**Fire used in a variety of images** - Matthew 3:10,11,12; 7:19; 13:40-50; 17:15; 22:7; 25:41. Mark 9:22, 14:54. Luke 13:9, 16-17; 9:54; 12:49. John 15:6; 18:18. I Corinthians 13:3,15 (Divine fire?); Hebrews 10:27; I Peter 1:7

**Divine fire** - II Thessalonians 1:7; Hebrews 1:7; 12:18, 29; Revelation 1:14; 2:18; 3:18; 4:5; 8:5; 7:8; 9:17-18; 10:1; 11:5; 14:18; 15:2; 16:8; 17:16; 18:8; 19:12; 20:9

**Eternal fire or fire of destruction** - Hebrews 10:27; II Peter 3:7; Jude 1:7, 23;

**Fire of false prophet** - Revelation 13:13

**Fire of Torment** - Revelation 14:10;

**Lake of Fire** - Revelation 19:20; 20:10,14,15; 21:8

**Eternal fire** -Matthew 18:8; 25: 41

**Furnace of Fire** – Matthew 13:36-43, 47-51

**Darkness** - Luke 1:79; 22:53; 23:44; John 3:19; Acts 26:18; Romans 2:19, 13:12; I Corinthians 4:5-6; II Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:8, 5:11, 6:12; Colossians 1:13; I Thessalonians 5:5; I Peter 2:9; II Peter 2:17; Jude 1:13.

**Outer Darkness** - Matthew 8:12, 22:13; 25:30

Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on Isaiah 66:22-24 ff.

They who go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem every new moon and Sabbath, see there with their own eyes the terrible punishment of the rebellious. *“And they go out and look at the corpses of the men that have rebelled against me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched, and they become an abomination to all flesh.”* They perfects are *perf. cons.* regulated by the foregoing יִצְאָהּ. יִצְאָהּ (accented with *pashta* in our editions, but more correctly with *munach*) refers to their going out of the holy city. The prophet had predicted in Isa 66:18, that in the last times the whole multitude of the enemies of Jerusalem would be crowded together against it, in the hope of getting possession of it. This accounts for the fact that the neighbourhood of Jerusalem becomes such a scene of divine judgment. בִּרְאָהּ always denotes a fixed, lingering look directed to any object; here it is connected with the grateful feeling of satisfaction at the righteous acts of God and their own gracious deliverance. נִרְאָהּ, which only occurs again in Dan 12:2, is the strongest word for “abomination.”

It is very difficult to imagine the picture which floated before the prophet's mind. How is it possible that all flesh, i.e., all men of all nations, should find room in Jerusalem and the temple? Even if the city and temple should be enlarged, as Ezekiel and Zechariah predict, the thing itself still remains inconceivable. And again, how can corpses be eaten by worms at the same time as they are being burned, or how can they be the endless prey of worms and fire without disappearing altogether from the sight of man? It is perfectly obvious, that the thing itself, as here described, must appear monstrous and inconceivable, however we may suppose it to be realized. The prophet, by the very mode of description adopted by him, precludes the possibility of our conceiving of the thing here set forth as realized in any material form in this present state. (End of commentary)

One concludes, after examining the texts and lessons, that the fate of the ultimate fate of the wicked is simply extermination or annihilation. At face value the illustrations of chaff thrown into the fire etc. leave little else to be thought. There seems to be a sense of something happening to the wicked prior to this fate, (including judgment) but it is short term, not long. Even the Lake of Fire, reserved for the Devil and his angels as well as the beast and the False Prophet determines eternal torment in their case but no such statement is made regarding those cast in whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. The passages speaking of outer darkness are not specific enough to conclude that this is the final step. The preponderance of evidence leads one to the conclusion that the stated ultimate fate of the wicked is destruction. However, there are three particular passages to be considered that could lead to a different conclusion. The first is:

## LUKE 16:19-31, THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

This story is one of three instances where the idea of the ultimate fate of the condemned (annihilation) is brought into question. If it is a teaching on the fate of the dead in the afterlife and a specific teaching on the nature of Hades (Sheol), then it is to be considered as a serious definition of the nature of the afterlife. If it a parable or portrait for other purposes, then it does not have to be considered as a teaching as described above. The church has done a lot to convince history that the afterlife is portrayed in terms of this story. But the church has also done damage to the scriptures through a strict literalism that is not acceptable. I choose to consider this story a parable for the following reasons, many being the very reasons others question its legitimacy as a parable.

1. The tale appears in the midst of a series of parables Luke records and, interestingly enough, it is followed by Jesus' teaching on stumbling blocks, which is our context for this excursus. Although the style is unusual, there is no reason to 1) assume it is a strict teaching on the immediate afterlife and, 2) therefore conclude it is not a parable.
2. It appears that this story in similar form had been told for centuries among the Jews regarding the benefits of generosity as opposed to selfishness, especially as it effects one's standing in the afterlife. Even in Egypt, a story strikingly similar to this had been told.<sup>2</sup> Many Jews may have been familiar with it. In any case, the theme of this story is common, even today, "The evil done in this life will be reflected in the afterlife as will the good". This theme is basic to many tales in much of near-eastern literature as well as in Greek mythology. But Jesus takes this common theme and pulls the rug out from under the preconceived conclusion. His masterful use of this theme grabs the attention of his hearers and holds them to His key point – which centers on faith, not works or rewards.

In addition, The Talmud lends elements to this story as it describes the "Bosom of Abraham" as the destination of the truly righteous in the afterlife. This means that Abraham, accounted righteous by faith, was in God's favor. All in his bosom would be similarly blessed. The use of Abraham's name lends effect to His story rather than removing it from the realm of imagery or parable. Jesus' painting of this portrait is interesting in that His purpose is to address the unbelief of His hearers, not their selfishness. And the theme has some familiar elements in it such as - riches do not necessarily indicate good standing before God anymore than poverty indicates a negative standing before God. This great debate exists today. Does wealth, health, or high social standing indicate God's favor? Not at all, but this is still not the point of Jesus story even though His hearers may have thought so as He was in the midst of telling it.

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<sup>2</sup> An Egyptian story goes like this, according to Hugo Grossman in 1918, repeated in TIB, volume 8, page 289. It was apparently still extant in a Demotic Egyptian papyrus in the first century A.D. "The body of a wealthy man, clad in his finest attire, was carried to his grave by a large company of mourners. At the same time the body of a poor man was removed for burial, unaccompanied by attendants and covered only by a mat. An observer, impressed by the disparity in the honors bestowed on the two, commented on the advantages enjoyed by the rich man but changed his views when he was permitted to visit the underworld. There he saw the poor man clothed in the linen garments of the rich and given a place of honor, while the rich man suffered torments for his evil deeds. The story concludes with the moral: "Hew who is good on earth fares well in the realm of the dead, and he who is evil on earth fares well."

3. The point is surprising, and typical of Jesus. First is that once one enters Hades, (signifying the end of this mortal existence – the grave), what transpires thereafter rests upon what was done in one’s lifetime (verse 25). This is the common theme his hearers had heard before. Second, there is no crossing over to Abraham’s bosom nor can one cross over to Hades from Abraham’s bosom (verse 26). This precludes objections and questions about the possible “whys” and keeps his hearers from being mentally distracted. Third, and most importantly, opportunity is given now for people to listen to Moses, the prophets, and as a final Divine statement, one who rises from the dead. But failure to listen will result in the most unpleasant of fates. God offers, through Jesus, opportunity for mankind to be given the truth in an undeniable fashion. However, there will always be those who deny what is before their very eyes due to close mindedness or hardness of heart (verses 27-31). This is an unexpected conclusion and his hearers are no doubt stunned. There are no questions, and Jesus once again dashes their preconceived ideas to the ground.
  
4. When Jesus spoke this parable, He likely spoke in Aramaic, or possibly Hebrew. Thus, He would have used the word Sheol, not Hades. Hades is used by Luke as he writes in Greek. It is interesting that the other gospel writers omit this story. Perhaps Luke thought it would have a significant impact on Theophilus, his Greek friend to whom he writes his histories. The use of Sheol lends itself to more creativity than does Hades because it is basically undefined as simply the place of the dead, the grave, - a mysterious realm the condition of which was unknown to the Jews. Hades on the other hand, comes with Greek mythology and baggage we include in the story from our background. In fact, “Hades” was the name of the god of the underworld in Greek mythology.<sup>3</sup> Jesus’ use of Sheol allows Him to paint a portrait which the hearers knew to be a creation for effect. This is common to Jesus’ style. There is no precedent for any of the elements in the story in Hebrew literature. But Hebrew literature is loaded with stories using imagery for effect.
  
5. Although the scripture abounds with statements about Sheol (Hades) with basic teachings regarding the nature of this place, which is simply the grave or the mysterious underworld place of the dead, and adding to that the fact that all who die go there, whether believers or not, (even Jesus was there-Acts 2:27,31), we have the introduction of “Abraham’s bosom” where Lazarus (not the brother of Mary and Martha) rested. Lazarus is the Greek rendering of Eleazar, meaning “one whom God has helped”. Abraham’s bosom was seen in the Talmud as the hope of those who died. The preponderance of information about Sheol and

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<sup>3</sup> Hades is the lord of the dead and ruler of the nether world, which is referred to as the domain of Hades or, by transference, as Hades alone. He is the son of [Cronus](#) and [Rhea](#). When the three sons of Cronus divided the world among each other, Hades was given the underworld, while his brothers [Zeus](#) and [Poseidon](#) took the upperworld and the sea respectively. For a while Hades ruled the underworld together with [Persephone](#), whom he had abducted from the upperworld, but Zeus ordered him to release Persephone back into the care of her mother [Demeter](#). However, before she left he gave her a pomegranate and when she ate of it, it bound her to the underworld forever. Hades sits on a throne made of ebony, and carries a scepter. He also has a helmet, given to him by the [Cyclopes](#), which can make him invisible. Hades rules the dead, assisted by various (demonic) helpers, such as [Thanatos](#) and [Hypnos](#), the ferryman [Charon](#), and the hound [Cerberus](#). Many heroes from Greek mythology have descended into the underworld, either to question the shades or trying to free them. Although Hades does not allow his subjects to leave his domain, on several occasions he has granted permission, such as when [Orpheus](#) requested the return of his beloved [Eurydice](#). Hades possesses the riches of the earth, and is thus referred to as 'the Rich One'. Possibly also because -- as Sophocles writes -- 'the gloomy Hades enriches himself with our sighs and our tears'. Of all the gods, Hades is the one who is liked the least and even the gods themselves have an aversion of him. People avoided speaking his name lest they attracted his unwanted attention. With their faces averted they sacrificed black sheep, whose blood they let drip into pits, and when they prayed to him, they would bang their hands on the ground. The narcissus and the cypress are sacred to him. Other names include Clymenus ('notorious'), Eubuleus ('well-guessing') and Polydegmon ('who receives many').

the grave lends credence to this unique story as a parable. Otherwise, the elements of this story would be commonly known. But it is not. It is unique, as were many of Jesus' stories. One can legitimately ask the question noting the style of verses one and two, "Did Jesus hearers actually have personal knowledge or acquaintance with either or both of these individuals?" In asking this question, I have received a preponderance of "no's" and a few who didn't know. Only rarely do I get a definite yes, and these are from people who don't accept that the Bible has any teaching that is not to be taken literally.

6. If Jesus were to state a position on or teaching about the nature of Hades, He would be more inclined to begin His description with, "Truly, truly I say to you that Hades (Sheol) is a place of torment where all who go there will suffer agony in the flame and cry out for help! Etc." But He doesn't. He uses names of individuals to indicate that the message that has a significant point. Rather than question whether the story is a parable because names are used, (and this is the only parable so doing), we can understand the parable better because names are used, especially considering the impact the imagery of Abraham's name brings to the table.
7. There is a main point to the story that would be unnecessary if the story was intended to be a description and warning about those who would go there. The point has nothing to do with Hades itself, but of the unbelieving generation. The point begins at verse 27, "And he (Dives) said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house--for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "But Abraham \*said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" The point is clear! Those whose hearts are not open to Moses and the Prophets will not be open to any revelation from God, even the resurrection of one from the dead.
8. Some other elements of the story bear comment. In verses 19 and 20, the rich man is seen to be "gaily living" due to his wealth, while the poor Lazarus is carried by someone to the gates of the rich man's residence. This, of course would be unlikely. With his disease, the poor man would have been likely excluded as unclean and placed in a colony of the unclean where others would care for him and feed him. Jesus contrives this scene for effect and to grab His hearers. The question arises, "What will the rich man do?" The words describing the condition of Lazarus are only found here. They indicate a condition of ulcerated sores. Luke, a physician, would be familiar with the proper term as he translates the Aramaic to Greek.

In verse 21, it appears that the poor man can see the table of the rich man and we note later on that the rich man was able to see the condition of the poor man and did nothing about it. He may have used the excuse that the poor man was "unclean" and so avoided him using this rationality. The story has some similarities to the parable of the Good Samaritan. It seems the dogs have more compassion on Lazarus than does the rich man. The poor soul couldn't even clean himself. In verses 23 and 24, the rich man still sees Lazarus as subservient to himself. Verses 25 and 26 assure the hearers of the conclusion in their own mind. They will listen closely to see if they are right. They are shocked to find out they were totally caught off guard. In a message very typical of the style of the prophets, Jesus

illustrates that that hardness of heart toward the poor is symptomatic of hardness of heart toward God.

In verse 27, Jesus takes the story in a new, unexpected direction. Verse 28 places the story in the hands of the rich man in torment. It appears that the rich man finally expresses a concern for others. The motive for his request is extreme. This extreme means to motivate one to care for the needs of others must be avoided and hearts need to be softened prior to this point. Further, the rich man has humbled himself to even asking the Abraham send Lazarus to his own family to warn them. But in fact, the hardness of heart resulting in faithlessness, selfishness and carelessness will not only fail to listen to Moses and the prophets, but not even to the words of one miraculous rising from the dead. In this image, not only is Lazarus included as one that would have to rise from the dead to warn the brothers, but there is the allusion to Jesus own rising from the dead and the reception He will receive from those hardened of heart.

The second and third passages speak of a furnace of fire in which there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth. These are found in Matthew 13:36-51.

Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering *fish* of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good *fish* into containers, but the bad they threw away. "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all these things?" They *said* to Him, "Yes." And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.

This account of Jesus' teaching is unique to the gospels. In fact, other than Daniel 3:1-30, and Isaiah 31:9, this is the only other reference to such an image. In Daniel, the account is of the three heroes, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were cast into Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace for failing to worship his image. They survived without even a hint of the aroma of smoke and Nebuchadnezzar was moved to honor them and their God. If Jesus is using this image, perhaps He is noting that those who do commit idolatry can anticipate the same treatment but without survival.



The length of time the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” takes place is not determined, so it could be of any chosen time. In Isaiah, the theme is again idolatry by the citizens of Judea and the leaders of Jerusalem who are seeking help from Egypt rather than repentance and trust in God in the face of an Assyrian threat. The following phrases are used:

Isaiah 30:31-33 “For at the voice of the LORD Assyria will be terrified, *When* He strikes with the rod. And every blow of the rod of punishment, Which the LORD will lay on him, Will be with *the music of* tambourines and lyres; And in battles, brandishing weapons, He will fight them. For Topheth has long been ready, Indeed, it has been prepared for the king. He has made it deep and large, A pyre of fire with plenty of wood; The breath of the LORD, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire.”

**Topheth**--literally, "A place of abomination" (discussed earlier); the valley of the sons of Hinnom, southeast of Jerusalem, where Israel offered human sacrifices to Moloch by fire; hence a place of burning (2Ki 23:10; Jer 7:31). Latterly Gehinnom or Gehenna, that is, valley of Hinnom, was the receptacle of the refuse of the city, to consume which fires were constantly burning. In the former sense it was a fit place to symbolize the funeral pyre of the Assyrian army (not that it actually perished there); the Hebrews did not burn, but buried their dead, but the heathen Assyrians are to be burnt as a mark of ignominy. (From Keil and Delitzsch)

Isaiah 31:8-9 “And the Assyrian will fall by a sword not of man, And a sword not of man will devour him. So he will not escape the sword, And his young men will become forced laborers. "His rock will pass away because of panic, And his princes will be terrified at the standard," Declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.”

The “furnace” here appears to indicate that while the Lord’s fire (glory) resides in Zion, His judgment upon the wicked stems from Jerusalem, where His presence is represented by the temple. (See 10:16-17; Amos 1:2-4)

In Jesus teachings, there are some elements we must consider. He is teaching in parables and His subject is again the kingdom of God. In His first parable illustrating the separation of the righteous from the wicked, a field of grain is used. The harvest is the end of the age and God’s angels are the reapers who separate the grain from the weeds (tares). The “tares” are identified as “sons of the Evil One” and are “stumbling blocks, and “lawless”. They are “gathered up by His angels at the end of the age and “burned with fire” and/or “thrown into the (not ‘a’) furnace of fire (and) in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The idea of “The” Furnace rather than “a” furnace indicates that His hearers had an idea of what He was referring to.

In His second parable, a fishing dragnet is the illustration and God’s angels are the fishermen who separate the catch. The wicked are fish that the angels thrown away. Then Jesus states, So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Again, “The” Furnace of fire presents a fire within a structure designed for a specific purpose as opposed to a general fire. In furnaces, not only did chaff get burned up, but also as a kiln, pottery was cured, or as a smelter, metals purified, for the blacksmith, metals softened. In other words, within the furnace, we find a superheated situation such as we see in Daniel 3.

A reference to the use of a furnace of fire to punish evildoers (in the mind of Babylonian/Persian rulers) is found in Jeremiah 29:21-23,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying to you falsely in My name, 'Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will slay them before your eyes. 'Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire, because they have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows and am a witness," declares the LORD."

Whether those hearing Jesus parables thought of any of these images or simply understood the intense heat generated by a furnace in which, rather than total destruction occurring, one suffers torment, we cannot say for sure. In any case, the images are used to motivate those in this life to consider their standing before God and His angels, and thus be given opportunity to repent before there is no more time to do so. The weeping and gnashing of teeth points to one's recognition that it is too late, and the incredible realization that there is no more opportunity to change one's mind. Personal disintegration, not on just a temporal scale, but on a final, eternal scale is devastating and fear, remorse, terror, and rage pour forth from the forever lost.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to say with absolute certainty that the ultimate fate of the wicked is defined as extermination even though the preponderance of scripture seems to indicate this. There are enough illustrations, teaching and information that can be interpreted by some to cast this conclusion into question.

But, other factors can be brought to bear on this as well. The nature of God and His mercy for one. Is it in the nature of God to torture unbelievers for eternity? Is it, on the one hand as some have taught, the destiny of the saved to look upon the torments of the lost with glee and revel in their judgment? On the other hand, as John writes in Revelation 21:1-5,

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He \*said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son", then how does this leave room for an arena of eternal torment and pain to exist? If the "Lake of Fire" is a part of this worldly continuum, would it not also be vanquished?

Another issue is the dissolution of the created universe and the creation of a new one after The Day of The Lord as II Peter 3:7, 10-13 describes:

“But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” (See also Isaiah 66:14-17;

In Jude 5-10 we have a vivid picture of the destruction of the wicked:

“Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed.

In II Thessalonians 1:3-10 Paul writes,

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. *This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed.”

Even in the beloved verse of John 3:16, Jesus states, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Here, the word “perish” is “απολλυμι” (apollumi) meaning to totally destroy, suffer destruction or ruin.

In every instance where God brought judgment upon His enemies or instructed others to do so in His name, not one single time was there the command or action resulting in torture of the enemies. On the contrary, they were to be “utterly destroyed” (See Deuteronomy 7:2, 20:17; Joshua 11:20; I

Samuel 15:3; etc. for examples of this). Further, we have patterns that indicate the way in which the Lord deals with the ungodly. At the flood, none were saved at all except those in the Ark, all was lost at Sodom and Gomorrah, and in Korah's rebellion, (Numbers 16), there was no question regarding the totality of the judgment. Finally, in no place is there ever a command to torture or torment the enemies of Israel or God.

In nearly every instance where the image of fire is used, the result is destruction, either in judgment or in purification where the impure is destroyed. This is the rule rather than the exception. Exceptions to this image occur in parables designed to use this image to achieve a point beyond the nature of the "afterlife" or the "beyond". The student will have to decide for himself what seems to be the final outcome of the wicked.

## END OF EXCURSUS

### **CHAPTER ELEVEN - JESUS LEAVES GALILEE AND JOURNEYS TOWARDS JERUSALEM.**

Mark 10:1-12 Getting up, He \*went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds \*gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them. *Some* Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and *began* to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted *a man* TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. "But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." In the house the disciples *began* questioning Him about this again. And He \*said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

Jesus doesn't remain long in Galilee. After a brief sojourn, He heads south, for Judea to a region "beyond Jordan". Likely He began this journey on the East side of the Sea of Galilee and traveled South from there. Jews were unlikely to travel this route as it passed through Gentile country. Jesus would have little disturbance on His journey. His route took Him into Judea, and to an area on the East side of the Jordan River in Perea. The site may have been close to where John the Baptist was announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God and Baptizing people in anticipation of the One to come. Here, Jesus Himself was baptized prior to His temptation in the wilderness. And now, He knew He faced an equal if not greater challenge ahead. To the South lay Macherus, where John had been incarcerated and then beheaded. This area held many disturbing memories for Jesus and the disciples.

His arrival was soon known by the people. As He was teaching them, Pharisees came to Him and asked Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife. The question was neither "out of the blue", nor intended to glean truth from Jesus but to entrap Him into a situation that might result in either His arrest, imprisonment, and even perhaps His execution or cast Him into disfavor with the masses. For this was the very issue John had been arrested for by Herod Antipas when John

denounced Herod's marriage to his brother Phillip's wife Herodias. If Jesus could be entrapped into some comment relating to this, the goal of the Pharisees would be accomplished by others. With Herod in mind, and in his territory, the question was posed to Jesus.

Let's look briefly at what Herod had actually done. Married to a Nabatean princess, Herod lusted for his brother's wife Herodias and it appears the feelings were mutual.

Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was the daughter of his son Aristobulus and his wife Bernice. Bernice was the daughter of Herod's sister Salome and so was his niece. Herodias first marriage was to the half brother of her father, her uncle [Herod II (Philip)]. By him she bore a daughter, Salome (who later asked for John's head on a platter as prompted by Herodias). Herod Antipas was also the half brother of Herod Philip, having the same father but a different mother (Herod II Philip - Mariamne II, Herod Antipas – Malthace). While Herod II (Philip) and Herodias were guests in his home, Antipas wooed her and persuaded her to leave her husband for him. Remember, she was his niece. To make room for this union, he divorced his wife and took Herodias from his brother. Marriage to one's brother's wife, while the brother was still living was forbidden by Mosaic law. That is why John pronounced it "unlawful" for Antipas to have his brother's wife. Herodias' daughter by her first husband was Salome. Salome was married to Philip the Tetrarch of Trachnonitis the daughter of Herod the Great and Cleopatra. In other words she also was married to an uncle, her father's brother.

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce a wife?" If Jesus answered in the affirmative he would be seen as agreeing with the law, but might be accused of disagreeing with John and the Pharisees would be able to stir the crowds, who loved John. If He answered in the negative, he would be agreeing with John that Herod Antipas' actions were "unlawful" and place Himself in possibility of arrest as John had been. So the stakes were high regarding Jesus' answer to this seemingly innocent question.

Jesus answer betrays his deity. He answers their question with a question. But a question designed not only to thwart the scheme of the Pharisees but to give an unexpected answer. "What did Moses command you?" He asked. This response may have brought glee to the Pharisees because Jesus was going to reference the Law. But the question also directed their thoughts and was used by Jesus to manipulate the manipulators for His own purpose. Their answer was direct, "Moses permitted *a man* TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY." (Deuteronomy 24:1 ff.) They thought they had Him. He was going to conflict with John. But He had them. In focusing on Moses and the Law, as well as their own goal, their attention was diverted from the possibility of Jesus' answer. And so He answered, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. "But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." The Pharisees were defeated. Of course they realized He was correct, but that answer never entered their minds because it was clouded by their motives and scheming in asking the question in the first place.

Later, Jesus' disciples asked Him to clarify the matter. Jesus' answer to them bears directly on Antipas and Herodias as well as on all who play loosely with their marriage vows and commitments. He agrees with John and is willing to share this with His disciples in confidence. They would not betray Him...yet.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE - EXCURSUS: MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE<sup>4</sup>**

What about the Jesus instructions and Biblical teaching on this subject? The scripture is clear. The two base principles are firm and fast:

(1) Marriage is to be honored until death. There is to be neither thought of divorce, adultery, unfaithfulness of any kind on the part of either partner, nor any abuse, neglect or damage done to one's partner in the marriage. Both are to be selfless, servants of each other and their children, honoring each other in God's plan, purpose and will. The scriptures here are numerous. They need not be listed except for the hardest of heart.

(2) At the death of either, the widowed partner is free to seek another mate from among those who are legitimately available. This means other widowed persons or those never having been married (or sexually active).

The reason for the tight teaching on marriage is found in Jesus comments in verses 6-9. "But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

When the man and woman are joined in marriage, they fully represent the image and nature of God. This is clear from Genesis 1:27-28. God is One and his nature contains the aspects of both male and female in perfect harmony. God isn't sexual in nature, but the sexual nature of creation reflects the glory of God. Oneness or unity is part of what makes God who He is as the Creator and Redeemer of the universe. Division or divorce in a marriage is an insult to God's nature and is seen as unfaithfulness and idolatry. In fact, God, His prophets, Jesus, and the apostles use the marriage union as the primary illustration relating God to His people. It is a picture of the sacred and the divine and is not to be profaned.

But most profane it in one way or another. Our sinful nature causes this in us, yet we have no excuse.

Another Biblical principle:

(3) An unmarried male is obligated to care for his brother's wife and family if her husband has died. This extends to close relatives as well (Note the story of Naomi and Ruth). The closest relative may shirk this duty and become abominable in the site of the community, but that is his decision.

The complexities and solutions:

(1) Divorce and remarriage

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<sup>4</sup> See a more recent discussion of this subject at: [www.bibleclassroom.org](http://www.bibleclassroom.org), Bible Studies; "Controversial Issues and Studies", topic XII.

The rampant acceptance and social drive toward divorce and remarriage or just extramarital sexual involvements is increasing. I often wonder why people get married at all. I think it is, in the mind of the woman, (for the most part) a means to control her husband. This very trend is proof of the hardness of heart. Divorce takes place for innumerable reasons, and, in the Jewish economy a man could divorce his wife for no reason at all. All he had to do was write out a writ of divorce, hand it to her and say, "I divorce you". Women had no rights in the matter and could not divorce their husbands. This act could be extremely cruel as it placed the woman without any means of support. She would be forced to go home to her parent's house and be dependant upon them. It was a disgrace for her. She couldn't remarry unless her husband died. This is why David had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah murdered. In a purely twisted rationalization, David, having impregnated Bathsheba, felt that the way out of that disgrace was to commit murder.

So the divorced woman was left to unfortunate circumstances and often blamed for the divorce because she wasn't keeping her husband happy. This is why women were treated so badly and worked so hard to keep their homes. If their husbands became discontented, they could be in trouble. Wives were taken advantage of (if their husbands so desired) and had no recourse. This is still true in Muslim countries today.

The only other Biblical ground for divorce was "adultery". Actually, this was determined prior to or just after the consummation of the marriage. If the bride's hymen was found broken before or by the time of consummation, her groom could annul the marriage immediately and even present his bride for execution. He was not required to do so, but it was his option. We have this situation with Mary and Joseph. If there were adultery after marriage, the same options applied. (Note Hosea)

Some remaining verses on "divorce" in the Bible:

Deuteronomy 22:13-30 "If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and *then* turns against her, and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, 'I took this woman, *but* when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,' then the girl's father and her mother shall take and bring out the *evidence* of the girl's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. "The girl's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man for a wife, but he turned against her; and behold, he has charged her with shameful deeds, saying, "I did not find your daughter a virgin." But this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the garment before the elders of the city. "So the elders of that city shall take the man and chastise him, and they shall fine him a hundred *shekels* of silver and give it to the girl's father, because he publicly defamed a virgin of Israel. And she shall remain his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days.

"But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin, then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house; thus you shall purge the evil from among you. "If a man is found lying with a married woman, then both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel. "If there is a girl who is a virgin engaged to a man, and *another* man finds her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city and you shall stone them to death; the girl, because she did not cry out in the city, and the man, because he has violated his neighbor's wife. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. "But if in the field the man finds the girl who is engaged, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the

man who lies with her shall die. "But you shall do nothing to the girl; there is no sin in the girl worthy of death, for just as a man rises against his neighbor and murders him, so is this case. "When he found her in the field, the engaged girl cried out, but there was no one to save her. "If a man finds a girl who is a virgin, who is not engaged, and seizes her and lies with her and they are discovered, then the man who lay with her shall give to the girl's father fifty *shekels* of silver, and she shall become his wife because he has violated her; he cannot divorce her all his days. "A man shall not take his father's wife so that he will not uncover his father's skirt.

Deuteronomy 24:1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's *wife*, and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, *then* her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.

Jeremiah 3:6-11 "Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. "I thought, 'After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. "Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. "Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception," declares the LORD. And the LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.

Malachi 2:11-17 "Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD which He loves and has married the daughter of a foreign god. "As for the man who does this, may the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob *everyone* who awakes and answers, or who presents an offering to the LORD of hosts. "This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts *it with* favor from your hand. "Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. "But not one has done *so* who has a remnant of the Spirit. And what did *that one do* while he was seeking a godly offspring? Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied *Him*?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?"



Matthew 5:27-32 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. "If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell. "It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 19:1-12 "When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. *Some* Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." They *said* to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?" He *said* to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." The disciples *said* to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." But He said to them, "Not all men *can* accept this statement, but *only* those to whom it has been given. "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are *also* eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept *this*, let him accept *it*."

Mark 10:2-12 *Some* Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and *began* to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted *a man* TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. "But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. "FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." In the house the disciples *began* questioning Him about this again. And He *said* to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

1Corinthians 6:13-20, Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will

do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with *her*? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1Corinthians 7:1-40 “ Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But this I say by way of concession, not of command. Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such *cases*, but God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? Only, as the Lord has assigned to each one, as God has called each, in this manner let him walk. And so I direct in all the churches. Was any man called *when he was already* circumcised? He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but *what matters* is the keeping of the commandments of God. Each man must remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that *condition* in which he was called.

Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy. I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and *his interests* are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and *to secure* undistracted devotion to the Lord. But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. But in my opinion she is happier if she remains as she is; and I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

Translation of 7:36-38

NASV

1Co 7:36 But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry.

1Co 7:37 But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well.

1Co 7:38 So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.

MSG

1Co 7:36 If a man has a woman friend to whom he is loyal but never intended to marry, having decided to serve God as a "single," and then changes his mind, deciding he should marry her, he should go ahead and marry. It's no sin; it's not even a "step down" from celibacy, as some say.

1Co 7:37 On the other hand, if a man is comfortable in his decision for a single life in service to God and it's entirely his own conviction and not imposed on him by others, he ought to stick with it.

1Co 7:38 Marriage is spiritually and morally right and not inferior to singleness in any way, although as I indicated earlier, because of the times we live in, I do have pastoral reasons for encouraging singleness.

RSV

7:36 If anyone thinks he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes, let them marry, it is no sin.

7:37 But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.

7:38 So that he who marries his betrothed does well and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

Stewart

I Cor. 7:36, Εἰ δὲ τις ἀσχημονεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν παρθεὸν αὐτοῦ νομίζει, εἰ ἡ ὑπερακμὸς καὶ οὐπὼς ὀφείλει. γίψεσθαι, ὁ θελεῖ ποιεῖτω οὐχ ἁμαρτάσῃ γαμειτώσας.

If one thinks he is without control or substantive plan toward his own betrothed virgin, and if she is beyond her prime, and he wishes to bring about what he wants, he does not sin they may marry.

(If any man thinks he lacks control toward his betrothed, and he wishes to bring about what he wants, he does not sin, they may marry)

1Co 7:37, ὅς δὲ ἐστήκεν ἐδραῖος ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ, μὴ ἐχὼν ἀναγκή, ἐξουσίαν δὲ ἔχει περὶ τοῦ ἰδίου θεληματος, καὶ τοῦτο κεκρίκεν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ, τοῦ τηρεῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθενοῦ, καλῶς ποιεῖ.

But if he stands firm in his heart, not having (compulsion, constraint, hardship) but he has authority over his own will (wishes) and he has decided (or judged) in his heart regarding keeping himself (a) virgin he does well.

1Co 7:38 ὥστε καὶ ὁ ἐγαμιζὼν καλῶς ποιεῖ, ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐγαμιζὼν κρεῖσσον ποιήσει.

So that he who marries does well and he who refrains from marriage does better.

In our modern age, outside of the conditions of virginity at marriage and faithfulness during the marriage, we have the following situations to deal within the church. These represent current situations for couples, where one partner at least, is a Christian, or has become a Christian after marriage or remarriage. This section will include Jesus' instruction, and compare those under Law and under Grace: "And He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.'"

For the Christian, the following situations may be involved.

- A. Discovery of sexual activity prior to marriage on the part of either partner.
- B. Marrying a non-believer.
- C. Sexual activity (unfaithfulness) after marriage on the part of either partner.
- D. Divorce in a Christian marriage.
- E. Divorce in a marriage when the wife is a Christian and the husband is not.
- F. Divorce in a marriage when the husband is a Christian and the wife is not.
- G. Remarriage after any of the above.
- H. Divorce for causes such as physical, sexual or child abuse; those marrying under the pretext of being a Christian, homosexuality, medical conditions such as coma etc.

#### Basic understandings:

As those under grace and not law, we need to be careful not to continue in sin(ning) so that grace may abound. In fact, greater effort must be made to preserve the union than for unbelievers. We have Biblical mandates under the New Covenant relating to behavior and conduct in the marriage and family. Too many Christians assume freedom in their relationship with God that seems to exclude commitment, obedience, faith, and responsibility when the opposite is true.

At the same time, there is no sin that Christ didn't pay the price for. We stand clean before God and it is eternal regardless of our conduct. The convenience of this truth is tempting, more tempting perhaps than the mandate to holiness and commitment. But it is not a license to sin as those accuse the "grace teachers" of proclaiming. Quite the contrary, God forbids that attitude (Romans 6:2, 15). Hence, consequences for such behavior will accrue as the natural outcome of such conduct. One may well incur the discipline of God (Hebrews 12) so that righteousness will develop. It is incumbent upon the Christian not to seek release from a marital partner. If it does or has occurred, it is incumbent that the Christian remain as he or she is, single, or in the present relationship. Divorce and remarriage under the law is prohibited with only a few exceptions, and it is prohibited under the New Covenant as well. In fact, it is even more strictly prohibited in light of the abundant teachings on Christian marriage and family unity and development. Jesus' teachings about the union prior to the law being given give weight to God's intention for marriage from the beginning. His teachings are not contradicted in any of the apostolic letters as irrelevant under grace.

Mandates or policies of the state are irrelevant. Yes, we are under the law of the state, but that doesn't mean that because something is legal that it is okay to participate in deeds of darkness and ungodly conduct.

Letter to my friend Doug, 5/18/2004

Doug,

Regarding developing a church policy on divorce:

- 1) I do think it is important that the board define it's own reason for being and the manner and attitude it should possess when dealing with all ministry issues. Being at one with the goal, purpose, and attitude toward all peoples and solutions is so very important.
- 2) Surprisingly enough, under the New Covenant of grace, the marriage is held to a higher standard and there is absolutely no place for divorce. In fact, everything taught is to

enhance the marriage and help each partner as well as the children understand their true role as one, servants of each other and set Christ's relationship with us as the example of what our relationship with each other should be. Likewise, there is not to be remarriage if such a divorce takes place until the spouse is dead. Period. This is fine, of course, as a teaching for the unmarried so they will wisely choose their mate and allow their heads rather than their glands to be their guide. Virginity is expected until the married bed. All of this is for the benefit of the individual and their future family and is for the glory of God so His name and truth will not be disgraced and stumbling blocks come to those seeking the truth. But...

- 3) This may come as a surprise, but because we are not within a Jewish (first century church) framework it is not as easy for us to lay down a standard set of rules that will fit everyone, even though we would like to. In the Jewish community, certain things were the norm, like virginity, arranged marriages, sustained families, and severe penalties for adultery. So one size fits all in our culture may not be where we should be even though that is where we would like to be because it is simpler and less complicated.

For example, Paul had difficulty when he dealt with the church at Corinth, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, having every sort of problem in the area of sex and marriage. Corinth is the only church to which Paul wrote his rather complex teaching in chapters six and seven. Even then, he had no scriptural or traditional foundations to build from in dealing with their messes and said so in chapter seven. His points are important but only set down for us limited guidelines

- A. The sexual union is a holy thing and we are ordered not to join our bodies in promiscuous sex. It is a sin against our own bodies in that our body is Christ's because we belong to him and have been bought with a price. We are (like Joseph) to flee immorality.
- B. If possible and gifted in such a manner, men should not even consider sexual unions in marriage or other wise, because the responsibilities of marriage and family deduct time, energy and resources otherwise spent totally in God's work. Paul repeats this many times in chapter seven in various ways. The reason for this teaching might be prompted by several immanent facts. First, there was a strong persecution against the church and when a man was arrested, imprisoned, beaten, exiled or even executed his family was left to suffer with limited resources. The offering for the disenfranchised in Jerusalem due to the persecution is mentioned in several of Paul's letters. Second, there was an expectation of Christ's soon return and the urgency of getting as much done as possible in spreading the gospel was felt. There were other factors as well.
- C. But if a man and woman have no such gift or control, then they should marry to avoid immorality or simply burning with passion (which would render them less effective for the ministry anyway). They should fulfill their duty to each other and not withhold themselves except for periods of spiritual devotion and make their marriage count for the kingdom.
- D. Often, as it occurs today, a believer may marry an unbeliever (forbidden, by the way) or (more likely in his context) become a believer while the spouse does not. Paul teaches clearly that the unbelieving partner is not to send the spouse away (because God has a direct opportunity to save the unbelieving partner) but if the unbelieving partner leaves, then the believing partner is not bound. This means there is no restriction on remarriage. There is no union between darkness and light.

- E. Underscored (by repetition) is the mandate to stay where one is. That is, regardless of the marital state (or singleness) of the individual, don't seek to change it. I believe this is a very important principle because it teaches us to manage our situation and attitude, as well as training our heart toward faithfulness and perseverance with love and understanding within what a Christian marriage ought to be. Our marriages are not just for our benefit but are a witness to the world. I often ask young couples seeking marriage if they are looking for a wife or husband or looking to be a wife and husband. The same with having children. Are they looking to have children or to be parents? The shift in emphasis is startling don't you agree?
  - F. Paul also teaches in other places what the role of the young woman, widow, older woman, etc. is to be. In each case, the goal for either marriage or singleness is what will produce the greater work of the kingdom of God. So I believe we can use this truth for a general foundation upon which we can counsel those who really want to serve God in the greatest capacity. Please tell me if you think this is a good place to begin.
- 4) The difficulty and blessing of Paul's teaching, is that he has opened the door to recognizing that situations exist that are outside of the scriptural model and must be dealt with in the manner Christ would deal with them. But if Paul were to try to cover every possible marital problem, he would still be writing today and his epistles would fill the library of congress. Does Jesus want a husband, wife or child to be trapped in an abusive and cruel situation? If we counsel one must stay in such a union doesn't that trouble us? In the millions of different situations (as many as there are people) if we counsel all to remain in a situation or all to remain outside of a relationship, would that make us satisfied that we had done all we could to minister in the manner and attitude of the Lord?

So one size fits all will not work. The fact is that each case must be dealt with individually as it occurs with the following things in mind:

- a. What is the heart of the individual as best as we can read it regarding their relationship to Lord and their desire to follow Him. If one's heart is found to be rebellious, hurt, sorrowful, repentant or whatever, then that area is where ministry must be focused first because, although man looks on the outward, God's primary interest is the heart.
- b. Then, the purpose for the board, church, and body of Christ regarding the goal it is wanting to achieve in the life of the counselee must be considered before a plan of ministry is assumed. There is no place for someone to impose their preconceived ideas or prejudice in this situation. If they have some of this in any given situation, they need to recuse themselves. What is Christ's attitude and goal for this poor soul? I have mentioned this already in previous writings.
- c. What will result in the greater work for the kingdom?
- d. Progressive steps are to be established in terms of ministry, strictness and discipline for the sake of the individual. Going directly to step "six" is not proper. The first step ought to be teaching the body (especially the younger people) about marriage and God's expectation of the conduct of the individual as well as when they become a couple-and have children, and why God's pattern is important. Then, the body itself needs to be encouraged to self manage in a way that allows them to apply the proper

approach and attitude to each other when they see their brothers or sisters straying and getting off track. This is very Scriptural. A lot of stuff can be nipped in the bud before it gets extreme or has to come to the attention of the board. Then, Paul is right when he counsels “STOP”, stay where you are and do not seek to change your relational status-except in the case of death of the spouse or if the unbeliever leaves.

- e. If solutions are arrived at and programs of restoration are offered in love and it become apparent that they are not working for what ever reason, then three things must occur:
  - 1. Abandoning the individual is not an option. But if he or she leaves the fellowship, then the church is not obligated.
  - 2. Don't attempt to go to far in changing the heart and mind of the individual. Leave it to God. That is His work and often the church goes too far and does damage. Believe me, the consequences of stupidity and disobedience will be painful enough, plus God will deal, in time with His children. We tend to want to get it done now! I tell people that they can expect to wait 40 years to look back and see how God did it right after all. Quick, frustrated expectations or actions are not necessary and will do more harm that good.
  - 3. If the individual is causing a rift or disorder in the congregation, and refuses to comply with the board's request for order, change or attitude or whatever, then, and only then can they be asked to leave. The body should be made as fully aware as to why, so gossip and division will not occur.

If what I have done so far has been thought provoking or helpful, please let me know. I'm sure I have missed some things, and I will be happy to keep responding as long as you want. I respect your commitment to this very critical matter.

#### **End of Excursus**

### **CHAPTER THIRTEEN - CHILDREN - AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Mark 10:13-16, And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*." And He took them in His arms and *began* blessing them, laying His hands on them.

Jesus may well still be in the house we left Him in back at verse 10 when He had come to Perea and encountered the question about divorce. After teaching His disciples about this later we find that people were coming to Him and bring them their children. The children were likely brought to Jesus by their mothers and the word used here, προσεφερων) indicates that this was a spiritual act of dedication. The mothers may have sensed Jesus' love for women and families as His teaching went



forth. They preferred His blessing to that of the rabbis. All they wanted was for the Savior to simply touch the children. Not a big deal, just, “touch my child”. Why then, did the disciples rebuke those that brought the children? This touching and lovely occasion shows Jesus’ attitude toward both children and women, which contrasted with the rabbinic attitude toward both women and children. Children are the least of all the people the Jewish men thought, women slightly higher perhaps.

When Jesus saw this He was not so much indignant as He was grieved, annoyed or displeased. The disciples had missed the point of everything He had taught them regarding the Kingdom of God and its citizens. He had repeated in direct teachings, parables and clear statements that the poor, outcast, disenfranchised, even if they are Gentiles are, by faith, equal citizens in God’s kingdom. But another opportunity presents itself to reiterate this truth. It is another lesson for the spiritually crude and stubborn, hard headed and hearted disciples. The disciples loved to rebuke others far more than they desired to change their viewpoints, attitudes and prejudices. This recalls Jesus’ statement in 9:19, “How long must I put up with you?” Here He simply commands that the disciples let them all come and not forbid or hinder it because the kingdom of God belongs to all such as these.

Jesus defines what He means by that statement. “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it *at all*.” It is the receiving character of children that is the point. Yes it includes the faith of little children. They believe easily, are trusting and innocent. But more than that, they are without prejudice. I remember growing up in a multicultural neighborhood. In elementary school, my best friend was Harry Muranaka, a Japanese boy. My parents were grudgingly accepting of him. Why? It was at the end of WWI that this occurred.

In school I had good friends who were Hispanic, Black and Asian. We got along fine. My folks were less than amused. My mother had prejudice toward Blacks and Japanese. Mexicans were okay.

Children don’t have preconceived negative attitudes toward people. Different, rich, poor, Jewish or Gentile, it matters not. Life is too fun. Adults, like the disciples, have all that baggage. It must be discarded to enter God’s kingdom because all the other types of folks will be there including women and children.

In addition, regardless of a person’s background, children can often sense that when evil appears, they recognize it easily as well. Any child will tell you that he likes someone or doesn’t, even though he may not know why and even though the evil one’s appearance and demeanor seems acceptable to adults.

For the disciples, they were accepting of true evil and rebuking of true righteousness. The children were a fine example of what the kingdom citizens are all about. So Jesus decided not to just touch the children. He took each one up in His arms and hugged them and talked to them blessing them. This took much longer and the disciples had to stand there while the lesson was repeated over and over again. Did they get it yet?

The next account fits right in with this theme for it is also regarding the nature of the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:17-31, As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.

Only Luke tells us that this man was a ruler in Israel. He may have had a seat on the Sanhedrin or in the synagogue (most likely) and only Matthew tells us he was a young man. He was probably between thirty and forty. His question was sincere but shallow. People ask a lot of sincere, but shallow questions hoping to be affirmed in their present lifestyle hoping also that they not only already meet the requirements but that anything else will be easy. The man's question had to do with what Jesus wanted him to do. He had wealth, power, and position. Perhaps he could do pretty much anything he was asked and outdo most. Jesus answers in an interesting but very Jewish way by asking a question to the questioner. But Jesus' question to the man was not to deny His own goodness, but to put off guard the questioner who began His question with a not so subtle attempt at flattery. He probably thought this approach might win favor from the Lord. People love to be flattered. But he knew not Jesus. It was not in Jesus' nature to be manipulated. When Jesus pronounced that no one was good except God, all the air in the questioners balloon escaped. And so Jesus continued to press the point.

"You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up." Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

Jesus relates only the commandments regarding personal relationships. His use of the word "defraud" possibly reflected the commandments not to bear false witness or covet. Notice that the man dropped the use of the word good. He set aside his pretense and his pride and complied with Jesus point. Perhaps this is why the text tells us Jesus felt a genuine love for this man (αγαπε). But this did not make His counsel lighter. He actually told the man what to do which revealed the truth about the man's heart and the man went away gloomy. Even the sincerest love Jesus' has may not be sufficient to change a human heart. It seems the disciples demonstrated this time and time again. But who is to say? The man may have thought it through and began to change his direction. Somehow, I tend to think so.

But, once again, it is not the keeping of the commandments that is the issue, or righteousness by the Law or the works of the flesh, but where the heart is. Jesus already had made it clear that where your treasure is, there also will be your heart. The man had trouble with dividing his worship of God from his worship of property. But the kingdom of God is not of this world and no one there possesses any personal property as far as we can tell. None are richer or poorer than others and earthly treasure is of no value in God's kingdom except for what is done with it here. Jesus comments to this effect,

And Jesus, looking around, \*said to His disciples, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus \*answered again and \*said to them, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus is not teaching that it is impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom. But money and wealth has its grip on the human heart and only the heart can let it go. How odd it must seem to the disciples in their present pre-conceived fixed state of mind that a handsome, powerful, rich leader of the Jews who had kept all the commandments from his youth remains outside the kingdom of God while stinking lepers, prostitutes, gentiles and other outcasts and second rate persons are welcomed in without any demand made upon them at all. The “camel and eye of the needle” is a hyperbole and not intended to be a factual statement about some gate in the Jerusalem wall now long gone. The needle here is a common household item and made of either bronze or bone and could range in size from an inch and a half to six inches or longer. The needles were used to sew leather and cloth. Luke uses the word for surgical needle (βελονε) while Matthew and Mark use the word for household sewing needle (ραφίς).

They were even more astonished and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" Looking at them, Jesus \*said, "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. "But many *who are* first will be last, and the last, first."

Reflecting on the attitude of the rich ruler, and seeing Jesus' affection for him, Peter is quick to point out that unlike the ruler, the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus. Is Peter seeking some affirmation from Jesus? Is He beginning to desire to be loved by Jesus as was the ruler? Jesus is moved by this and makes it clear that their sacrifice will not go unnoticed. But He concludes with the repetition of His theme regarding service and the character of the citizens of the kingdom. Jesus again underscores the point the disciples find so hard to accept and believe.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN - THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM**

Mark 10:32-35 They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, *saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. "They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."*

They are now on the road to Jerusalem. Which means they crossed the Jordan from Bethany beyond the Jordan in Perea and set their feet on the road to Jericho. They were accompanied by many pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration just a couple of weeks away. Jesus led the entourage, followed by His disciples whom we are told were “amazed” and by a group of people to whom He had been ministering which Mark tells us were “fearful”. The word “amazed” (θαμβέω) means that the disciples were in wonder, stupefied and astounded at what they envisioned was to come about. The crowds were “fearful” (φοβέω) meaning in awe or actually afraid because of the unknown effect of not really knowing what was to come. The disciples thought they knew and were giddy. The crowds didn’t know except that Jesus had a price on His head.

So Jesus, as they approached Jericho, once again took the disciples aside and repeated what he had told them many times before. It didn't sink in. Note that the word "crucify" is not used by Mark in any of his writings describing what Jesus will endure. This is true of Luke and John as well. Only Matthew, late in his gospel as he recounts this same discussion at this same time, uses the word "crucify" (20:19). The reference to being handed over to the Gentiles may have conjured up the vision since the Romans tortured and executed by crucifixion.

Mark 10:35-41, "James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, \*came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You. (Matthew says it was their mother who asked) " And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on *Your* left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. "But to sit on My right or on *My* left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Hearing *this*, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John."

They continued to travel and a heated discussion was taking place behind Jesus. The word "indignant" is the same word used of Jesus regarding His disciples when they rebuked those bringing the children to Him to be touched. The ten disciples were displeased or grieved that James and John would seek to achieve power and position leaving the rest out of it. Since this discussion had occurred before without a decision, (9:34-35) perhaps James and John determined that the direct approach was necessary to gain these positions. It is clear what the disciples discussed as it had occurred at least once before as they left Caesarea Philippi and from the repeated comments by Jesus to all of them.

Mark 10:42-45, Calling them to Himself, Jesus \*said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

He had taught this as often as He had taught what lay in Jerusalem for Him and both lessons were ignored. The lesson on servant leadership was not to be remembered until after the resurrection as the disciples began to recall what it was that Jesus had said. There is no question that they spent time both discussing and writing down the teachings of Jesus. Peter couldn't read or write, so he employed Mark, his cousin, to do it for him. This early note taking is lost, but evidence exists that there was a corpus of material developed and shared by the disciples from which the message and the Gospels themselves had roots.

The idea of a servant leader took shape in the hearts of the disciples and they emulated Jesus ministry in their own mission. They did it fearlessly because Jesus' resurrection took away the fear of the unknown as it related to death. But for now, they were still lost in confusion, as the next encounter shows.

Mark 10:46-52 "Then they \*came to Jericho. And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar *named* Bartimaeus, (the son of Timaeus), was sitting by the

road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many were sternly telling him to be quiet, but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him *here*." So they \*called the blind man, saying to him, "Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you." Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus. And answering him, Jesus said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, *I want* to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and *began* following Him on the road."

Again, Jesus demonstrates in His own ministry both the content of kingly service and the nature of the kingdom of God. The name of this blind beggar is noted in terms of his father (Bar-Timaeus, "son of Timaeus). Matthew tells the story and notes there are two blind men. Mark focuses on one and remembers his name and the name of his father Timaeus. This is unusual and indicates that Timaeus, a citizen of Jericho, had a significant role somehow in the early church. People reading Mark's epistle recognized this name and authenticity was given to both Mark's account and to Timaeus ministry as well as that of his son. No doubt both affected an impact at Jericho, and possibly other places as well.

The disciples and others sternly ordered him to be quiet, after all, he was an outcast, a second-class citizen and there were more important things to do because they were on their way to Jerusalem for big things! But Bartimaeus yelled all the louder. There are always those who would try to keep others from becoming a part with Jesus, but never let them stop you. Jesus will welcome all who call on His name. And Bartimaeus knew who was passing by. He called Him by name and gave Him honor as a son of David and cried out for mercy. In this he recognized the power of Jesus, not to conquer or to lord it over people, but to serve and minister to them. Bartimaeus had a better idea of who Jesus really was and His role than did Jesus' disciples. Jesus healed his sight and made a clear point ... "Your faith has made you well". Bartimaeus had that childlike, uncomplicated faith Jesus had spoken of, and his request was immediately granted, while the disciples, who sought power and position were left without their requests being granted. Bartimaeus did not return to Jericho, but followed Jesus on to Jerusalem.

Mark 11:1-11, "As they \*approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, He \*sent two of His disciples, and \*said to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find a colt tied *there*, on which no one yet has ever sat; untie it and bring it *here*. "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' you say, 'The Lord has need of it'; and immediately he will send it back here." They went away and found a colt tied at the door, outside in the street; and they \*untied it. Some of the bystanders were saying to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They spoke to them just as Jesus had told *them*, and they gave them permission." They \*brought the colt to Jesus and put their coats on it; and He sat on it. And many spread their coats in the road, and others *spread* leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Blessed *is* the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus entered Jerusalem *and came* into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.

The final section of Mark's Gospel begins here. Bethany is a village about four miles from Jerusalem to the Southeast. It is here that Jesus stayed with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Bethphage is a small village East of Jerusalem near the foot of the Mount of Olives whose name means "House

of Figs". Jesus and His entourage had come from Jericho along the road that approaches Jerusalem from the South and winds Northwest around the Mount of Olives. As one turns the corner, Jerusalem can be seen on the West side of the Kidron Valley and The Mount of Olives on the East side. As one continues up this road, Bethphage is situated near the Southwest side of the Mount of Olives across a small valley from the main road.

It was at Bethphage that the disciples were instructed to go and procure the un-ridden colt. Residents of the city inquired why the disciples were taking the colt and answered as Jesus instructed. How did Jesus know about the colt? We are not told. Matthew has the disciples bring both the colt and its mother to Jesus as He directed. Luke agrees with Mark and John just notes that Jesus found a young donkey. When the crowds saw what was about to transpire, they rushed into nearby fields and cut off leafy branches from trees to prepare for the procession and celebration.

Many, no doubt began to recognize the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 and wanted to join in on the occasion. John mentions palm branches that had to have been brought in from the Jericho area as they didn't grow in Jerusalem. This may explain some of the language describing the emotions of the crowds and the disciples (10:32). As Jesus sat upon the donkey and began His descent into Jerusalem, the crowds cast their branches and their cloaks before Him shouting, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Blessed *is* the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!"

The Donkey is a symbol of humility, peace and Davidic royalty, and the action of the crowds was that of royal homage (II Kings 9:13). All of the gospels note the fulfillment of prophecy. All four quote portions of Psalm 118:25-26, while only Matthew and John quote Zechariah 9:9 as well. The word "hosanna" is both a prayer and a praise and means "save now" and reflects Psalm 148:1-2 and Jeremiah 31:7). The event reflects the anticipation of the disciples and the crowds regarding the mission of the Messiah. Jesus' words had fallen on deaf ears, otherwise the disciples would have been in mourning, not in celebration.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN - AT JERUSALEM**

As Jesus came into the temple area, He dismounted and looked everything over. Then He left for Bethany with His disciples for the evening, likely staying with Lazarus, Martha and Mary.

Mark 11:12-14, On the next day, when they had left Bethany, He became hungry. Seeing at a distance a fig tree in leaf, He went *to see* if perhaps He would find anything on it; and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again!" And His disciples were listening.

This unusual story is repeated in Matthew 21:18-22. Both accounts have Jesus and His disciples returning to Jerusalem from Bethany. Mark says Jesus found Himself hungry. Both note that the fig tree was in leaf, an unusual occurrence at this time of year as fig trees in that area begin leafing out in the Spring but do not get into full leaf and bear fruit until June. This tree had leaves but no figs. Jesus simply spoke the tree condemning it to extinction because it looked like a fruitful tree from the outside but was void of fruit to match its appearance. The disciples marveled at how soon and how complete was the withering of the tree. Speculation has run rampant over the meaning of

the event. Jesus' response to the disciples was a simple lesson on faith (verses 19-24).

Mark 11:19-24 When evening came, they would go out of the city. As they were passing by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots *up*. Being reminded, Peter \*said to Him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree which You cursed has withered." And Jesus \*answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him. "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.

Jesus' statements about the cursed fig tree being a lesson on faith appears somewhat incongruous and difficult to grasp at first glance, especially as one attempts to impose an interpretation on the account. Clearly, the fig tree has little to do with the lesson; it is Jesus' action that is the focal point.

First, the fig tree simply represents what is expected when one looks at the signs but the reality is the most unexpected. The signs are false. The leaves or "sign" of fruitfulness are misleading as much as is the common understanding of the Messianic work is misunderstood even though the "signs" are there. Thus, the fig tree would represent the distorted eschatology of the Jewish people and their teachers. Jesus' initial statement "Have faith in God" most likely relates to the impending drama awaiting all of them in just a week or two. Their focus must first be on God and not on things that appear to be one thing but are in reality another – such as their entrenched pre-conceived ideas about the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. What they will face and the challenges to every aspect of their faith and personhood will make the mountain look like an anthill.

It can be legitimately argued from the immediate context as well as the larger context that his event is not "a gloss" or a "acted parable" as some commentators state because they are clueless as to its meaning, but another example of Jesus' teaching the disciples to not place their faith in that which is expected but in God who does the unexpected.

If one insists that the fig tree symbolizes Israel as a nation in this account, then the clear point is that Israel's commission to "bear fruit" for the nations is cancelled and concluded. From now on, those that bear fruit are Jesus' disciples. Now that Jesus has come, Israel has nothing else to offer and their mission is fulfilled. (See: Judges 9:10-11; Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10) Timothy was told by Paul, "...preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

The fig tree event is sandwiched between the temple cleansing, the challenge to His authority<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 11:27 They \*came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders \*came to Him, and *began* saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?" And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and *then* I will tell you by what authority I do these things. "Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." They *began* reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' "But shall we say, 'From men?'" --they were afraid of the people, for everyone considered John to have been a real prophet. Answering Jesus, they \*said, "We do not know." And Jesus \*said to them, "Nor will I tell you by what authority I do these things." The "authority" being asked about comes not because the council was curious, but because "authority" was granted by a specific process and personnel. Today we call it "ordination". From the time of Moses, this ordination or authority was gained by the laying on of hands and a commissioning of an authoritative body.

Numbers 27:18-23, "So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. "You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey *him*. "Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at

the parable of the landowner and vineyard.<sup>5</sup> In all of these scenarios, Jesus exacerbated the hostility of the Chief Priests, Scribes and Pharisees against Himself helping motivate their plans for His execution. This is significant in that the message at the end of the parable (in Matthew 21:43-44) is, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." They knew He was speaking about them and sought ways to destroy Him.

In the parable of the landowner and vineyard (in footnote 5), Jewish law provided that an ownerless piece of property could be claimed by anyone if there were no heirs to do so. Once the last heir, the son of the landowner, was killed they assumed they could claim the land as their own.

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his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses. Deuteronomy 34:9, "Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses."

Laying on of hands "samak yad" in the Hebrew, was carried into the New Testament Church as well. It is seen in Acts 6:6; 13:31 Timothy 4:14; and II Timothy 1:6. It still continues to be the method of ordination in most Christian churches.

It was obvious that Jesus had received no such ordination either by a convening authority or in the name of a recognized authority. As He said in John 5: 26-27, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man." 5:34 "But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. In fact, Jesus authenticated the source of His authority by granting it to the disciples on more than one occasion. For example, in Matthew 10:1 "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." Mark 6:12-13, "They went out and preached that *men* should repent. Mar 6:13 And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."

Mark 1:22, as with other accounts states, "They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes". The Scribes had been given authorization by human approval. In John, the lack of "human" education or of "human" approval is thrown in Jesus' face and is countered by Him. For example, note John 7:14-18, "But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to* teach. 15: The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" 16: So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 17: "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from Myself. 18: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." And, in John 8:12-18, "So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true." 14: Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I testify about Myself, My testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. 15: "You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. 16: "But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent Me. 17: "Even in your law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. 18: "I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me."

<sup>5</sup> Mark 12:1-11 And He began to speak to them in parables: "A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. "At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive *some* of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. "They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. "Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. "And he sent another, and that one they killed; and *so with* many others, beating some and killing others. "He had one more *to send*, a beloved son; he sent him last *of all* to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But those vine-growers said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!' "They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. "What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. "Have you not even read this Scripture: THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?" And they were seeking to seize Him, and *yet* they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And *so* they left Him and went away.



During the cleansing of the temple, Jesus illustrated how corruption had come to God's own house. The parable(s) following illustrate the difference between a repentant heart and a corrupt one. The repentant heart listened to John (Matthew 21:32) while those professing righteousness did not. The Chief Priests and the Scribes knew He was talking about them and they sought to destroy Him. He was on their home turf and causing chaos to their control.

Mark 11:15-18, "Then they \*came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He *began* to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." The chief priests and the scribes heard *this*, and *began* seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching."

The illustration of "moving the mountain" (Mark 9:14-29) was used in Matthew 17:14-20 in the context of driving out the demon from the young man back at Caesarea Philippi just after the transfiguration. Matthew places it again in this same "fig tree" context in 21:21. It seems to fit better in the "casting out the demon" context when Jesus answers the disciples question, "Why could we not cast it out?" The answer there was, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer". The "moving of the mountain" comment is a hyperbole indicating that faith in God will allow them to believe the unexpected or the heretofore impossible.

Our comment there was, "It's not that God is not willing to heal and make whole, but whether people believe God is willing and has the power. It is not man's power or words, or beliefs, but God's. This story reflects that truth as nowhere else. Man's self importance, in all the different representations gathered together on this day is of no help whatsoever. Without Him, they (and we) can do nothing." This seems to work well in the Markan context also.

In Matthew and Mark, Jesus follows this teaching with these words, "And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were deeply grieved."(Matthew 17:22-23; Mark is similar) So, on the face of it, this understanding of the fig tree event fits the picture Jesus consistently drives home to His disciples. But for those who are not satisfied with this, other explanations are given as well by interpreters over the ages.

1) The fig tree represents Israel (Hosea 9:10; Jeremiah; Joel 1:6-15) who is not bearing the fruit of faith.

Hosea 9:7-17, "The days of punishment have come, The days of retribution have come; Let Israel know *this!* The prophet is a fool, The inspired man is demented, Because of the grossness of your iniquity, And *because* your hostility is *so* great. Ephraim *was* a watchman with my God, a prophet; *Yet* the snare of a bird catcher is in all his ways, *And* there is *only* hostility in the house of his God. They have gone deep in depravity As in the days of Gibeah; He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins. I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first *season*. *But* they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame, And they became as detestable as that which they loved. As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird-- No birth, no pregnancy and no conception! Though they bring up their children, Yet I will

bereave them until not a man is left. Yes, woe to them indeed when I depart from them! Ephraim, as I have seen, Is planted in a pleasant meadow like Tyre; But Ephraim will bring out his children for slaughter. Give them, O LORD--what will You give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. All their evil is at Gilgal; Indeed, I came to hate them there! Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more; All their princes are rebels. Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, They will bear no fruit. Even though they bear children, I will slay the precious ones of their womb. My God will cast them away Because they have not listened to Him; And they will be wanderers among the nations."

Jeremiah 8:5-13, "Why then has this people, Jerusalem, Turned away in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return. "I have listened and heard, They have spoken what is not right; No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his course, Like a horse charging into the battle. "Even the stork in the sky Knows her seasons; And the turtledove and the swift and the thrush Observe the time of their migration; But My people do not know The ordinance of the LORD. "How can you say, 'We are wise, And the law of the LORD is with us'? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes Has made *it* into a lie. "The wise men are put to shame, They are dismayed and caught; Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, And what kind of wisdom do they have? "Therefore I will give their wives to others, Their fields to new owners; Because from the least even to the greatest Everyone is greedy for gain; From the prophet even to the priest Everyone practices deceit. They heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace. "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They certainly were not ashamed, And they did not know how to blush; Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time of their punishment they shall be brought down," Says the LORD. "I will surely snatch them away," declares the LORD; "There will be no grapes on the vine And no figs on the fig tree, And the leaf will wither; And what I have given them will pass away.""

Joel 1:6-15, "For a nation has invaded my land, Mighty and without number; Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, And it has the fangs of a lioness. It has made my vine a waste And my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast *them* away; Their branches have become white. Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth For the bridegroom of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off From the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, The ministers of the LORD. The field is ruined, The land mourns; For the grain is ruined, The new wine dries up, Fresh oil fails. Be ashamed, O farmers, Wail, O vinedressers, For the wheat and the barley; Because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up And the fig tree fails; The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, All the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up From the sons of men. Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* And lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering Are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, Proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *And* all the inhabitants of the land To the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

- 2) The story represents the fruitless life of the individual who professes faith, has all the proper

trappings but is withered inside. The display of the external withering of the tree exhibits the true worthless inner life of these people, much like the many Pharisees Jesus condemned for their hypocrisy.

- 3) Luke omits this story and substitutes a parable instead (Luke 13:1-9). Some think the Matthew and Mark accounts are the parable come to life.

Luke 13:1-9 "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. And Jesus said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were *greater* sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered this *fate*? "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? "I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And He *began* telling this parable: "A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. "And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?' "And he answered and said to him, 'Let it alone, sir, for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, *fine*; but if not, cut it down.'"

The Chief Priests, Scribes and Elders were unable to trap Jesus into a self-incriminating statement, so they sent Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees to trap Him in a statement. All of these groups, so often at odds now have a common enemy and cause which has united them, proving the old (not Biblical) proverb, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend". The plans for His destruction, begun in Galilee, have now gained momentum. (Mark 12:12)

Mark 12:13-17, "Then they \*sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement. They \*came and \*said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not? "Shall we pay or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why are you testing Me? Bring Me a denarius to look at." They brought *one*. And He \*said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" And they said to Him, "Caesar's." And Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were amazed at Him."

The trap was that they thought if Jesus answered "no" to the question, the Herodians would report Him to the Roman governor for treason, but if He answered "yes" to the question He would be seen as a traitor to His people who resented the tax and the Jewish leadership would regain the support of the people.

Caesar's inscription on the coin separated the issue of money and tax from the worship of God and service to Him. Jesus made it clear as He had consistently done before that one cannot worship both, yet one is bound by civil law and duty. The leaders were amazed ("εκθαμβος"—utterly astounded, confounded) at His teaching. There was no way around what He had said without bringing either the opposition of government or the people against themselves.

Mark 12:18-27 "Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) \*came to Jesus, and began questioning Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER

DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. (Deuteronomy 25:5) "There were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died leaving no children. "The second one married her, and died leaving behind no children; and the third likewise; and *so* all seven left no children. Last of all, the woman died also. "In the resurrection, when they rise again, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God? "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. "But regarding the fact that the dead rise again, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the *passage* about *the burning* bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, and the God of Jacob'? "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; you are greatly mistaken."

This teaching is found in all three synoptic Gospels. The only marriage in the resurrection will be the marriage of the Lamb to His corporate bride, the church. It is alluded to in John 14:1-3 and clearly taught in Rev 19:7-9. "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he *\*said* to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he *\*said* to me, "These are true words of God."

Mark 12:28-34, "One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD; AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to Him, "Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that HE IS ONE, AND THERE IS NO ONE ELSE BESIDES HIM; AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL THE HEART AND WITH ALL THE UNDERSTANDING AND WITH ALL THE STRENGTH, AND TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR AS HIMSELF, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions.

Jesus recognizes the sincerity of the inquirer. There is no trap, it is a straight forward question. And Jesus answers it in a straight forward manner. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:4, the "shema" followed by verse 5 and Leviticus 19:18b. Mark 11:27 reminds us that this dialogue may well have taken place within the temple grounds near the place of sacrifice. Jesus saw that the scribe answered "intelligently". (νοῦνεχώς) *nounecho's, noon-ekh-ocē*; in a *mind having way*, that is, *prudently*: -discreetly – having a mind.

Mark 12:35-37, "And Jesus *began* to say, as He taught in the temple, "How *is it that* the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? "David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET.'" "David himself calls Him 'Lord'; so in what sense is He his son?" And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him.

As Jesus taught in the temple, and since the religious leadership were no longer questioning Jesus, Jesus set out a few questions of His own to turn the tables on them. So, He set about casting doubt in the minds of the people regarding the authority and ability of the Scribes. The quotation is from Psalm 110, and places a vital question before the people...one to make them ponder. How can the Messiah be both David's descendent and His Lord? The answer is plain. He was preexistent yet born of David's lineage. The fact that it is spoken in the Holy Spirit shows it is beyond David's capacity to grasp. The Messiah, though David's descendent is also greater than the royal lineage since David calls Him Lord. The title "Son of David" is preempted by the Messianic title. The Messiah comes to redeem even the Kings, and rule in their place as the King of Kings.

Psalm 110:1-7 **A Psalm of David.** The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You *as* the dew. The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill *them* with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore He will lift up *His* head.

Mark 12:38-44, "In His teaching He was saying: "Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and *like* respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation." And He sat down opposite the treasury, and *began* observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

As the scribes walked around in distinctive robes much like the order of priests and the Pharisees, they did so to be recognized as having achieved a special status and as such, commanded the respectful greetings of the "common" people. We can see from the gospels that Jesus wore no special garb to make Him stand out from the crowd, as much as artists and filmmakers like to attire Him in white, or make Him taller. His comments support this truth as he criticizes these leaders for their garb and for the motive for wearing it.

The scribes wore long, white, fringed linen robes that nearly touched the ground. During the synagogue services they sat at the front of the hall facing the crowd so they could be seen while the congregation of men usually stood. Since they were basically self-employed, (that is their services were hired out by others or contracted for some period of time) they sought donations to support themselves rather than employment as a laborer. Often widows were the easiest touch and vulnerable to exploitation. While deliberately exploiting others for personal gain, they stood in the synagogue and put on piety by grandiose and lengthy prayers. Jesus calls it "for appearance sake" or a "pretense". The word is "προφασις" and means "façade". Their reward is "greater condemnation" when they expect greater recognition.

This teaching about the scribes appears to be as Jesus was walking about in the temple grounds (verse 35) for it is in the context of a widow placing her two small coins into the offering box. This would have been in the court of women, where the treasury was located for both men and women. The treasury consisted of a large boxes fed by thirteen large trumpet-like metal receptacles. The crowds passed by and as they contributed to the treasury, the noise of metal coins on the metal receptacles could be heard throughout the temple area. The widows two little copper coins were not heard by anyone but Jesus saw her put them in and drew the attention of His disciples to it. Her offering was everything she had, and it would have bought a ration of bread for herself. So while the scribes “devour widows houses”, she puts her last few cents into the temple treasury. Her contribution left her with nothing contrasted with the abundance others gave from and had plenty left. Thus she, as Jesus pointed out, had given more than all of the others combined. She had given her very life. Her faith in God’s provision was superior to all the rest together. Matthew (23:1-38) adds much more to this section.

Matthew 23:1-38, “Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them*. "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger. "But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels *of their garments*. "They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men. "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. "Do not call *anyone* on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ. "But the greatest among you shall be your servant. "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. ["Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]\* "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? "Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears *both* by the altar and by everything on it. "And whoever swears by the temple, swears *both* by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. "And whoever swears by heaven, swears *both* by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-

indulgence. "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.' "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. "Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers. "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you may fall *the guilt of* all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. "Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. "Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!"

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN - ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES**

The next section is the famous "Olivet Discourse" regarding things to come.<sup>5</sup> All three synoptics record this as one of Jesus' final teachings. Matthew 24 and 25 are dedicated to this, as well as Luke 21:10-38.

Mark 13:1-37, "As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples \*said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down."

The disciples rightly marvel at the construction of the temple and its surroundings. The stones were often as long as 37 feet by 12 feet high and 18 feet deep and weighed a hundred tons or more. As in most ancient buildings we wonder, along with the disciples, how they were able to move these stones, let alone stack them. The quarry or quarries were nearby, within a mile of the temple site. Apparently, large sledges on rollers were used to move the stones.

"JOSEPHUS, who gives a minute account of the wonderful structure, speaks of stones forty cubits long (50-60 feet)[Wars of the Jews, 5.5.1.] and says the pillars supporting the porches were twenty-five cubits high (30-40 feet), all of one stone, and that of the whitest marble [Wars of the Jews, 5.5.2]. Six days' battering at the walls, during the siege, made no impression upon them [Wars of the Jews, 6.4.1]. Some of the under-building, yet remaining, and other works, are probably as old as the first temple." - Jamieson Fausset and Brown Commentary

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete review of this controversial subject, see: bibleclassroom.org, Bible Studies, "Controversial Issues and Studies" topic XXII, "The Return of Christ, Rapture and Great Tribulation."

Perhaps the disciples' comment was simply to establish some sense of permanency or to change the subject to something lighter after witnessing Jesus tirade against the religious leadership. It was not to be. Jesus comments silenced the disciples and initiated quiet discussion among them until they reached the Mount of Olives.

Mark 13: 3-13, "As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what *will be* the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He!*' and will mislead many. "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; *those things* must take place; but *that is* not yet the end."

"For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will *also* be famines. These things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs. "But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to *the* courts, and you will be flogged in *the* synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. "When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but *it is* the Holy Spirit. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. "You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved."

[Matthew 24:3-14, " As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that is* not yet the end.]

["For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. "But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs. "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. "At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."]

The key verse to this discourse and to both Matthew and Luke's account is the statement, "See that no one misleads you". During the entire discourse this is repeated several times. In fact, we will see the cyclical and repetitive nature of the discourse as we go along. There will be many people and events that could mislead even the elect...they are to be aware, observant and alert, not to the signs of the times regarding Jesus' return and the fulfillment of all things, but more so that they are not misled. It is critical that this be understood. Too many teachers ignore this and focus on trying to establish the time of the fulfillment and nearly all of them mislead their hearers. I would say the percentage of pastors and teachers, using the very words Jesus used so His followers would not be misled, actually mislead His followers due to a misapplication of those same words and the percentage reaches close to 95% if not 99%. Predictions of the date or era of Christ's return as well



as the style of it based on the Olivet Discourse have been made and re-made for over 200 years, but the majority have been made since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There have been hundreds of dates set, and thousands of predictions all gone unfulfilled since 1900 and the “prophets” and churches continue to exist and set new dates and times based on the same faulty Biblical and theological premises. People continue to be misled and blinded to the truth by established Christian churches and teachers, all wrong. All wrong. People still flock to these teachers today and soak up error. If Christ does not return for a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, will people, in nine hundred or ninety thousand years disbelieve it will ever happen? Or will they rightly reject the predictions and theology of their teachers? My opinion is that they will disbelieve both. (Luke 18:8)

Is the rush to get Jesus back so that faith will not wane? Yes! That is one reason Jesus and the scripture teaches what it does. ( See: Luke 12:45-46; II Peter 3:1-9; Rev. 6:9-11; Luke 18:1, 6-8; Hebrews 10:37, Rev. 10:6)

So, are we willing to see the teachings of Jesus and the scriptures in their own light? Or shall we bring to the Bible preconceived faulty ideas we have been taught to be true and rest in them? Do we know the difference? Can we find out?

To begin, Matthew’s account is the most complete and between the three synoptics we have a very good idea of what He was getting at. Jesus outline includes: false christs, wars, famine, earthquakes tribulation, apostasy, and completion of the proclamation of the gospel to the whole world. This order is remarkably similar to the order and content of the six seals in Revelation chapter six. These are general signs and constantly repeating themselves in history. The end is not indicated by these things. They have occurred repeatedly in history as have many astronomical signs.

Mark 13:10, "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations". “εθνη” Is the word here and in Matthew. It refers primarily to gentile nations or peoples. This itself had to be shocking to the disciples.

Matthew 24:14, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” Here, the “whole world”, “οικουμενη”, is the inhabited earth, mankind. “Nations” is again “εθνη” as in Mark.

One wonders if this could mean that the end will not come until all who would have a chance at being saved will hear the word. With the birth rate as it is, how long could this actually take? God is not willing that any should perish. But the end will not come prior to this being fulfilled.

Verse 8, “Birth pangs” – The rabbis spoke of “birth pangs” or sufferings that would occur prior to the coming of the Messiah.

Verse 13 gives some pause and is often used to indicate that one could lose his salvation if he does not endure to the end, that is endure the hate, betrayal, persecution, torture and so forth. “The end” is not the end of time or the end of the age, but the end of the sufferings to death, as Christ Himself endured to the end and announced, “It is finished”. Recall that Jesus is teaching disciples yet to be converted and filled with the power of The Spirit. This statement would give anyone pause because of the weakness of the flesh. But Jesus does not tell them how they will be able to endure and this must cause the disciples to wonder. They are still thinking as Jews under the Old Covenant at

which they have failed miserably, how can they face these challenges? Jesus is still teaching under the Old Covenant and giving them pause in this area may force them to look beyond the works of their own flesh and mind.

We know from the New Covenant that only the faithful and the saved will be able to endure because they have the assistance of The Holy Spirit. Jesus states this in verse 11 without going into an explanation. There is no way a person can endure such in that which he does not believe. God empowers His own to stand in that day (Romans 14:4, Rev. 7, etc.). (See also: Hebrews 3:14; 6:11-12; 10:36)

"But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. "The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

The Abomination of Desolation. Matthew notes (24:15) "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)". Luke makes no mention of it and John excludes the discourse totally. Daniel alone has two references to this, Daniel 11:31 and 12:11.

shiqqu<sup>ts</sup>, *shik-koots'*, *disgusting*, that is, *filthy*; especially *idolatrous* or (concretely) an *idol*: abominable filth (idol, -ation), detestable (thing).

sha<sup>me</sup> m, *shaw-mame*, A primitive root; to *stun* (or intransitively *grow numb*), that is, *devastate* or (figuratively) *stupefy* (both usually in a passive sense): - make amazed, be astonished, (be an) astonish (-ment), (be, bring into, unto, lay, lie, make) desolate (-ion, places), be destitute, destroy (self), (lay, lie, make) waste, wonder.

βδελυγμα – bdelugma, *bdel'-oog-mah*, a *detestation*, that is, (specifically) *idolatry*: - abomination.

ερημωσις – ere<sup>mo</sup> sis, *er-ay'-mo-sis*, from *ερημοω*, *ερημος*, *despoliation*: - desolation, to *lay waste* (literally or figuratively): - (bring to, make) desolate (-ion), come to nought; *lonesome*, that is, (by implication) *waste* (usually as a noun): - desert, desolate, solitary, wilderness. Same word used in Matthew 23:38

Jesus refers to Daniel's prophecy which is specific in nature referring to Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He applies it to the future as a model for what will happen in days future from His own time, but prior to His return at the end of the age. Daniel's portrait begins with Alexander The Great who conquered all the lands East from Greece as far as Afghanistan and to India and South as far as North Africa including Egypt by around 325 B.C. (Daniel 8, esp. verse 21-26, and 10:20; 11:2). Before he died in 323, his territory was divided into four empires, each ruled by one of his four generals, two most notably Seleucus, who ruled Syria and Mesopotamia, and Ptolomy who ruled North Africa and Palestine from Egypt.

All of this is noted in Daniel and becomes the model for end time prophecy in both the Old Testament and in the New. (Lysimachus – Asia; Cassander - Macedonia were the other two)

The Seleucid dynasty began with Seleucus, and continued with his son Antiochus I Soter from 293-

261, (who married an Iranian princess – Apama), then Antiochus II Theos (god), from 261-224; Antiochus III the Great 223-187; Seleucus IV Philopater and then Antiochus IV Epiphanes\* (his brother) from 175-163, our target ruler \*(the glorious) or . It is important to note, that since Antiochus II, these rulers had adopted the cult of the divine imperial ruler. Secondly, the Seleucids were constantly attempting to wrest Egypt from the other key dynasty, the Ptolomies.

There were many famous Ptolomies, but we know of one quite well – Cleopatra (VII) born in 69 B.C.. Cleopatra was the daughter of Ptolemy XII and became queen upon his death in 47 B.C.. She was Greek and Macedonian not Egyptian, and though not particularly beautiful, she was a seductress of great skill and lured every ruler she met into bed (including Herod the Great) to form a bond and alliance in which she could have a measure of control if not outright power. This was to further her two ambitions, one to consolidate her empire and dynastic heritage, and two, to share in central power at Rome. To these ends she went to great lengths to seduce Roman heads of state and finagle her way into the developing Roman power structure. Her efforts ultimately failed without either goal possible and she committed suicide in 30 B.C. along with Mark Antony and Egyptian dynasties came to an end. All North Africa came under the rule of Rome with a new Caesar called Augustus (Octavian).

But our focus is 130 years earlier as the Seleucid king Antiochus IV comes into conflict with Ptolemy VI over who is to rule Palestine. Antiochus invades Egypt and overcomes Ptolemy securing his allegiance. Antiochus then withdrew and began to make political and religious changes in Jerusalem, offensive to the Jews. This included continued Hellenization (begun by Alexander) of Palestine including Greek language, dress, architecture, games and idolatry. In the meantime, a conspiracy in Egypt to disregard Antiochus demands brewed and Antiochus got wind of it and returned to Egypt to wreck havoc on the rulers. The Ptolomies appealed to Rome and Rome sent a delegation by water to Alexandria and Popilius Laenas met with Antiochus intervening on behalf of Egypt.

Antiochus, extremely angered by this action did not take on Rome, but instead vented his wrath on the territory of Palestine which he was allowed to keep. (Daniel 11:29-31) The “Abomination of Desolation” was an altar and statue of Zeus set up in the temple in 168 B.C.. (“let the reader understand” – see also II Thessalonians 2:1-5) Apostasy was rampant, and a rebellion began to form and the Hasidim, supporting the house of Hasmoneus, led by Mattathias and his son Judas Maccabeus took on the forces of Antiochus and, using Guerrilla warfare, defeated them in 165 B.C.. The temple was cleansed and rededicated in December (Kislev) of that year. This story is told in its entirety in I and (particularly) II Maccabees giving rise to the holiday still celebrated by all Jews called Chanukah, the “Feast of Dedication” or “Feast of Lights”. It is well worth reading. (Note: The Pharisees and Zealots are descendents of the “Hasidim”)-(from “chesed” - “covenant love”)

The future (from Christ’s day) :Abomination of Desolation” will follow a similar pattern to that set up by Antiochus Epiphanes. This means that in the Holy Place, just outside the Holy of Holies, something will be erected that makes the area desolate of life and God’s presence. In 70 A.D. the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and along with it, the temple. It has never been rebuilt. Some believe that the temple must be rebuilt in order for this prophecy to be fulfilled. Others see the new temple of God as being His church in which His spirit and presence now dwells and that the Abomination will occur in the church. Some see Roman Catholicism and especially the Papacy as a strong possibility of this fulfillment. Some look at the Mosque of Omar, the Dome of the Rock as The True Abomination as it stands in the “Holy Place” (Matthew 24:15) formerly occupied by the

temple. It has been there some 1400 years. Others understand this in many different ways, some spiritual, some personal, some historical, some figuratively.

"But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. "The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat. "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! "But pray that it may not happen in the winter."

Mark 13:14-18. Matthew adds, "or on a Sabbath" because under the Rabbinic interpretation of the commandment, a Jew could not travel much more than half a mile on the Sabbath and Matthew is writing to a Jewish constituency. (Talmud)

"Flee to the mountains" – Possibly across the Jordan to Pella where Christians fled during the Roman siege before 70 A.D.. Housetops were flat and used as a place for the family to gather, rest, cook, picnic etc. It is urgent to flee without delay not unlike the days in Egypt (Exodus 12:11, 29-39) but without provision. Those there must not go down to get things out of the house (Matthew 24:17). Increased difficulty in fleeing occurs for those who are pregnant, nursing babies, or if it is in the winter which would freeze the rivers and streams at capacity and difficult if not impossible to cross. The reason is given in verses 19-23.

"For those days will be a *time of* tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will. "Unless the Lord had shortened *those* days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days. "And then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ'; or, 'Behold, *He is there*'; do not believe *him*; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. "But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance. Mark 13:18-23.

(See also Matthew 24:26-28, an addition. "Vultures" – a proverb indicating that Jesus' return will be as plain as vultures circling. All know that a dead carcass is the reason. Luke places these verses in the context of Jesus' return (note: Luke 17:22-35)

The (great) tribulation. A period of intense persecution and suffering of God's faithful unlike any ever experienced or will be experienced, more so than under Antiochus IV who is Daniel's model for this future period. (See Daniel 12:1-13, Josephus, (Wars of the Jews) present at the time of the Roman invasion under Titus in 69 A.D., describes the destruction of Jerusalem in almost identical language as Matthew and Mark.) But Jesus notes that this tribulation will surpass any historical occurrence and will be followed by specific events leading up to His actual return. Because of similar events to come, He is persistent to warn against being deceived by false teachers.

Some teach that the "Great Tribulation" and the "Great and Terrible Day of the Lord" are one and the same. However, Biblical descriptions of each and the historical context regarding Daniel's prophecy disallows this mutual identification. "The Great Tribulation" is described consistently as the wrath of the world poured out upon the Saints. The Lord shortens those incredibly severe days for two reasons, one, is that no flesh would remain alive if He didn't and two, for the sake of the elect. "The Great and Terrible Day of The Lord" is consistently described as God pouring out His wrath upon unrepentant man. God's people will be protected during these days. Models for both

these events are frequent in the Scripture From Genesis onward.<sup>6</sup>

"But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.

Jesus now directs the attention of His disciples to heavenly signs and they are quite familiar with their meaning. (Note: Is. 13:6-13; 24:1-23; 34:1-4; Ezekiel 32:1-10; Joel 2:1-11, 28-32; 3:9-17; Amos 8:9-10; Revelation 6:12-17) These signs are a prelude to God's wrath upon the nations, not upon his own people. Those killed during the great tribulation will rest in his presence. The rest of his people will be protected from the "Great and Terrible Day of The Lord." The point of such judgment is to give remaining unrepentant souls a final opportunity to repent.

It is also notable that signs like these have occurred from time to time throughout history, with panic spreading in the streets. But the end is not yet. Now Jesus begins speaking of signs and the disciples are certainly paying attention. During His ministry when He was challenged to show the people a sign demonstrating that He was sent by God, He responded in the following manner.

Matthew 12:38-42, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Matthew 16:1-4, "The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, '*It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.*' "And in the morning, '*There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.*' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away."

But there is a sign that Jesus return is immanent and it is found in the following verses.

Mark 13:26, (Matthew 24:29-31, Luke 21:25-28; Daniel 7:13-14) "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.

The title "Son of Man" has been discussed thoroughly (See pages 54-65). Note: Mark 8:38; II Thessalonians 1:6-10; and Revelation 19:11-16)

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent discussion of all points of view, see "The Blessed hope" by George E. Ladd, Eerdmans, 1956

Mark 13:27, "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven. (See: I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:13-18.)

Mark 13:28-29, "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. "Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.

Jesus' use of the fig tree this time is clear. Don't be fooled by false or early signs, but know the signs when the tree is actually ready to bear fruit. What He has said are the true signs though many signs purported to be those of His coming will be shown and those who are not alert may be led astray.

Mark 13:30, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Likely the generation when the final signs begin to appear.

Mark 13:31-37, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father *alone*. "Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the *appointed* time will come. "*It is* like a man away on a journey, *who* upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, *assigning* to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. "Therefore, be on the alert--for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning-- in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

Jesus is consistent to give His disciples repeated reminders not to be deceived and to urge them to keep alert. There is no way to know the day or hour, but the season itself has indications of His return. The season, however, could be very lengthy indeed. Most of the signs have occurred, and we simply await some final signs in the clouds.

At this juncture, Matthew's material on the Olivet Discourse is so well organized that it bears review, especially as it reveals the Hebrew style of parallelistic expression. Jesus brings His hearers to the end many times, each time with a different point regarding the events leading up to the end.

Note Verses: 4-14; 15-28; 29-31; 32-36; 37-39; 40-42; 43-44; 45-51; 25:1-13; 14-19 (The Judgment 20-30); (The Judgment 31-46).

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN - THE LAST PASSOVER**

Mark 14:1-2, "Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill *Him*; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."

The Passover (Feast of Redemption) is held in the Spring, generally March or April on our calendar, but always on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. On the 13<sup>th</sup> the head of the house begin an inspection of his house to assure that all leavened bread and any specks of leaven are collected and burned by noon on the fourteenth. The whole family is engaged in house cleaning. The feast is held on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>, and the oldest Son has spent that day in fasting and prayer. It commemorates the deliverance from Egypt initiated by the Israelites crying out to god and God sending Moses back into Egypt as His emissary. After the plagues, God brought the Angel of Death upon Egypt to kill the first born in all the land. The Hebrews, safely housed and protected by the blood of the lamb sprinkled upon the doorposts and lentils of each house, experienced the Death Angel passing over each house so marked. Because of the devastation of this event, Pharoah allowed Israel to leave Egypt, and they did so with great haste lest he change his mind.

It is interesting to note that the Biblical Jewish feasts have “Christian” fulfillment in Jesus. His death and resurrection occur at Passover, the Holy Spirit was poured out at the Feast of First Fruits (also called the Feast of Weeks, the church does not need to celebrate Yom Kippur, “The Day of Atonement” since Jesus’ sacrifice and his priesthood is once for all and forever, and five days after the Day of Atonement, The Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated wherein Israel rejoices over the giving of the Law and the promise of salvation therein. Perhaps Jesus’ birth took place at this time. So could it be that His return might occur at the Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashonah? There are illusions to trumpets prior to and at His return in the New Testament.

Mark 14:3-9, “While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining *at the table*, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; *and* she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly *remarking* to one another, “Why has this perfume been wasted? “For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and *the money* given to the poor.” And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. “For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. “She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. “Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

Matthew’s account is identical to Mark’s but Luke places it earlier in Jesus’ ministry (Luke 7:36-50) and apparently in Galilee. There, it takes place in the home of a Pharisee named Simon, (not in the home of Simon the leper unless they are the same person). It is also possible that two different but similar acts happened at different times or that the stories from each author adds a little more detail to the single account. Luke’s geography and chronology however, seems to separate it from the accounts of the other three writers. In John’s account (chapter 12) this story also takes place in Bethany, and though it could have been in the home of Simon, it seems it took place in the home of Mary and Martha sometime after the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus is present, Martha is serving, and it would be unusual for her to assume this role in someone else’s home, though it is not impossible. Mary, her sister, is the one anointing Jesus and the disciples find this act unacceptable.

Pure nard is a costly ointment created from the root of a plant from the Himalayan Mountains in India. It was used at weddings, also to scent royal beds, and to anoint special guests at feasts or perhaps even their quarters, and sometimes used to anoint a body for burial on rare occasions. It also may have been part of a woman’s dowry. It was kept in an alabaster (marble) jar with a sealed extended top and was only broken and used on these special occasions. Once broken, the ointment

had to be used as it would not keep after being exposed to air for any length of time. The small vessel had a value equivalent to nine months wages.

In Mark and Matthew's account several disciples were grumbling over the use of such an expensive commodity. In Luke it is Simon the Pharisee who complains and in John it is specifically Judas. Their argument is that the commodity could be sold and the revenue given to the poor (or in Luke's story, the woman bringing the ointment is a prostitute and Jesus shouldn't be associating with these kinds of people). The argument does take into account the woman, the cost of the ointment, Jesus and the Passover Season. There are several reasons relating to each of these that perhaps caused these arguments to be uttered.

First, they once again scolded the woman. Had it been a priest doing the anointing, they not only would have said nothing, but may have received a glimpse of the stature of Jesus and sat quietly in wonder. But women were second-class citizens in their eyes and did foolish things. So they considered the woman to be doing a foolish thing, wasting this costly ointment. They probably felt that Jesus would agree seeing He cared for the poor. Further, Passover was often the time when special consideration was given to the poor and gifts brought to them.

Second, this shows their lack of understanding, (still) about who Jesus really was and what He was about to go through. Mary appears to have more insight, as do so many women, as opposed to men who are fixed in their ways.

Third, The comment is made by John that Judas' objection and motive for doing so was because he held the purse strings and pilfered from the funds.

Fourth, Jesus saw the anointing as relating to the fact that though they always have the poor with them, He would not be with them much longer. Her act was a preparation for His burial and thus she had done a good deed for Him. Isn't it interesting how few good deeds are done for Jesus by those around Him?

This seemed to be the last straw for Judas. Jesus was not the Messiah and persisted in talking about His own execution. Since it was a lost cause in Judas' mind, why not profit from it.

Mark 14:10-11, "Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard *this*, and promised to give him money. And he *began* seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

I worry about folks who think they know exactly how God is supposed to do things. It is common that when God fails to do things they way they expect and believe that their faith wavers or they become distraught somehow. Some might even get so upset that they do something foolish and stupid that could be simply causing pain or betrayal to friends or family.

The chief priests were glad to hear of Judas offer. They had not planned to apprehend Jesus during the feast for fear of the crowds (verse 2). But when one of His disciples is ready to betray Him, the heat is off of them. They can now expedite their plans.

Mark 14:12-16, "On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover *lamb* was being sacrificed, His disciples *said* to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He *sent* two of His disciples and *said* to them, "Go into the city, and a



man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished *and* ready; prepare for us there." The disciples went out and came to the city, and found *it* just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover."

The first day of Unleavened Bread would be the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, when the Passover lamb was slain. Unleavened Bread and Passover are two names for the same feast. It is also called the feast of Redemption. The first of Nisan occurs at the new moon somewhere between and within our March or April. The 14<sup>th</sup> is the slaying of the lamb, done as the sun was setting. The 15<sup>th</sup> is the celebration of Passover. It may occur on any day of the week. The remainder of the commemoration closes after Eight total days, or on the evening of the 21<sup>st</sup> of Nisan. No leaven is to be consumed during that week.

Fifty days after Passover are observed as a time of sadness and consolation over the loss of Israel's great heroes and historic captivities. During this time the Jews neither marry or give banquets. On the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of this time a break occurs when the first ripe sheaf or "omer" of grain is taken to the priest and waved before the Lord as a sign of hope to come. On the 50<sup>th</sup> day the "Feast of Weeks" or "Harvest" begins and is also called "First Fruits". We know it as Pentecost. This is a two day celebration held to the same strict standards as Passover. Tradition says that The Law was delivered to Moses at this time. Of course, for Christians, both these celebrations find fulfillment in the death of Christ at Passover and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Jesus sent two men (Luke says they were Peter and John) into the city to look for a man carrying a water pot. This was easy as normally the women carried these water pots. The texts suggest that Jesus had made prior arrangements for these accommodations and services. He had been in Jerusalem for two weeks or so and had ample time to mention it to someone. Luke's account is essentially the same as Mark's. Matthew notes Jesus words as, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I *am to* keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." From this it seems the man was acquainted with Jesus and had some idea of His mission. This person may have been an acquaintance of Jesus family from years before. The house would have already been swept and cleaned of all leaven and supplies for the feast purchased and in house.

Mark 14:17, "When it was evening He \*came with the twelve."

The Passover was prepared by the disciples and they returned to Jesus at Bethany to tell Him. As evening approached, they all came to Jerusalem together and entered the house. A guest room may have been provided by the owner for Jesus and His disciples or they may have had possession of the entire place. Otherwise, two commemorations would have been involved and there is no indication that Jesus and His disciples were not alone in the place. They reclined at the table. That is, they lay back stretched out often having pillows for comfort and support. Originally, (Exodus 12:11) it was eaten while standing with their "loins girded, sandals on and their feet and their staff in their hand." With haste it was to be eaten ready to leave Egyptian bondage at a moments notice, no time to wait For leavened bread to rise.

Mark 14:18 As they were reclining *at the table* and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me--one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" And He said to them, "*It is* one of the twelve, one who dips

with Me in the bowl. "For the Son of Man *is to go* just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* good for that man if he had not been born."

The accounts of the discussion Jesus had with His disciples at this point varies among the four writers. Matthew's account is closest to Mark.

Matthew 26:21-25, "As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?" And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. "The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus *said* to him, "You have said *it* yourself."

Luke 22:14-23, "When the hour had come, He reclined *at the table*, and the apostles with

John's account of the last supper covers five chapters. He includes all of the contents of the other three accounts but with more detail. The pertinent portions are below.

John 13:1-5 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come with which He was girded.

After the foot washing ceremony and its teaching,

In John Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me." It is alluded to in other accounts (Mark 14:18; Matthew 26:32)

John 13:22-30 "The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss *to know* of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter *gestured* to him, and *said* to him, "Tell *us* who it is of whom He is speaking." He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, *said* to Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus then *answered*, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He *took* and *gave* it to Judas, *the son* of Simon Iscariot. After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus *said* to him, "What you do, do quickly." Now no one of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night."

During the meal part of the feast it was a custom (as it still is in some parts of the Middle East) to take a piece of bread or bread wrapped in meat and dip it in a sauce of stewed fruit and wine (the charoseth sauce) and enjoy it. It was a symbol of friendship and to "break bread" together was tantamount to saying, "I am your friend and will not hurt you". This made Judas' deed all the more despicable. The practice was that everyone dipped into a common dish or bowl.

Mark alone records Jesus' words, "For the Son of Man *is to go* just as it is written of Him". This is referring to Isaiah 53 and other passages related to the Son of Man.

John's conclusion is helpful. The disciples were in the dark as to what was going on. There was not enough specific information to lead them to the conclusion we all know today. Again, the practice of giving to the poor at Passover was common. After the Passover commemoration was nearly complete and Judas departed, Jesus made an addition to the supper.

Mar 14:22-26 While they were eating, He took *some* bread, and after a blessing He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, and said, "Take *it*; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. "Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Luke adds the words (as does Paul), "This cup which is poured out is the New Covenant in my blood." This fulfills Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jesus is called the lamb in many places and the blood of the lamb was what saved Israel from the death plague.

His solemn assertion in Mark 14:25, "Truly I say to you I will never again drink the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God", bears witness to the kingdom being both present and future. At that time all the faithful will be gathered. There will be no Judas's. Death and sin will have been eradicated and life and righteousness established.

The hymn they sang was the "Hallel" from Psalm 115-118.

Mark 14:27-31, "And Jesus \*said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.'" "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." But Peter said to Him, "*Even* though all may fall away, yet I will not." And Jesus \*said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." But *Peter* kept saying insistently, "*Even* if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also."

This conversation apparently took place on the way to the Mount of Olives. Jesus quotes a portion of Zechariah 13:7 and applies it to Himself and His disciples. Peter locked onto this statement and ignored Jesus' following words, "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." Had he listened to it all, his comment might have been different instead of, "*Even* though all may fall away, yet I will not." Why would Peter leap upon this statement and ignore a significant statement? What lesson can be learned?

Remember in 10:38-39, Jesus was asked by James and John (or by their mother) to sit on His right and left hand in the kingdom. His response to them was, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to Him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized." "But to sit on My right or on My left, this is not Mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Hearing *this*, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.

Jesus response was simple, " And Jesus \*said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." This was a personal affront to Peter. Not only did Jesus not believe him, but foretold that Peter would not just fall away, but would even

deny Him three times by the time the cock crowed twice. Jesus even prefaced it with the surety of undeniable truth, “Truly I say to you”. Peter’s words in verse 31 were stated in a way the Greek renders as “flying off the handle” or with “excessive vehemence”, “*Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*” Jesus had already experienced their failure to believe what He was telling them, perhaps this prophecy would change that. Jesus did not reply to Peter’s outburst. He had told the truth and it was clear. He needn’t repeat it.

## **CHAPTER EIGHTEEN - GETHSEMANE**

Mark 14:32 They \*came to a place named Gethsemane; and He \*said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed."

Gethsemane means “oil press”. It was the place where the olives were processed, and was on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. It was a favorite place of Jesus and His disciples because at night it was quiet and peaceful. (video)

This moment begins the passion of Jesus. It is one of the most moving and dramatic narratives in the gospel story. After telling the disciples to sit and wait until He had prayed,

Mark 14:33-34, “He \*took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He \*said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch."

Peter, James and John were the three key disciples Jesus was closest to and had accompany Him at special times. They were the fishermen of Bethsaida, and Jesus knew them before He picked them to follow Him. They are listed first among the twelve with Andrew, Peter’s brother who first brought Peter to Jesus. They were close and of course, James and John were brothers. Their spirited hard work and determination made them leaders, and Peter, their senior, was well respected by the community. But it was Peter, James and John whom Jesus took with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration, and it was these three that inquired about Jesus’ sayings regarding the stones of the temple, and it was Peter and John who prepared the Passover. In the early church, these three distinguished themselves above the other nine and Luke lists them in Acts 1:13 as Peter, John, James and Andrew indicating their order as that of importance or significance in the very early church.

When Jesus went to pray He had these three accompany Him once again. His purpose in having them accompany Him is not said, but we can feel Jesus’ desire for company and support. He asks them to, “remain here (near Him) and keep watch”. The word “watch” (γρηγορεῖω) simply means, do not slumber, be stay awake, be vigilant. The disciples are not aware that anything negative is about to happen. They are still oblivious to what He has taught. So now, it is here that His soul now faces the inevitable horror ahead. In all His deity, He is not relieved of His humanness. Agony begins to infect His inner being.

14:33, “He \*took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed... “distressed” - εκθαμβέω – ekthambeo, *ek-tham-beh'-o*, to *astonish* utterly: - affright, greatly (sore) amaze. θαμβος - Akin to an obsolete τᾰφω, tapho<sup>-</sup> (to *dumbfound*); *stupefaction* (by surprise), that is, *astonishment*: - amazed, + astonished, wonder.

The distressed took Him by surprise. He had never felt that way before and it gave Him cause for inner turmoil. “What is happening to me?” He may have thought.

...and troubled”. αδημονεω, ade<sup>-</sup>moneo<sup>-</sup> *ad-ay-mon-eh'-o* From a derivative of αδεω, adeo<sup>-</sup> (to be *sated* to loathing); to *be in distress* (of mind): - be full of heaviness, be very heavy. μονη, mon-ay'

From μενω, a *staying*, that is, *residence* (the act or the place): - abode, mansion. meno<sup>-</sup> men'-o  
A primary verb; to *stay* (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy): - abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry (for), thine own.

The distress or unexpected inner turmoil had the effect of overtaking His entire being and did not diminish as time passed. His whole being was engulfed in the emotion. He defined it as “grieving” in verse 34: “And He \*said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”

ψυχη, psuche<sup>-</sup> psoo-khay', from ψυχω, *breath*, that is, (by implication) *spirit*, abstractly or concretely (the *animal* sentient principle only; thus distinguished on the one hand from πνευμα (spirit), which is the rational and immortal *soul*; and on the other from ζωω, (life) which is mere *vitality*, even of plants. When Jesus uses the word “soul” He is referring to the very breath of life inside of Himself.

The word “grieved” is περιλυπος, perilupos, per-il'-oo-pos: *grieved all around*, that is, *intensely sad*: - exceeding (very) sorry (-owful). λυπη, lupe<sup>-</sup> loo'-pay, Apparently a primary word; *sadness*: - grief, grievous, + grudgingly, heaviness, sorrow.

Jesus describes this intense feeling as a heavy grief and sorrow, more than He can manage, which has taken over every fiber of His being. He wishes for death to escape the feeling. It is heavy and crushing. He goes to pray in the garden of the Gethsemane. There is no analogy given in the text, but the heavy stone of the wine press crushes the oil, the life, out of the olives until it flows into a basin. Isaiah 53:5 states, “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed” and in 53:10, “But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief...”.

Like the olives in the press, Jesus was crushed and poured out His blood for us all.

Mark 14:35, “And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell to the ground and *began* to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.”

Unlike the many visual portraits of Jesus praying in the garden upon a rock, the normal position was prone, upon the ground. Was Jesus praying that His destiny would be changed? He seemed to speak in this manner for only at this moment did He experience the full impact of the fear the horror that was to come.

Mark 14:36, “And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”

His words reflect the close personal touch He and His Father had. Perhaps God could find another way to redeem mankind. All things are possible. Yet, Jesus knew there was but one way.

Mark 14:37-39, “And He \*came and \*found them sleeping, and \*said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? “Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words.

When He needed their support, even those closest to Him failed to stay awake. In their defense, it can be mentioned that they had just finished a sumptuous meal accompanied by several cups of wine. And, they were not in distress as Jesus was, ignorant of what He faced. Their falling asleep added another dimension to His suffering and sorrow. All three were asleep, but Jesus speaks to Simon Peter alone. Was this because of his bold assertion that he would not fail Jesus? Or was it simply because Peter was the leader of the disciples and responsible for their staying awake?

Prayer is one key to avoiding the temptation of the flesh. In this case, the temptation is to sleep when vigilance is needed. It is poignant to note that Jesus statement, “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” is so simple but profound. How many times have we intended or have been eager to follow Jesus in our lives, to be obedient and godly only to have our own flesh pummel us into failure? When one is extremely sleepy, it is nearly impossible to carry on. When one is exhausted, or hungry or thirsty, the demands of the flesh prohibit us from considering anything but meeting its demands and needs. There are times when we can push ourselves beyond these demands, but a price is usually paid in damage to our bodies. We are, in a sense, trapped by our flesh.

From another perspective, we cannot eliminate the possibility that Jesus was including Himself in the phrase as He experienced the fullness of human weakness in Himself.

So Jesus goes to pray again.

Mark 14:40, “And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.”

Mark 14:41-42, “And He \*came the third time, and \*said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”

Only Luke records that Jesus perspired so heavily it soaked the ground. How long did Jesus pray and the disciples sleep? Likely several hours. Oddly, the statement, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners” is used by Jesus as a final declaration to further stupefy the disciples (see: 8:31, 9:31 and the discussion on pages 54-65). Jesus is consistent in using this term in reference to the sufferings He is about to endure. The word “betrayed” is “*παραδίδωμι*” which actually means to “give near” or “give over” and carries with it the sense of force. The word “sinners” is “*αμαρτωλος*” and pictures those who fail to hit the mark and so miss out on the prize.

Mark 14:43, “Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, \*came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, *who were* from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders”.

Mark notes that the Judas coming with the crowd was one of the twelve. This is noted because the name Judas or Juda(h) was as common as Jim, Bob or Dave. Further, it appears that though Jesus held the Passover with the twelve, there were other “disciples” with Him at most other times. Among them may also have been one of similar name as they came to Gethsemane. The memory of this event is striking as we see by the details because, for the first time, a physical threat is being displayed against Jesus and His disciples. The crowd was comprised of members of the temple guard, and the auxiliary police, a unit of the temple court assigned to manage crowds beyond the precincts of the temple. John adds that there was also a Roman cohort (normally 600 men) as well as officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees. Lanterns, (household lamps burning with olive oil and a wick) torches, (burning stakes of wood) and all the noise accompanying this crowd posed an unnerving challenge to the small company.

Mark 14:44-46, “Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard (safely, securely).” After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, “Rabbi!” and kissed Him. They laid hands on Him and seized Him.

“Rabbi” means “my teacher” and Judas came up to Jesus and kissed Him on the cheek, a common sign of respect a teacher’s disciples gave him. Judas’ kiss may have been a sham of contempt. John reports that Jesus’ had already identified Himself to protect His disciples from harassment, harm or arrest, but Judas played out his part anyway assuring the leaders of the arresting crowd that they had the right man indeed and that a switch was not taking place. Jesus was then seized, physically constrained by several physically holding on to Him.

Mark 14:47, “But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.”

We know from John that this was Peter and that the servant’s name was Malchus (from the Hebrew “melech”, a king). Peter’s sword was likely a triangular shaped short sword with a wooden handle. His blow was intended to be a fatal one and Peter was in full attack mode. In Matthew, Luke, and John, Jesus commands Peter to stop and put his sword away. Only Luke tells us Jesus healed the servant right there.

Mark 14:48-49, “And Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as *you would* against a robber? “Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but *this has taken place* to fulfill the Scriptures.”

Jesus notes the reference again of Zechariah 13:7 (He quoted a portion of in verse 27 prompting Peter’s vehement denial that he would leave Jesus). “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,” Declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered...”. This was enough to clue in the disciples.

Mark 14:50-52, “And they (the disciples) all left Him and fled. “A young man was following Him, wearing *nothing but* a linen sheet over *his* naked *body*; and they \*seized him. But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.”

Most agree this was John Mark. His own gospel alone records this escape. He had prepared for bed but had been alerted that Jesus was going out of the city and decided to follow. It was late, the

company was all men and it was common to gather at the Mount of Olives to sleep. John mark had no idea what was going to transpire.

## **CHAPTER NINETEEN - THE TRIALS OF JESUS**

Mark 14:53-54, "They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes \*gathered together. Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire".

The high priest may have been Caiaphas, who seemed to alternate year to year in the role with Annas, his father-in-law. Both were appointees of Roman governors. Mark does not include the name of the High Priest in his narrative. Matthew says it was Caiaphas, Luke notes that both served during the time of the beginning of Jesus ministry, while John notes both of them were "High Priest" in chapter 18. Luke, in Acts 4, notes that Annas was the high priest, Caiaphas being present at Peter and John's arrest.

Those who had arrested Jesus took Him to the home of the high priest and may have gathered in an upper room. The entire Sanhedrin or a goodly representation was gathered there. The Sanhedrin (those "seated together") was the high council of the Jews and comprised 71 members. It had existed from the time of Ezra. In Jesus day, it was composed of chief priests, elders and scribes, numbering 70 plus the High Priest. They were allowed by the Romans to sit in judgment on all Jewish civil and criminal matters that were not capital crimes invoking the death penalty. Any crimes of this sort were to be solely adjudicated by Rome.

Peter had followed the crowd and pushed his way into the courtyard sitting, warming his hands at the fire with the "officers" (those having been assigned to official duties or services of the Sanhedrin).

Mark 14:55-59, "Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. Some stood up and *began* to give false testimony against Him, saying, "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent.

In the rule of the Sanhedrin, prosecution was done by witnesses against the defendant and according to Deuteronomy 19:15-21, the witnesses had to agree:

Deuteronomy 19:15-21, "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be *in office* in those days. "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness *and* he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. "The rest



will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Mark 14:60-62, "The high priest stood up *and came* forward and questioned Jesus, saying, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed *One*?" And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."

It would have been improper, due to the third commandment, for the High Priest to use the word "God" in the question to Jesus, and the term "Blessed One" was the common term for God. The question itself was interesting for two reasons. One, the Messiah was not thought of in terms of being the Son of God. So the High Priest may have asked this question because it was reported to Him (perhaps by Judas) that Jesus had said this about Himself. Second is that the question was not within the context of the false witnesses' statements regarding the Temple. If it was Judas who reported this to the High Priest, then Judas had abandoned the idea that it was true. This may have given impetus to the High priest to believe that Jesus was a liar and a deceiver and to accuse Him without fear of repercussion.

Jesus' answer combines Psalm 110:1 with Daniel 7:13. In quoting a verse of a passage, especially the first verse, it brought to mind the entire passage to the hearers. Psalm 110 is Messianic as is Daniel 7.

Psalm 110:1-7, 1: **A Psalm of David.** The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." 2: The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, *saying*, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies." 3: Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You *as* the dew. 4: The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 5: The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. 6: He will judge among the nations, He will fill *them* with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. 7: He will drink from the brook by the wayside; Therefore He will lift up *His* head.

Daniel 7:13-14, "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 7:14 "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

So Jesus' response was a shock to the High Priest, but pleased him in that it gave him motivation to advance the case against Jesus.

Mark 14:63-65, "Tearing his clothes, the high priest *\*said*, "What further need do we have of witnesses? "You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers received Him with slaps *in the face.*"

When the High Priest tore his clothes it was an indication to the crowd that he had judged Jesus guilty of blasphemy. The tearing of the clothes goes back to Genesis (37:29, 34) and is a frequent occurrence among leaders or heads of households when confronted with great sorrow, sadness, shock or repulsion due to circumstantial or spiritual matters. The tearing of the clothes seems to symbolize the heart or life of the person affected. It suffers damage in the presence of such a shock and cannot be repaired. When one loses a loved one and tears his clothes, only burial can begin the process of healing the heart. So immediately those surrounding Jesus, prompted by the question of the High Priest, called for Jesus' death. Further, following the lead of the High Priest who had judged Jesus as a liar and blasphemer, they mocked Him, blindfolding Him and slapping Him challenging Him to prophesy if He was indeed the Son of Man, the Son of the Blessed One. This treatment of Jesus stems from Isaiah 11:2-3 where it was concluded that the Messiah could judge perfectly without using His physical senses.

"The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;"

Mark 14:66-72, "As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Nazarene." But he denied *it*, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about." And he went out onto the porch. The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, "This is *one* of them!" But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, "Surely you are *one* of them, for you are a Galilean too." But he began to curse and swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about!" Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, "Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." And he began to weep.

The narrative turns to Peter in all four Gospels. Peter, by his demeanor, dress, and dialect, could not hide himself from those about. He was recognized as one of Jesus' followers. The term "Nazarene" was synonymous with "despised" in the mind of many Jews. Peter's first answer was a strong denial using legal terms spoken while Jesus was stating He was indeed the Son of God.

In his shame and denial, Peter had much in common with Saul of Tarsus. They both were transformed into powerful apostles and their regret was a motivator to service to the point of death in fellowship with Christ. Both intimated this in their epistles.

Mark 15:1-2, "Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate. Pilate questioned Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He \*answered him, "*It is as you say.*"

This morning has been traditionally thought of as a Friday morning, but this is not necessarily so. This will be discussed later. The working day for the Romans began at daylight. The whole council bound and led Jesus to Pilate. Pilate would not hear an accusation of blasphemy. So the council, desiring to receive a death sentence for Jesus had to manipulate Pilate into believing it was deserved. The only charge they could support was treason. Mark's narrative is lacking in details as to how this came about but notes that before they bound and delivered Jesus to Pilate they held a

“consultation”. No doubt this was to devise a strategy on how to accomplish their goals. Matthew puts it this way,

Matthew 27:1, “Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; “

Pontius Pilate had been the Roman appointee as governor since 26 A.D, during the reign of Tiberius, or for about four years. He held his office until 36. His primary residence was at Caesarea Philippi but when in Jerusalem he stayed in a wing of a palace built by Herod the Great just Southwest of Jerusalem. This is where the trial took place. It is called “The Praetorium”.

Mark 15:3-5, “The chief priests *began* to accuse Him harshly. Then Pilate questioned Him again, saying, "Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!" But Jesus made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed.”

Apparently the Jews attempted to persuade Pilate that Jesus was deserving of death for claiming to be God and teaching that taxes should not be paid to Caesar (Luke 23:2, 13-14; John 18:29-31; 19:7). They had a lot of accusations, a better translation than “harshly” (Mark 15:3). In questioning Jesus himself, Pilate found something in Jesus silence that drew admiration from him. Pilate didn’t buy the puny accusations of the crowd. But in the accusation found in John 19:12 and 15 Pilate found an excuse to accede to the demands of the crowd and put the matter to rest.

John 19:12, “As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar." John 19:15, “So they cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!" Pilate *said* to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

Prior to this in John’s gospel conversations between Jesus and Pilate are recorded in chapters 18 and 19. As a result of these conversations, Pilate, according to John, became apprehensive and fearful about crucifying Jesus. We pick the narrative up in 19:1-3,

“Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; and they *began* to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps *in the face*.” Note: Mark 15:16-20,

“The soldiers took Him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they *called* together the whole *Roman* cohort. They *dressed* Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His *own* garments on Him. And they *led* Him out to crucify Him.

This sounds similar to what happened at Herod’s court (Luke 23:11), “And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.” It may be that when Jesus returned to Pilate’s Praetorium that he was taken in to the palace where the Romans continued to torment Jesus. So Jesus suffered injury at Herod’s palace, more injury at the hand of Pilate’s guard including a crown of thorns placed then beaten onto His head as well as a severe scourging under Pilate’s direction before being crucified.

John 19:4-12, "Pilate came out again and \*said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him." Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. *Pilate* \*said to them, "Behold, the Man!" So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, "Crucify, crucify!" Pilate \*said to them, "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God." Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was *even* more afraid; and he entered into the Praetorium again and \*said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate \*said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin." As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him...."

Jesus' answer, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin" impresses Pilate to the extent that John suggests that Pilate, in seeking to release Jesus, has been moved to a recognition of the possibility that Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be. This is evidenced by Pilate's acceptance that Caiaphas has the greater sin thus recognizing Jesus authority to state such a fact and remove Pilate from primary responsibility for what ultimately became Pilate's decision to have Him crucified.

Normally, a person in Pilate's position would have taken this as permission to render a capital sentence without ramification or guilt. But Pilate, contrary to this, sought to release Him.

Mark 15:6-15 "Now at *the* feast he used to release for them *any* one prisoner whom they requested. The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. The crowd went up and began asking him *to do* as he had been accustomed to do for them. Pilate answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd *to ask* him to release Barabbas for them instead.

The offer of Barabbas was, once again, Pilate's attempt to stave off a capital sentence against Jesus. Either Pilate was genuinely moved to spare Jesus or he was trying to avoid the long process of scourging and crucifixion which, on the Passover might generate ill will among the people. Barabbas was one of their own, an insurrectionist who rebelled against Roman authority to the extent of committing murder. Surely the crowds would prefer this man among them again seeing their intense desire to remove Roman authority from Israel rather than choose the one they deemed a failure in fulfilling their hopes. But to Pilate's surprise they desisted in accepting the offer. Indeed the display of deep evil and demonic power is seen in this refusal to exchange Barabbas' freedom for Jesus' life.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY - THE SUFFERING AND DEATH OF OUR SAVIOR**

Mark 15:12-15, "Answering again, Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify Him!" But Pilate said to

them, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!" Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified."

Scourging was a whipping by a Roman soldier using a one of several devises depending on the severity of the crime and the status of the person being scourged. Freeman might be beaten with rods of Elm or Birch. Roman citizens were not allowed to be scourged. Slaves and non-Romans were often beaten with a whip, "μαστιγω". This whip would be of plain leather thongs extending from a handle, usually knotted at the end. Luke (18:33) and John (19:1) uses this word to describe the type of scourging Jesus suffered. For slaves, enemies, or criminals deserving of death, a whip made of several thongs of leather with bits of bone or metal woven or knotted in throughout each thong was used, called a flagellum. The flagellum may only have had as few as one thong. Matthew and Mark use this term to describe the scourging Jesus received. For these last two, a man was stripped and his hands tied to a post with thongs and then beaten on his naked back.

Although the Jews, by their own law, limited the amount of lashes to 40 (39 being the practice to avoid a miscount) the Romans had no such practice. Flogging was done until the soldier was told to stop or to an appointed number was completed. Some victims did not survive the scourging with the flagellum.

Scourging usually followed the condemnation to crucifixion, but in Jesus case it preceded it. Perhaps Pilate thought the scourging would satisfy the crowd. It may have been his last attempt to save Jesus. We are not clear what Pilate's specific orders were regarding Jesus' scourging, but the crowd was not satisfied. Pilate's goal was to make them happy. This was no time for a riot with the city filled with thousands of pilgrims. In his own mind, he did what he thought he had to do to satisfy order.

### **EXCURSUS – WHEN IT ALL TOOK PLACE**

This discussion is employed because of the apparent differences between the synoptic gospels and John regarding the timing of Jesus' dinner with His disciples and the crucifixion, which all revolve around when Passover was actually observed by all parties. All the Gospels record that Jesus was crucified on the "preparation day", (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42-43; Luke 23:54; John 19:14,31,42). The question is, preparation day for what?

Generally, the preparation day referred to the upcoming Sabbath and so it was Thursday at sunset through Friday at sunset. Then began the Sabbath. But, the term "preparation day" was also used of the Passover. This would have begun at sunset on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Nisan (Abib) through sunset on the 13<sup>th</sup> - the 14<sup>th</sup> being Passover day (sunset on the 13<sup>th</sup> being the beginning of Passover).

There appears to be a difference between the gospels as to which preparation day is mentioned, how the terms "Sabbath" and "Passover" are being used and exactly what they designate. (Compare Matthew 26:17 with John 18:28; 19:14)

Another issue is what time of day in "hours" is being employed. We will cover this one first. We have two issues to deal with. The Jewish day begins at sunset and is divided into two twelve-hour segments. The Roman day began at midnight as does ours. In Mark 15:25, Jesus was crucified at the third hour (9:00 A.M Jewish day). Darkness fell on Golgotha at the sixth hour (noon) and at the

ninth (3:00 P.M.), Jesus died. This was according to Jewish time which had twelve hours from sunset to sunrise, and another twelve from sunrise to sunset (Matthew 20:3-12; John 11:9; Matthew 27:45; Acts 2:23). Matthew makes no reference to the third hour but includes the sixth and the ninth and describes them just as Mark does. Luke makes no time references at all.

At first glance in John's gospel, (19:14) it appears that Jesus was condemned to die by Pilate around the "sixth hour". This would be 6:00 A.M., Roman time or noon Jewish time. But John could either be speaking of the time when the audience with Pilate was first commenced, (6:00 A.M. - see: John 18:28) or noon when Jesus was actually hung on the cross. Mark is direct in that Jesus' actual crucifixion was at the third hour, or most likely 9:00 A.M. Jewish time. There is no symbolic significance to this hour so he would not be trying to say something about the time itself. Further, this would have been an approximation as well.

John says it was "about the sixth hour" that Pilate condemned Him to die. John's reference reflects Roman time as he refers to roughly 6:00 A.M. when the Jews were before Pilate. They came to Pilate "early in the morning," (18:28) which means that they approached Pilate at or before sunrise, for it was not until sunrise that the Roman administrative day began. At this time of year, the first hint of sunrise was somewhere between 3:30 A.M. and 4:00 A.M.. So John's comment could roughly fit the time that either the Jews appeared before Pilate or when Pilate condemned Jesus to die. It could well have taken two or three hours to finally have Him on the cross.

Sunset would have begun around 4:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M. at this time of year in Jerusalem. In all accounts, Jesus' death occurred just prior to sunset. If He indeed died around three in the afternoon, the Jews were looking at just an hour or so to take Him from the cross and entomb Him. No wonder the women could not finish preparing their burial ointments.

So the accounts coincide as long as one recognizes which time system each author is referring to.

Now, we must address the days (please see the chart at the end of this excursus). Let's go back to the time just before Passover and follow it through. Matthew tells it this way.

Matthew 26:1-2, "When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is *to be* handed over for crucifixion."

This implies that Jesus predicted His arrest would take place just before or on Passover. To be arrested then tried and crucified on Passover itself, is absurd because of the restrictions on activities on the feast days. Jesus may have spoken these words sometime around the 11<sup>th</sup>. A Jewish "day" would be counted even if only an hour had expired. In other words, two days could be as few as twenty-five hours. And technically, the final hour of today and the first hour of tomorrow could be considered spoken of as "two days" even though only two hours had transpired. We will come back to this later.

Matthew 26:17, "Now on the first *day* of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

If Matthew is absolutely accurate, the first day of Unleavened Bread took place on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> as sunset was occurring, passing into the 15<sup>th</sup> which was the official start of the feast. The 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan was the preparation day for the Passover until sunset when Passover (or the 14<sup>th</sup>)

began. Just as sunset was approaching on the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Pascal lamb was slain (Exodus 12:6; Lev. 23:5). Jesus and His Disciples would have eaten the Passover that evening which became the 15<sup>th</sup>. In other words, the first day or the beginning of Unleavened Bread was on the same night as Passover was eaten. In other words, Passover was eaten on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>, after sunset, so technically on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Matthew is saying that it was just after sunset when the disciples spoke to Jesus about the Passover dinner. Sunset was around 4:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. in Jerusalem at that time of year. This means that Jesus, according to the synoptics, was crucified, died and was buried on the first day of Unleavened Bread during the Passover Feast Day on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

But, Matthew mentions nothing about the Sabbath prior to the crucifixion, or about a trip to Herod, nor about Jesus' legs being broken to assure His immediate death so He would not be on the cross when the Sabbath occurred. But after Jesus was entombed, we read in Matthew 27:62-28:1,

62: "Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate 63: and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am to* rise again.' 64: "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." 65: Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it *as* secure as you know how." 66: And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone. 28:1 "Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave."

Note then in verse 62, according to Matthew the day of preparation was the day Jesus was crucified. Preparation for what? Matthew nowhere mentions the Sabbath until after Christ's burial, unless he is suggesting this preparation day is the Sabbath preparation day. If so, it is odd that he would say "Now on the next day" rather than, "Now on the Sabbath day, the day after the preparation". The only two days Matthew can be speaking of as the "day after the preparation" are either the Passover Day itself when everyone rested prior to the slaying of the lamb, (the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan) or the Sabbath Day. But if he is speaking of either day, Jesus had to be crucified on the "preparation day".

So looking at each option, what do we have? If the "preparation day" is for the Passover, it would be on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Matthew's express statement that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples on the First Day of Unleavened Bread (26:17) disallows for this because Jesus would then have to have been crucified on Passover itself, before Unleavened Bread began. So the preparation day in verse 62 must be the Sabbath preparation day. This would have been on a Thursday. He states it oddly, seemingly for his own purposes. The approach of the chief priests to Pilate requesting the guard must have been just as the preparation day was passing into the Sabbath.

Mark makes more specific notes but they bear close examination as well. First,

Mark 14:1-2, "Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill *Him*; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."

This agrees with Matthew that it was two days before the Feast(s) but does not mention Jesus' prophecy regarding His arrest during this time. Mark does, however, note that the Jewish rulers were reluctant to proceed with their plan during the feasts because they didn't want to rile up the crowds.

Mark 14:12, "On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover *lamb* was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

Again, the timing is the same as Matthew except Mark makes a specific note that the Passover Lamb was sacrificed on the first day of Unleavened Bread, the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, just minutes before sunset and the 14<sup>th</sup> began (The word "when" is simply to indicate that this was the same period of time in which these events were occurring. It does not suggest that the lamb was sacrificed after sunset.) Thus, Jesus and His disciples ate The Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup>. He was arrested on the 15<sup>th</sup>, late at night or early in the morning (perhaps after midnight our time).

Mark 15:1, "Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate".

Still on the 15<sup>th</sup>. There is no mention of the Sabbath so far in Mark. He also does not mention the trip to Herod and back. Jesus was crucified on this same day around noon (the sixth hour) and died after the "ninth hour" had begun or about 3:00 P.M.. Now Mark notes,

Mark 15:42, "When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath...".

It appears that Mark is referring to Thursday, the preparation day before the Friday Sabbath. If this is true, then it means that the Passover and the Sabbath preparation day were on the same day. Could the reference to the "Sabbath" mean anything other than Friday-Saturday? Could it mean, for example, a different but special holy day? This is possible, but Mark doesn't use the term "a Sabbath", but "the Sabbath" employing the direct article, nor is there any suggestion that he is speaking of the Passover itself.

Luke agrees that Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> and that he was arrested, crucified and buried on the same day. He includes the account of Jesus being taken to Herod. But he is specific in stating that the preparation day looks to be for the weekly Sabbath (thus on Thursday) noting that the women did what they could prior to the command to rest on the Sabbath (Friday after sunset to Saturday's sunset), and returned after the conclusion of the Sabbath to finish, on the first day of the week at the dawning (Sunday morning).

Luke 23:54-56, "It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. Luke 24:1, "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared."

Thus, it is nearly impossible to account for the language of the synoptic gospels other than that Jesus was crucified on a Thursday. It seems inconceivable that these writers would use the term "Sabbath" to mean the Passover, any day of the Passover especially when all three make the clear notation about Jesus eating the Passover on the first day of Unleavened Bread which follows by one day the beginning of Passover.



John's account seems different altogether. He begins talking about the upcoming Passover and the plot to arrest Him in chapter 11 without reference to how many days it was away. And John seems to suggest that Jesus had a supper with His disciples before the Feast of the Passover:

John 13:1-2, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him..."

Is John saying that a supper took place before the Feast of The Passover, or could John's reference be that Jesus knew His hour had come "before the Passover" and that the dinner was the Passover feast? The latter is more plausible because there is no other antecedent to the participle "knowing". Still, this is difficult to determine especially with what follows in Chapter 18. But meanwhile Judas leaves and there is a great deal of discussion, foot washing, and, the trip to Gethsemane is filled with much more dialogue all comprising five chapters of John's narrative (See introduction page 1, paragraph 2).

Even though John includes much more information, Jesus is arrested in the Garden on the same night he supped with His disciples, and if it was after midnight, it would have been the following day on the Roman calendar. Then, after the inquisition before the High priest and Peter's denials, we read the following:

John 18:28, "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover".

This sounds as if the Passover Seder had not yet been eaten by these men, or at least one of the successive meals in the eight day commemoration was anticipated. If John is speaking of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, this suggests that this visit to Pilate was on the Passover Day, the morning of the slaying of the Passover lamb or on the day of cleansing for the Passover, the 13<sup>th</sup>. Passover was considered by the Jews as a "Holy Day" (more on this later). They did not desire to enter the residence of a gentile on this day, whichever it was. If this timing is true, then Jesus, according to John, appears to be crucified either on Passover Day itself or the preparation day for Passover, the 13<sup>th</sup>. But note chapter 19:14:

"Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!"

So we know now which day John refers to in 18:28. This could have been confusing. Both passages refer to the same day and are indeed on the same day, the preparation day for Passover. Jesus was crucified, suffered death and buried on this same day. Still, John could be speaking of a preparation day for the Sabbath which this week fell at Passover-Unleavened Bread. Can we be sure?

Let's look at two other of John's passages before concluding what he is actually saying.

John 19:31, "Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away."

John 19:41-42, “Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Therefore because of the Jewish day of preparation, since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there”. John 20:1, “Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene \*came early to the tomb, while it \*was still dark, and \*saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb.”

So, is it possible to reconcile John’s record with the Synoptics?

First, the comment in 18:28 stating that the Jews didn’t want to be defiled, but might eat the Passover doesn’t mean this was Passover day. This could well have been any time prior to or during the eight day feast. We now know that John calls it the “preparation day”.

Second, the “preparation day” for the Passover noted in 19:14 did not necessarily have to be on the 13<sup>th</sup>, but one has to stretch the limits of credulity to put it at another time. Still, it could have been the preparation day for the Sabbath which took place during Passover commemoration. There is no doubt that all these events overlapped. So it is possible that John was speaking of the Sabbath when he used the term “preparation day” and since it occurred during Passover, he mentions it.

Third, in 19:31, John clearly states that the Sabbath was a high day! This is helpful. This could mean one of three things:

One, the Sabbath occurred during the eight day Passover commemoration and so John notes it as a “High Sabbath”. Most commentators agree. This means that Jesus may well have been crucified and buried on a Friday, before sunset as the synoptics suggest. Hence we have agreement. But, this does not solve all the problems.

Two, Passover Day and The Sabbath Day occurred on the same day. But if that is the case, the supper Jesus had with His disciples could not have been eaten the night of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So this option is in question.

Three, the Passover itself is called a “High Sabbath” and preceded the weekly Sabbath. Is there evidence for this? There is nothing from the Old Testament that states this specifically, although some commentators accept this possibility. The only indication for this is the accounts of the other gospel writers, which place the Passover feast Jesus celebrated on the evening of His arrest, (on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan) but don’t align it with a specific day of the week. Let’s look at some of the Old Testament passages, and reiterating: it is clear that the Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread was eight days long, Passover followed by seven days of Unleavened Bread. It falls on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan as the first day, with the Passover lamb slain at sunset. Unleavened Bread begins immediately on the second day (that same evening after sunset) and the Passover Dinner (Seder) is eaten then as well. But there is no regular day of the week when this might occur. But on both the first and seventh day of the Feast there is a “holy assembly” on which no work is to be done – regardless of the when the weekly Sabbath falls! This means that both of these feast days were, in essence, special Sabbaths. Note the following texts:

Exodus 12:14-20, “Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it *as* a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it *as* a permanent ordinance. ‘Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that

person shall be cut off from Israel. 'On the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and *another* holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you. 'You shall also observe the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. 'In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 'Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* an alien or a native of the land. 'You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.'"

Note the same commands in Exodus 13:6-8,

"For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. "Unleavened bread shall be eaten throughout the seven days; and nothing leavened shall be seen among you, nor shall any leaven be seen among you in all your borders. "You shall tell your son on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

The same in Leviticus 23:4-8,

'These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. 'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. 'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'"

And in Numbers 28:16-18,

'Then on the fourteenth day of the first month shall be the LORD'S Passover. 'On the fifteenth day of this month *shall be* a feast, unleavened bread *shall be* eaten for seven days. 'On the first day *shall be* a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work.

And in Deuteronomy 16:8,

"Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall do no work *on it*.

So it is possible that each writer had some of these commands in mind when he wrote his gospel using terms like Sabbath, Passover, preparation day, Unleavened Bread, rest, and so on.

So, can these accounts be reconciled and can we know what and when it all occurred? Possibly. Let us note first that Matthew, Mark and Luke make it clear that the supper Jesus shared in the upper room was the Passover itself, but only Luke (23:54-56) suggests it was on Friday, making the statement that the women rested on the "Sabbath" according to the commandment after Jesus' burial on the same day. The other two make no direct claim in terms of weekly days as to which day the Passover or the death of Jesus occurred, only that it was on the same day.

John's Gospel, although appearing confusing at first, can be understood to teach that Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples and that the Passover concerns of the Jews who appeared before Pilate referenced the continuing Feast of Unleavened Bread. Though John seems to be clear that the Jews were before Pilate on the day of Preparation of the Passover (19:14), he could he have meant the "Sabbath" and inserted "Passover" because it was Passover. The meal had been eaten just the evening before - after sunset on the first day of Unleavened Bread, which was still ongoing as all this occurred, and at the same time, the first day of Unleavened Bread was also the preparation day for the Sabbath.

To add one exciting additional element to this period of time, there also occurred the waving of the first barley (or wheat) sheaf during the feast of Unleavened Bread indicating that the first fruits or cuttings of the seven week harvesting season had begun. The full harvest was to be commemorated fifty days thereafter. This waving of the barley sheaf took place at the Temple on the day after the first Sabbath following the first day of Unleavened Bread.<sup>7</sup> In this case, it was on that first Sunday, the very day of Jesus' resurrection is also the first day of the Feast of weeks when the first fruits of the harvest were waved before the Lord at the Temple. Fifty days thence came the celebration of the Feast of Weeks marking the end of the grain harvest and the beginning of the season for the offering of first fruits. The New Testament calls this fiftieth day "Pentecost" and it is also called the "Feast of Ingathering (or Harvest)".<sup>8</sup>

Some Jews taught that the first wave of first fruits came not on the first Sabbath after Unleavened Bread but on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan regardless of the day of the week because they considered the Holy day of Passover Unleavened Bread (the 14<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup>) as a special "Sabbath". As we have seen, there is some justification for this thinking in Scripture. This could have also colored the way the Gospel writers described the events of holy week.

A final thought. Jesus made it clear and it is repeated many times that He would be entombed for three days and three nights or at least He would rise after three days from His death.

Matthew 12:40, "...for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

John 2:18-21, "The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

The minimum that three days comprises is the end of one day (sunset) all the second day to sunset, and anytime during the third day. This would fulfill Jesus' statement even if He were crucified, died and was buried on Friday minutes before sunset. Technically, that would comprise one day even though only one or two hours of it were involved. The Sabbath then, from that sunset (Friday) to the next (Saturday), would be another day. Once the sun sets on Saturday evening the third day begins and is counted even though less than 24 hours expires. In a matter of exact hours, three days could be as few as 26 hours. So, technically, a Friday crucifixion and death are possible for Jesus

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<sup>7</sup> See Leviticus 23:5-22

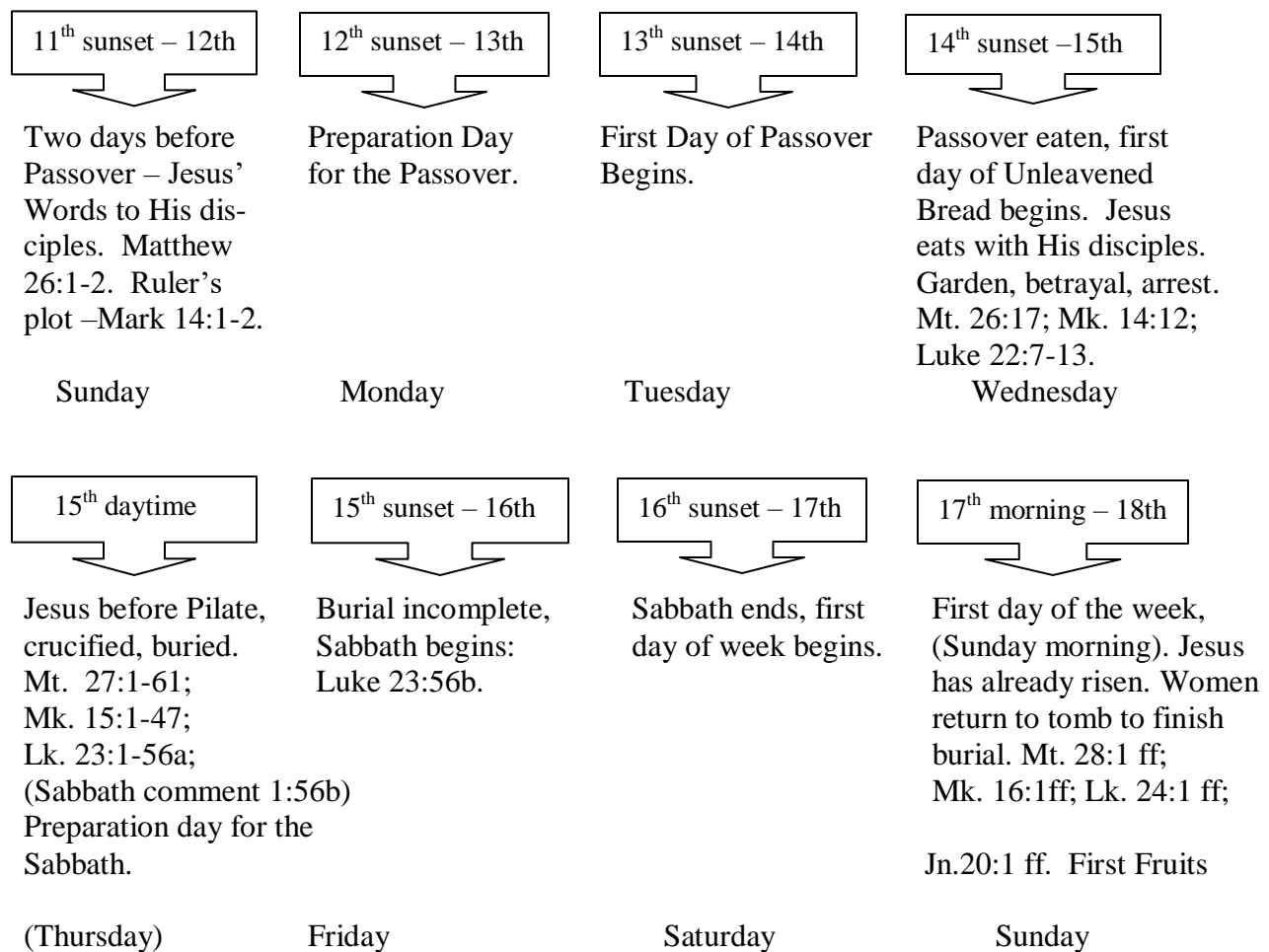
<sup>8</sup> See Exodus 23:15-16, 34:22; Lev. 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26 ff.; Deut. 16:1-11

to be discovered risen on Sunday morning, the first day of the week. However, Matthew 12:40 quotes Jesus as saying, "... for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This is the only place where the "three nights" are mentioned.

If three nights are involved, these would be full nights and then Jesus must have been crucified on a Thursday.

### **CHART OF THE DAYS** **AN IDEA**

#### MATTHEW / MARK / LUKE ACCOUNT [THE MONTH OF NISAN (ABIB)]



**END OF EXCURSUS**

Mark 15:21, “They \*pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.”

Mark’s mention of Rufus and Alexander is interesting because it indicates to the church that they know who these men are and that Simon was their father. It also suggests that Simon and his sons were impacted by the events of this week and had come to faith. Both men are mentioned without disfavor here in this early Gospel. They are also known to Paul and the church at Rome where Mark likely sent his letter. In Romans 16:13 Paul writes, “Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.” Written in about 57 A.D. Paul does not mention Alexander. This might suggest that Mark’s narrative was earlier or that Alexander was not in Rome at the time of Paul’s writing. An Alexander is found in Ephesus (Acts 19:33) and in Paul’s correspondence to Timothy from Rome, and Alexander is mentioned in very negative tones. Since Timothy was in Ephesus at the time, it could be the same Alexander as in Acts but not necessarily Rufus’ brother. Note the text of I Timothy 1:18-20:

“This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my* son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.”

Then in Second Timothy 4:14-16, Alexander is mentioned again:

“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching.”

It seems unlikely that this man is the brother of Rufus because he is identified with the “smiths” who revolted against Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19) but different from the Alexander (the Jew) who attempted to make a defense of Paul at the riot there. Alexander, of course, was a popular name among both gentiles and Hellenistic Jews. The sons of Simon, though from Cyrene were probably Jews and not gentiles. Cyrene was an important city in North Africa with a large Jewish population.

It is possible, however, that the Alexander in I Timothy 1:18-20 is Rufus’ brother since he is not in Rome at the time of Paul’s writing and is known to have been a believer but had made “shipwreck” of his faith. Likely he got caught up in the great Gnostic heresy infecting all Asia Minor at this time.<sup>9</sup>

The “cross” is a word that comes from the Latin “cruz” and the Latin cross was formed like the traditional cross we commonly accept as the design upon which Jesus was crucified. But the actual New Testament word is “stauros” which is accurately translated as an “upright pole” or “stake”. This pole would be the same type as used in a “stockade”. It was simply made from a tree trunk. The Romans kept a stockpile of these in a supply yard. It is more probable that Jesus bore a single pole upon which He was nailed. In a secondary possibility, He might have borne a cross bar, as the pole would have been already at the site. But it is nearly certain He was forced to carry a pole that was way too heavy for Him in His state, and so Simon was conscripted to aid Him.

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<sup>9</sup> See page six for additional information.

Mark 15:22, "Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull."

This landmark, if the same, still exists in Jerusalem today. It is a small hill near a bus depot with features resembling a skull. It is called "Gordon's Calvary" today and is about 250 yards Northeast of the Damascus gate. It is also near the site of the "Garden Tomb". There is however no other evidence to support this site as the place of crucifixion. The traditional site of the Church of The Holy Sepulcher" dates from the fourth century and has as much legitimate claim as anywhere else. In all cases, there is no way to verify any of these sites as the actual locations of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. However, a visit to this church and its provenance and location gives one pause as to its legitimacy.

Mark 15:23, "They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it."

This concoction was used by Roman soldiers to deaden pain.

Mar 15:24, "And they crucified Him, and \*divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them *to decide* what each man should take."

In this case, crucifixion would be upon a single pole where His hands would be over His head and nailed together through the wrists. His feet would be placed the same way, with the knees bent. The Romans would often place a block placed under the buttocks to allow the victim to sit. The method of torture consisted of forcing the muscles of both the legs and the chest and arms to cramp. As the victim hung from his arms he had difficulty breathing and so would be forced to push himself up using his legs. This was excruciating but relieved the chest and arm pain and cramping that constricted breathing. But holding oneself up on nailed feet was so painful and since the legs would begin to cramp, one had to lower himself to relieve this pain. The block was little comfort as it was designed to be painful if one lowered oneself onto it. So the raising and lowering motion continued until the limbs cramped so badly that it became impossible to do so. Soon the victim dies of asphyxiation if in fact he did not die before that from his wounds and loss of blood, or heart failure.

The garments were divided up by the soldiers as was their privilege if they so desired.

Mark 15:25, "It was the third hour when they crucified Him." About 9:00 A.M..

Mark 15:26, "The inscription of the charge against Him read, "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

This inscription was inscribed on a placard and perhaps carried before Him as He walked toward Golgotha. The crowds were able to see the inscription and, in John's account they complained about it. Then it was nailed at the top of the pole for all to see. John notes that it was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek.

Mark 15:27-28, "They \*crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left. [And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."]

The crime of the robbers was greater than simple theft. Capital punishment indicates that their crimes must have involved treason against Rome. The Scripture fulfilled was Isaiah 53:12, but this

phrase in Mark is not found in the earliest manuscripts. It may have been copied originally from Luke 22:37. As often occurred, preachers would add a note or two into their copy of the text to expound upon. These notes were then copied directly into the text by the next user. The reason was so nothing of what was believed to be of the original author would be lost. Better be safe than sorry. Copies of the gospels and letters were hard to come by as were materials to make copies with, so copyists were careful to include everything. This part of Mark shows up in the copies of the 8<sup>th</sup> century but are not found in earlier texts. Because Mark was both the first gospel written and the briefest, many such notes from later gospels were placed into Mark's text. We will see some larger examples later.

Mark 15:29-32, "Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who *are going to* destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking *Him* among themselves and saying, "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. "Let *this* Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, so that we may see and believe!" Those who were crucified with Him were also insulting Him."

The mockery was simply to add emotional grief and suffering to the physical agony and disgrace.

Mark 15:33-34, "When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" which is translated, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they *began* saying, "Behold, He is calling for Elijah." Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, "Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down."

The sixth hour – Noon. The ninth – 3:00 P.M.. These are approximate times. Jesus' suffering was intensified as He experienced full abandonment by His Father. Spiritual hopelessness and distress was added to His already crushing burden. He deeply felt the words from Dante, "Abandon all hope ye who enter here". His cry was in Aramaic and those standing nearby thought at first He was calling for Elijah who was believed to come in the last days preceding the Messiah. His words, however, reveal the deep distress and crushing torture of not only bearing the sins of the world for all time but the cutting off of the final source of life and hope because of it. They also reflect Psalm 22:1-21. When the first stanza of a Psalm or passage is quoted, it brings to mind the entire passage. As an example, if someone were to quote, "The Lord is my shepherd..." the remaining portion of the Psalm would automatically come to mind. One wonders what the Jews must have thought when Jesus uttered verse one of Psalm 22 as they remembered the following verses. Sour wine: see the comment on verse 23.

Mark 15:37, "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last."

Unusual. Normally weakness and a parched mouth would prevent any such outcry. Those crucified after flogging became terribly weak and thirsty, often passing into unconsciousness just before death. But Jesus possessed no such luxury. He was fully conscious and experienced the total agony until He gave up His Spirit and died. Matthew and John note that the loud cry comprised the words, "It is finished, into thy hands I commend my spirit."



Mark 15:38-39, “And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

Matthew and Luke record this startling event also. The finished work of Christ on the cross is symbolized by this tearing of the inner curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the Temple. It indicates that access to God is now open to all without barricade, fear or the need of a priesthood. The end of the Old Covenant is completed, the beginning of the New Covenant is begun.<sup>10</sup> Mark makes an interesting observation about the Centurion. He states that the Centurion was standing “right in front of Jesus and saw the way He breathed His last”. The Centurion then comments, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” This must have struck those who were there for the description is vivid. Matthew and Luke note it as well. There must have been something in the countenance or mannerisms of Jesus when He died that touched the Centurion and others around him.

Mark 15:40-41, “There were also *some* women looking on from a distance, among whom *were* Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and *there were* many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

Mary was a popular name and is translated from the Hebrew “*Miriam*”. Thus the writers are obligated to define which “Mary” they are talking about. These women are mentioned again in verse 47 and in 16:1. We know from John that Mary the mother of Jesus was there as well. James the less was the son of Alphaeus and the term “the less” refers to him as younger or perhaps shorter than James the apostle. His mother “Mary” has been linked with both Alphaeus (as his wife) and Clopas (as either his wife or his daughter – John 19:25. It is possible that he bore two names) and Salome may well have been the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY ONE- THE BURIAL OF OUR SAVIOR**

Mark 15:42-47, “When evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joses were looking on *to see* where He was laid.”

Joseph came from Arimathea, a village about twenty miles Northwest of Jerusalem in the hill country of Ephraim. He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, but had little influence in the overall decision to arrest and crucify Jesus. He was obviously a follower of Jesus (Matthew 27:57, John 19:38) and admired Him. Possibly to compensate for his sadness and inability to save Jesus from His terrible fate, he did what he could, especially in light of the fact that the body had to be entombed immediately. So, as Mark puts it, he “gathered up courage and went to Pilate” to request

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<sup>10</sup> See this author’s work on the Covenants of God.

the body of Jesus. One can imagine the trepidation with which he did this. Pilate's day had gone poorly. He was not known to be a compassionate man. He could easily have called for Joseph's arrest as another troublemaker. Or, the Jewish leadership, finding out that Joseph did this thing could have him expelled from the council or worse. But Pilate, confirming that Jesus had indeed died (for some victims lived for even a day or two), granted the body to Joseph without further adieu.

John adds an element regarding the verification of death. He notes in 19:31-37:

"Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him; but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe. For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN." And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

The purpose for breaking the legs of a living victim is to assure they will die of asphyxiation as soon as possible because once the legs are broken and there is no way to push oneself up, the arm and chest muscles will seize up quickly and prevent breathing. The Roman soldiers would likely have taken down the stake with Jesus' body on it, removed the nails and set the body on the ground along with the two thieves (Matthew 27:58). Then they would have gathered up the poles, nails and other materials and taken them back to the supply area to be used again. So Joseph, with the assistance of Nicodemus and others (John 19:39-40) took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths and then carried it to a tomb in a garden very near the place of crucifixion (John 19:41). The tomb was newly hewn out of stone. Matthew is the only writer that notes that it was Joseph's own tomb. After a hasty, unfinished job of covering the cloths with pungent ointments, the men laid the body of Jesus within the tomb and rolled the stone over the entrance closing the tomb in time for the Sabbath requirements. Mark notes that, "Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of James were looking on *to see* where He was laid." The reason for this was so they could return after the Sabbath was over and complete the task of anointing the bodily coverings. A surprise awaited them.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY TWO- THE RESURRECTION OF OUR SAVIOR**

Mark 16:1-3, "When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they \*came to the tomb when the sun had risen. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

The Sabbath was over the moment sunset on Saturday evening occurred. Jesus' resurrection could have taken place anytime during the next twelve hours. This anointing was not an embalming in the formal sense, but an act of devotion given to those held in high esteem. Coming to the tomb as soon as possible would aid them in avoiding the beginning stench of decomposition. Their question

about who would roll away the stone was legitimate in that these stones were placed on an inclined ramp which made it easy to roll them into the closed position, but difficult to roll up and away from the tomb entrance.

Matthew adds some information regarding guarding the tomb over the Sabbath prior to the women returning to the tomb.

Matthew 27:62-66, "Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I *am to* rise again.' "Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it *as* secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone."

28:1-4, "Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men."

28:11-15, "Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, "You are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.' "And if this should come to the governor's ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, *and is to this day.*"

The first passage demonstrates several things. First, that the Jewish leadership refused to use any personal reference to Jesus shows their contempt. Second, they had contempt for Jesus' disciples as well because they suspected they would steal His body, perpetrate a hoax and the consequences would be worse than the original trouble. This was said to influence Pilate. He did not need any more trouble. At the same time, he had done enough with the Jews. It was rumored later that the disciples had stolen the body, just as the guards were bribed to report. This rationalization is with us to this day. Third, the composition of the guard is debatable. It is generally thought that the guards were Roman soldiers, and tradition as well as the Gospel of Peter makes this claim. Matthew's language in describing the events inclines us to this point of view. But this is not an absolutely certain. There is no record of an assignment of a Roman guard at the disposal of the Sanhedrin. The terms used would be common for a Roman. Pilate notes that they "have a guard", and could be referring to the temple police. It would be odd for them to come to Pilate requesting he assign a guard rather than assign their own or request to use the assigned guard for this purpose. It also seems strange that after the resurrection the guard would report to the Jews rather than to Pilate. On the other hand, there would be no reason for the Jewish leadership to tell the Soldiers they would cover them if their deed came to the Governor's ears. If the guard were composed of the temple police, Pilate would have no concern about what they did. So we cannot be certain of what type of soldier the guard was composed.

The gospel accounts now recount the stunning events that followed. Their accounts are different to some degree, no doubt the result of the startling and exciting discoveries and encounters experienced by several of Jesus followers, especially the women. What happened must have been somewhat of a blur as several witnesses tell the story and have different things to add.

Mark 16:4, “Looking up, they \*saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large. Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed. And he \*said to them, “Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is* the place where they laid Him. “But go, tell His disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.’” They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

Mark’s notation that the stone was “extremely large” would designate a stone of above average size and weight signifying that it would be a difficult task to roll back. Certainly a single man could not do it. Is Mark dispelling the idea that Jesus Himself somehow survived and rolled back the stone from within? As they entered they saw a “young man” wearing white sitting at the right. Angels appear to humans in human form and do not have wings as is often portrayed. Matthew tells us that the angel rolled away the stone and in glistening white apparel sat upon it and an earthquake occurred. Luke records that there were two men in dazzling apparel (perhaps one inside and one on the stone). John mentions two as well but not until after the women had run to tell His disciples and returned to the tomb with them. Mark tells us that after the angel(s) spoke to the women, they fled from the tomb to ostensibly tell the disciples. What an incredible start to the week. But at this point, Mark’s narrative abruptly ends. It appears that the final portion of his manuscript was lost so at a later time and by another hand, two endings were attached to the gospel to complete it. The first ending is what we now call verse 21:

*[And they promptly reported all these instructions to Peter and his companions. And after that, Jesus Himself sent out through them from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.]*

One can see by a cursory reading that the style and language is unlike Mark. It is not even necessary to study the original. The same holds true for the “longer ending”. The “longer ending” is 16:9-20. It only appears in later manuscripts and is an attempt to conclude the gospel in a fashion comparable to Matthew and Luke and borrows material from them and John while adding previously unknown and fanciful material to it. It is almost as if the writer of this material is doing so from memory of tales told over the decades, some of which are not quite in accordance with the orthodox narratives. It comes across as pseudepigraphical and cultic in places.

9: [“Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. (John 20:13-18) 10: She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. (John 20:18) 11: When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it. (Matthew 28:17, Luke 24:11) 12: After that, He appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country. (Luke 24:13ff.) 13: They went away and reported it to the others, but they did not believe them either. (Luke 24:36-41) 14: Afterward He appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining *at the table*; and He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not

believed those who had seen Him after He had risen. (Luke 24:36-41) 15: And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. (Matthew 29:19)16:"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Matthew 28:19; John 3:18) 17-18: "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." There is no record of the act of drinking a deadly poison and surviving. Other elements of this verse are from scattered portions of Acts. 19: So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. (Mark 14:62; Acts 1:3; Acts 2:33) 20: And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]

The very nature of this section excludes it from being from Mark even though much of it is reflected in the other Gospels. A note was made earlier of preachers and teachers, having limited access to copies of the Gospels, taking the liberty to inscribe their copies with notes for teaching or preaching purposes. These notes were later included in succeeding copies for fear of excluding any words of the actual authors. (See pg. 143, bottom)

## **EXCURSUS – THE FOUNDATION FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND ITS TRUTH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Gospels leave us with the portrait of a group of disciples who were confused and unsure about Jesus until His resurrection. Then an excitement began to grow until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon 120 of His closest followers. 2000 years later the modern church is the proclaimer of their message,

Acts 2:32-33, "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

Acts 2:36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

There are people today having a difficult time believing that Christ was raised from the dead or that the dead could be raised in any way whatsoever. Christ's resurrection is the key issue for our faith and we must never forget it. The Christian faith, from earliest times to the present is based first and foremost as well as solely on Christ's resurrection from the dead. Paul makes this fact clear in I Corinthians 15.

1Corinthians 15:13-20, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ

have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

Paul makes it clear that what Jesus did here on earth including His sacrifice on the cross is null and void if He is not risen. In addition, he implies that God as the Bible describes Him, and in fact, the Bible itself, in its entirety, is a worthless religious document without truth or power.

When you look at the human situation, one finds that the greatest personal grief and pain occurs when a loved one is taken in death. Death is the unstoppable reality in all creation. We can prevent birth, but death, though frequently postponed for a short time, is ultimately the victor leaving people devastated and in shambles. If God exists in any form, one would think that He and He alone would have an answer to death. If God has the power to create life in whatever manner one believes it to have come about, one would think that God, with that kind of power and with an eternal nature - as most believe Him to have - would be able to cope with human mortality.

So if one believes in God, what sense does it make to limit Him to a role only slightly greater than that of a human being? What hope is there in that? I have found that if one believes in God, seldom is his/her belief limited to a God of such weakness. But if one's belief in God denies Him the power over life and death, what good is that - ultimately? In other words, if He has no power over death, what good does it do anyone to believe in this kind of God? Therefore, if the God of the Bible is the God one places their faith in, then that belief is useless unless He has power over the greatest enemy - death. And if He does have such power, would it not be comforting to know about it by, say, a demonstration so one would know that his/her faith is sound and true? And if He offers such a demonstration, what cause would there be not to believe in Him? There would be none. Instead, there would be cause for rejoicing!

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:26) There must be sufficient evidence for believing that what He claimed is true. Does this evidence exist and what is the consequence if Christ did not rise from the dead? Is Jesus' resurrection the demonstration we need to give us hope and truth, or is it all some myth or hoax?

### **The early church made the resurrection of Christ from the dead the cornerstone of their preaching and faith.**

For example,

Acts 4:1-2, “As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple *guard* and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

Acts 4:33, “And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.”

Acts 17:18, “And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, “What would this idle babbler wish to say?” Others, “He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.”

Acts 17:32-34, “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” So Paul went out of their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.”

Acts 23:6, “But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”

Acts 24:21, “...other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.’”

Romans 1:1-4, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord”

1Peter 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”

These examples raise other questions. How is it that Paul and Peter ever came to believe, preach and suffer, finally being executed for their faith in this doctrine? And why would they carry it to the extreme, final punishment if it were a hoax? And these questions must be asked in reference to the hundreds of other people in the early church who followed suit for the same reason.

Some, to answer these questions have resorted to sheer fantasy claiming that Jesus never lived, the entire story and all the events surrounding the early church is a fable and that the men who wrote the New Testament never actually lived either. All of this, apparently, was made up by hucksters sometime later for the express purpose of fleecing the crowds. Well, they also must have fooled the Romans and their historians, eye-witnesses and the testimonies of those who were actually there, as well as those who knew the apostles personally and wrote about it, such as Polycarp and Clement who were not on the scene. However, there is absolutely no credible historian today who would make such foolish claims whether he is a believer or not. I suspect those who want to make it all go away by claiming it is all fictitious do so not from a desire to know the facts, but from a desire to avoid the consequences one must consider if it is all really true.

In addition, it is an interesting fact that several cultic religious groups used the teachings of Jesus and the apostles to foster their own distorted views as they tried to create new religions. These groups were already in existence during the time Jesus lived. For example, the Gnostics wrote about the events of Jesus’ day outside of the gospel accounts and we have those writings with us today as well as many other extra-Biblical sources.

But, this brings us back to our question, why did Peter and Paul as well as others have such a firm belief in the occurrence of the resurrection that they willingly suffered and died for the message? Paul admitted that if the resurrection never happened,

“...then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless”.

Over the centuries, many have tried to explain away the resurrection of Christ by offering other possibilities. We will examine all of them, even some of the most absurd, to see if any hold water against the simple light of reason and evidence. Further, the consideration of each argument and rebuttal will be done most thoroughly.

First we'll look at the arguments for denying the resurrection of Jesus, and then we'll examine the evidence substantiating the resurrection. To refute the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it is necessary to deal with three elements of the gospel accounts stated as facts by the writers. Four primary factors that must be dealt with are:

- 1) The empty tomb.
- 2) The proclamation of the resurrection of Christ from the dead by those who saw Him.
- 3) The behavior of the disciples and of Saul of Tarsus.
- 4) The motive behind why the resurrection was recorded and included in the accounts, and why these historical events occurred, if indeed none of it is true.

If the resurrection did not occur, each of these elements must be refuted and satisfactorily explained. We will examine the theories proffered by the nonbelievers and the questions that result from these theories that must be addressed.

The principle arguments denying Christ's resurrection are:

- 1) The disciples stole Jesus' body.
- 2) The disciples were under some mass delusion, hypnosis, or genuinely deceived.
- 3) Jesus didn't really die on the cross, but revived in the tomb.
- 4) It wasn't Jesus on the cross, but a substitute.
- 5) The women went to the wrong tomb.
- 6) The Jews and/or Romans stole Jesus' body.
- 7) Someone pretended to be the resurrected Jesus.
- 8) The resurrection was not in the original writings of the authors.

Lastly we'll present the substantiating evidence.

- 1) The Biblical Testimony
  - a) From eyewitnesses
  - b) From associates of the eyewitnesses
  - c) From Old Testament prophets.
- 2) Extra-Biblical Testimony
- 3) Historical, Geographical, and Archeological Testimony
- 4) Writings of Dedicated Skeptics
- 5) The Testimony of "Silence"

### **ARGUMENTS FOR DENYING THE RESURRECTION**

**1. The first argument proffered immediately was that the disciples came by night and stole Jesus' body from the tomb, hid it and later proclaimed He had risen from the dead.**



This argument is actually recorded in the gospels of Matthew itself, chapter 28:11-15. After the resurrection appearances Matthew writes,

“Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all that had happened. And when they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, and said, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’ “And if this should come to the governor’s ears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble.” And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, *and is to this day.*”

It seems odd, that if the disciples actually did this, that one of them would write it down as a suggestion leading to the incrimination of themselves and to invalidation the resurrection of Christ. But there are a number of arguments and plain facts that make this conjecture an impossibility. And frankly, every one of the objections to Christ’s “in fact” resurrection comes down to motive.

- A. Why would they do this? There is no question they had given up any hope after Jesus was crucified and buried. It is odd that the authors of the gospels are clear about the reason the disciples followed Jesus and it was not to see their hoped for Messiah killed, if in fact they are trying to present a document of “faith”. Not only that, there is testimony and evidence that they were frightened of suffering the same horrible fate. What good would a hoax do if they were to die for proclaiming it? What would be their motive to do so in the face of these threats? Their motive is extremely important, for mankind normally looks to his own best interest in pursuing such an act. Money? Even when the proclamation was made and persecution of the church began in earnest, the apostles not only did not request money, but gave everything they had to support others in need. Were they seeking fame? Ambition? To what end? To make themselves public figures so they could be easily found and suffer the sword or stoning or crucifixion? Jesus, who was innocent of any provable crime, was tortured and killed. The disciples, in stealing the body would be guilty of not only bribing or killing the posted guard, but of breaking an official seal. These were punishable offenses, and one wonders why there were no arrests or protests of disciples following these deeds. We’ll come back to this later.

Perhaps they wanted to perpetuate the Messianic ideal for the benefit of the Jews who so desperately sought the Messiah. The trouble with this is the Messiah the Jews looked for was a traditional Messiah who would overthrow Rome and set up a divine kingly rule under which the Jews would be free and prosper. A crucified Messiah was not in their thinking. In fact, had Jesus succumbed to the traditional (but not fully Biblical) Messianic model, He would have failed miserably. So to proclaim a resurrected Messiah but leave Him impotent to deal with the Romans or any future enemies of the Jews would have been ludicrous in the eyes of the Jews. There would not only have been no following, but the disciples would have been laughed out of town.

Perhaps they were so devoted to Jesus they wanted to perpetuate His teachings or perhaps justify the three years they had committed to him. There would be no need to perpetrate a resurrection hoax to do this. In fact, this goal could have been met without a resurrection at all, just as it has for other prophets, founders of religions, philosophers and rabbis. The resurrection claim, in fact, is a stumbling block rather than an aid to reaching this goal. But then, part of Jesus’ teachings, as reported in all the gospel accounts, was the claim to rise from the dead. Perhaps they wanted to falsify the resurrection to give legitimacy to His

persona. But this is a contradiction. Why legitimize a person one knows to be a fraud, a liar, and a deceiver. The Jewish leadership who sought His demise called Him “the deceiver” and worse. There is no evidence that Jesus’ disciples were so enthralled with faith that they fell to this desperation. Quite the contrary. They were emotionally devastated and defeated.

If man seeks to gain something through a change of lifestyle or an act of violence and risk as would have to have occurred here, he does so for the purpose of accruing pleasure or security or in the effort to avoid loss or pain. None of these normal quests is present in a tomb robbing, resurrection falsifying caper. So the motive must be established in order to have some reason for the action imposed upon the disciples by skeptics of the resurrection.

- B. How did they overcome the guard? The same author who wrote about the rumor starting that the disciples stole the body also makes reference to the security of the tomb. He writes,

Matthew 27:62-66, “Now on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, “Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I *am to* rise again.’ “Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go, make it *as* secure as you know how.” And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

This guard is deemed to be a contingent of Roman soldiers assigned to the temple authorities for crowd control during the festivals as well as during the crucifixion of Jesus. Matthew wrote earlier, (27:54) “Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” The term used by Pilate is “Custodia” denoting a contingent of Roman sentries. So here is a trained Roman guard of soldiers with weapons now set and established to keep the disciples from stealing the body of Jesus and perpetrating a hoax. The tomb is also sealed, meaning that it was bound in a rope with a Roman clay seal stamped upon it. Breaking the seal could be punishable by death. So what happened? The guards fell asleep and the disciples sneaked by? All of them at once? Sleeping on guard duty brought severe consequences. Even if that could have happened, how did the movement of a very heavy stone as well as the noise the disciples must have made not awaken the guard?

The disciples overpowered the guard? How? And the only way to do this was to kill them, for the “Custodia” were sworn to hold their ground to the death. But the guard all showed up after the event alive and well. Why would the disciples risk this? In addition, the One they followed deplored violence. Even at His arrest, when Peter cut a man with a short sword, Jesus stopped him and healed the man who had been cut. So what was there to be gained by trying to overpower the Roman guard? It would be ridiculed as a denial of the very message the Master taught and the disciples’ attempts to proclaim the message of peace would have been dismissed along with themselves and their “Messiah”. In every aspect then, there is absolutely nothing to be gained from this. People do not risk what was at stake when there is absolutely nothing to be gained from it. One insane, deluded man might do this, but many? And the many grew to hundreds and the hundreds to thousands.

Perhaps, as has been proffered by some, the disciples somehow drugged the guards into sleep. This would have had to have happened prior to the grave robbing and would have

been a better excuse for the guards when facing inquiry. But since the report of the guards does not mention any problem until after the tomb is opened and the body is gone, the excuse was proffered that they fell asleep.

Did people really believe the story of the guards or the Jewish leadership about this? Since there is no further account of either the guards or the disciples getting into trouble with the “law” over this, one is forced to ask, “Why?” The only answer is that the story was not believed. The idea of these disciples drugging or overpowering a Roman contingent of guards and making off with the body of Jesus is simply too far fetched to be believed, let alone that they all simply fell asleep and stayed that way while the disciples crashed about with this effort. And then of course, we are back to “why?”

Maybe they bribed the guard to leave the tomb prior to stealing the body. Could this explain why the guard came to the Jewish leadership with such a fanciful tale, that is, the truth? They were apparently bribed again to falsify their false tale. Very greedy guards indeed! This plot by the guards is almost as creative as the one by the disciples in that case. I suppose one could argue that the disciples came into a lot of money somewhere in order to bribe the guard with sufficient funds that they would be willing to risk their lives. And we could suppose that the guard would anticipate another bribe so they could escape a report to Pilate by the chief priests. And the Jewish leadership, they knew, would cover their risk of severe punishment or even capital punishment, if the report came to Pilate. Amazing insight for these guards. But nothing was ever done to anyone after it was reported that Jesus was resurrected. If you were Pilate, wouldn't you want to know how on earth this happened? Or did Pilate not hear of it? Perhaps he believed it. Or perhaps he chose to ignore it. It makes no difference. The fact is, even if there were no guard, no sealed tomb, the entire purpose and motive for stealing the body must be examined as must the post-resurrection appearances to those not among them that were gathered together. One is hard pressed to account for this in a reasonable way.

- C. How did a dead man appear to other people besides the disciples if he actually never rose from the dead? There are numerous reports from others that they actually saw Jesus alive after He had been crucified, dead and buried. How does one account for these reports? Why would the Jewish persecutor of the early church, Saul of Tarsus, of all people, claim that he had seen Jesus alive and that is what turned him into the phenomenon we call the Apostle Paul? He himself notes,

1Corinthians 15:3-10, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is either the most mysterious, unexplainable anomaly of history for which there is no answer, or what he says happened actually happened. The result was the most effective spread of the Christian gospel in history. Not only that, but the Jew, Saul (Paul) became the missionary to the Gentiles,

something unheard of among Jews and an event that caused controversy in the early church (See Acts 15). Other than accept his account there is no reasonable explanation for his conversion.

- D. Why were the books of the New Testament written? It could be stated that the disciples were trying to perpetrate the hoax through literature. But this raises more questions. First, they used their own names. Why do this when a great persecution was under way? Few will deny, for example, the execution of hundreds of Christians under Nero who used their crucified flaming bodies to light the streets of Rome. Second, to perpetrate the hoax, one must conclude that all the writers were deliberate liars. This might be said of the disciples, but what of Luke, Mark, Paul and the author of Hebrews? They were not disciples at all, and Luke was a Gentile commissioned by Theophilus to ascertain the truth about all these stories years later (see Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3). Again, if the disciples and followers of Jesus were deliberate liars, this would be discovered soon enough through their character and behavior. But there is no record of any of them being con men, deceivers, thieves or the like. Quite the contrary, even their enemies admit they were good men. But perhaps they themselves were under a delusion, hypnosis of some sort or genuinely deceived.
- E. If the disciples truly believed that Jesus was going to be raised from the dead on the third day, why did they go to steal the body while there was more than twelve hours left in the third day? Remember, the Jewish day begins (and began then) at sunset. The third day (which was the first day of the week or our Sunday) began as the Sabbath (Saturday) faded into sunset. So the disciples still had until Sunday at sunset as a part of the “third day”. So why not wait? This is a potent argument that cannot be ignored. Secondly, if the disciples had lost all hope and had no confidence in a real resurrection, why steal the body and perpetrate a hoax? Again, to what end? So whether they truly believed in Jesus and what He said or not, it makes no sense to steal the body and less sense to do it more than twelve hours pre-maturely.

- 2. The disciples were under some mass delusion, hypnosis or genuinely deceived.

If they were good people, and nothing can be found to discredit their character, then perhaps they were simply and innocently deluded, led astray or under a mass hypnotic spell or hallucination or deception. The question arises, who did this to them? Who had the power to pull this off, and what would be their motive? The Jews? Why? They wanted it all to go away. The Romans? The same. The last thing Pilate needed within his precarious position in these days was more trouble. Did Jesus do this? Wait, He is dead! Maybe before His crucifixion? To what end? He would be dead so He could not benefit. And how does one mass hypnotize hundreds of people, some of whom He never met? A person would have to be God to do this. And if He is, then mass hypnotism or delusion is not necessary.

We can concede that a person or maybe two could be caught up in something like this. But a mass or crowd of people from all over the world? Even if a few were deluded to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, how would they convince a bunch of skeptics? Even the disciples did not believe it until Jesus appeared to them. John records the event with Thomas in 20:24-25, “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

This is what people say today. “If Jesus appears to me then I will believe.” Actually this is not true. They would soon dismiss it as a delusion or a hallucination. In addition, no one would believe this of a single encounter. People would be as skeptical of an account like this as they are of UFO sightings and abduction reports. Their impact would fade quickly. People are hard pressed to believe something like this without sufficient evidence to do so. It is normal to be skeptical. It is important. Still, people are led astray every day by slick shysters and deceivers eager to separate people from their cash. Masses have been led astray like those who followed Jim Jones, David Koresh or even Adolph Hitler. So those who want evidence of truth before they follow along are on the right track.

So if Jesus was a deceiver, as most of the Jewish leadership believed Him to be, something extraordinary would have to happen to dispel this belief. The disciples were no different. No one denies that they were Jewish, with Jewish expectations like all the rest of the community. The Jews abhorred any false religion. For example, they were entrenched in their own tradition and were persecuted because they refused to comply with the simplest of requests made by Roman authorities including dress regulations (under Claudius in Rome) and the recognition of the festivals or holidays of the empire. The Jews would revolt at the invasion of their religion and culture by any foreign religious or cultural influence. So to expect that the disciples and hundreds of other Jews would simply fall for any old line is ludicrous. Something extraordinary would have to occur for them to change their whole lives and thinking in a matter of a few days. A single report of Jesus’ resurrection would not do the trick. Even today, if one comes to you and says “Jesus appeared to me!” you will think him or her a lunatic. But when a mass of people begin to state it, people from all over the place, and then they give up everything they ever valued, including in some cases, their relationships, families, and lives, in exchange for an ignominious death, one is pressed to take notice and wonder.

Think of it, it is one thing to influence people with religious philosophy and wisdom and have a religion begin. This could be understandable as it has happened throughout history. It is another to proclaim a risen Messiah. And why risk death for this claim? Wouldn’t it have been easier to simply state that Jesus was a great teacher, a good man, a philosopher, as well perhaps a prophet and a seer and learn from His great mind? Of course it would. All the problems would have been solved and the world would be comfortable with the choice of which teachings to follow. But then, we are left with three things. First, the disciples did claim He rose from the dead – for no apparent or necessary reason if He didn’t. Second, if Jesus was such a good man and a great teacher, then how can we affirm this when He is obviously a megalomaniac and deceiver, a liar and a con-man, for His claims about Himself are that He is The Son of God, even God incarnate, the invisible creator revealed to us in human form. He also taught that he came to redeem mankind from their sins and that to prove this was true that He would rise from the dead. Why would anyone want to believe what this kind of man would say? And why would the disciples all write this stuff if He wasn’t risen, knowing it would make their efforts all the more difficult to accept? So if we cannot accept the incredible contradiction of the man Jesus, what is left? Third, with the resurrection swept away, that still leaves us with an impotent god, one unable to deal with our most serious challenge, death itself. We are back where we started, as Paul noted.

So the witnesses to Christ’s resurrection are not one or a few, but many, and among the many were those outside of the followers of Jesus. Paul being one noted, “After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.” His statement to the church at Corinth that “most of

whom remain until now” is an invitation to interview these witnesses themselves because they are still alive and well. Some had died to be sure (“fallen asleep”) but they died believing and with hope and truth to cling to.

A mass delusion, hypnosis, hallucination among these particular people is preposterous. Among the Greeks or Romans, maybe, for they indulged in narcotic use, and debauchery of all kinds based on their pantheon of gods and goddesses. But not the Jews. They would have none of it. So we are left with their witness, not backed up by debauchery, fleshly indulgence, lust, war or ambition for personal gain like so many other religions, but by sacrifice, love, compassion, commitment, even to the point of giving their lives with nothing - in this world - to gain.

Finally, to the consternation of many Jewish non-believers (there are millions of believers) Jesus birth, life, teachings, miracles, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection fulfill dozens if not hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. The odds of this occurring have been estimated to be impossible. What is even more aggravating, not one Jewish opponent has ever written or said that Jesus existence was any different than portrayed by the evangelists. More on this later.

### 3. Jesus was not dead, but drugged and revived in the tomb.

This theory has been perpetrated by many and most notably by Hugh Schoenfield in his 1994 book, “the Passover Plot”, a fanciful and unbelievable creation that weakly collapses from the sheer weight of its own foolishness and incredulity.

Basically, the gist of this general view is that when Jesus was on the cross, he was given a potent drink, a drink that rendered Him in an unconscious, death like state. Assuming Him to be dead, He was then laid into the tomb, and then revived later only to escape and claim He was risen from the dead. Possible? Let’s see. Remember, this theory is based on the text of the writing apostles and assumed to be truthful and accurate. Otherwise, no one would know Jesus was given this drink would they?

A) The texts noting this giving of Jesus a drink on the cross are as follows:

Matthew 27:33-35,

“And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting *it*, He was unwilling to drink. And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.”

Gall is the juice from a very poisonous and bitter herb we know as “Hemlock” from the Greeks, or as “Wormwood” throughout the Bible. In various quantities mixed with water or wine it could cause a deadening of pain, a stupor, a coma or death.

The context in Matthew proves that this was the contingent of Roman guards. The drink was in common use among the soldiers as a pain dampener. First, why would the Romans want to perpetuate a hoax? Obviously, they wouldn’t. Second, the text notes that He refused this drink.

Matthew 27:48 (Mark 15:36)

“Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.”

The context shows that this was one of the Jewish onlookers, not a disciple. Why would the Jews want to perpetrate this hoax? And we are not told here that He drank it. If He did, it

was not to perpetrate a hoax. The flogging, loss of blood and the torture of crucifixion would leave a person tormented in thirst and in pain. He may well have tasted it, but to assume He survived everything else because He drank this concoction stretches the limits of credulity.

John 19:28-30, "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a *branch of hyssop* and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

Here again, in the context, it is the soldiers who gave Him the sour wine and it suggests he drank some of it just prior to His death. Again, why would the Romans want to perpetrate a hoax? And supposing someone exchanged "sponges" where does that put us? Well, those who use this account of the disciples as the truthful base for their theory must also include some of the other facts:

- a. The Jews demanded that the three men crucified be killed before sundown because it was unlawful to have them unburied on the Sabbath (which was only an hour or two from occurring). See: Mark 15:42-45; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:31-42. In each of these passages, the death of each man had to be confirmed by a Roman Centurion. This was indeed confirmed by the Centurion and his soldiers, breaking the legs of the two crucified near Jesus and plunging a spear into the heart of Jesus Himself. The very account noting Jesus drinking of the "sponge" is the same account that tells of this confirmation. Pilate himself would not release the body of Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea until the Centurion assured him Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44). This was, of course, to prevent a bungling error by Pilate which would come back to haunt him.
  - b. There is no question that Jesus was placed in a tomb the entrance of which was covered with a large stone. These ancient tombs and their covering stones have been excavated by archeologists. The stones weighed up to several tons each. Further, Jesus' body was wrapped with linen cloths and anointed with ointments and spices. Finally, the tomb was sealed and a Roman guard was set to watch for any attempt to steal Jesus' body. So we are to believe that Jesus, after the beatings, floggings, falling under the weight of the cross, a torturous crucifixion, and after a great loss of blood, not only did not die, but even after being pierced with a spear and entombed, was able to revive (with no medical help), in the dark and cold of a tomb (not the most invigorating of environments), tear out of his ointment weighted wrapping cloths, push back and uphill a stone weighing easily a thousand pounds or more, overcome a trained Roman guard with weapons killing them all, and make good His escape into the night so He could proclaim He had risen from the dead. For what reason? To impress the Jews? Unlikely, for the Roman eagle still flew.
- B) First, this "plot" was not by the Son of God, but by a madman. What else could have gone wrong to mess it up? Second, who in his right mind would either create or submit to this kind of a plot and for what reason? Third, if the disciples helped Him, why? Again, they would know it was a hoax, and sooner or later, probably at the point of a Roman spear, they would confess, or even lie to say it was all a hoax after all (perhaps even if they knew it wasn't) just to save their skin. But they didn't! And again, how did the disciples overcome the guard?
- C) Why would this kind of hoax be planned let alone perpetrate? There were other ways to

attract a following. After all, Gamaliel, a respected and historical Rabbi alive at the time, had a devoted following. Previous Rabbi's like Hillel and Shammai had their devotees. Surely Jesus would have had dedicated students and teachers as well. His reputation would have at least labeled Him as a great prophet and teacher and a school or following would easily have occurred. Why screw that up with a hoax, especially one of this risk and magnitude? After all, other religions flourish without the claim of a risen founder. Finally, this kind of preposterous presumption is totally out of character for Jesus, His family, and the Jews in general. Would Jesus who treasured the truth desire His followers to build their faith upon a lie?

- D) Perhaps the most damning truth destroying this theory is that if Jesus had been drugged on the cross and passed out into a "death like state" undetectable to even trained Roman soldiers, He would not have been able to push Himself up with His legs and asphyxiation would have occurred in a matter of minutes, killing Him. This was the nature and torture of crucifixion. Hanging from ones arms caused a severe cramping of the upper body muscles so the victim could not breathe. In order to breathe, he had to push himself up on feet that were nailed to the beam. The pain was excruciating. After a time the legs also cramped. It could happen in a matter of minutes, hours or even days. Once the legs cramped, the victim could no longer push himself up to get a breath and died shortly thereafter. To hasten death, the Romans would take a beam and smash and break the legs. If Jesus was drugged, He was dead in minutes.

#### 4. There was a substitute on the cross.

Jesus later appeared to claim He had risen from the dead. This view is held by those who believe in Islam. Some in Islam believe that the individual on the cross was an "eidolon", a representation or a phantom. Others state that it was a substitute looking so much like Jesus that even His mother and disciples were fooled. This is based in part on Isaiah 52:14, "Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men."

- A) The simple question is, who exactly was the volunteer for this job, and why on earth would anyone go to this extreme to pull off a hoax when he had no "Messianic" power to do anything anyway?
- B) This means that Judas identified the wrong man.
- C) This means that neither Jesus' mother nor His disciples recognized Him as He was led to be flogged, or on the cross afterwards...or they were terrific actors.
- D) Even if this were true, there was a body still missing from the tomb to be accounted for. How did this happen? Perhaps there was a secret and concealed back door to the tomb that no one knew about except Joseph. He reveals this to the disciples. Then Jesus could have been removed even if the guard was alert and posted. But then, why was the stone removed? Who did it? There is no purpose for the stone's removal if this occurred. A claim of resurrection would be more effective with the stone in place. Once Jesus' resurrection was proclaimed, the stone would be removed to prove the body was gone. All would be in wonder. But then, the guards would not have needed to come up with their cockamamie story and then be bribed to change it. In addition, it is likely a thorough search of the tomb would have been made and the secret entrance discovered. And we are still left with the motive, the post-resurrection appearances, and all the rest.
- E) Why would anyone go to these lengths and then die defending it as true for no gain whatsoever as the disciples did?



- F) How can we justify the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who hated the entire matter about “Christ” let alone justify the conversion of Jesus’ brother, James, who questioned Jesus’ sanity early in His ministry and then became so strong a believer he remained in Jerusalem while others left to protect the disenfranchised Jewish believers. He was executed with the sword for his role as head of the church.

5. The women went to the wrong tomb on the first day of the week.

The argument goes that they were so distraught that they got disoriented in the early light and found an empty tomb somewhere and ran and told the disciples Jesus had risen.

- A) How is it possible for the women to go to the wrong tomb when only a matter of hours had passed. Mark makes the comment in 15:47, “Mary Magdalene and Mary the *mother* of Joses were looking on *to see* where He was laid.” Luke notes, (23:55-56) “Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.” One might get lost somehow, but more than one?
- B) This means Peter and John also went to the wrong tomb and never did discover where the “lost tomb” was. This is a greater mystery than the resurrection itself.
- C) To compound matters, poor Joseph of Arimathea forgot where his own tomb was, even after placing Jesus inside it.
- D) The Roman guards would have then reported that everything was secure, not knowing that all the others had gone to the wrong tomb. So when the claims of resurrection were pronounced, it would have been a simple matter for the Roman guard to show the Jews where Jesus still lay! Unless, of course they got lost as well.
- E) If they did go to the wrong tomb, and Jesus never did rise from the dead, why then go out and proclaim it? To what purpose? Thomas surely wouldn’t have believed it would he? Then, all the Jews had to do to disprove that Jesus was still dead was to open the real tomb and display the dead body of Jesus for all to see.

6. The Jews and/or the Romans stole and hid the body so a hoax would not be perpetrated.

- A) If this happened, then when the disciples claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead, all that had to be done to crush this claim was for the Jews or Romans to produce the body they themselves hid.
- B) Then, why would the disciples make such a claim based on an empty tomb by itself? Would they not want to know what happened to the body of Jesus? This was their first question when they got to the empty tomb. John 20:1-2, “Now on the first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb. So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.” The empty tomb does not support the resurrection of Christ from the dead by itself. It had to take an actual appearance to many disciples, non-disciples at different times and places to even begin to believe it actually happened. And that is what took place.

7. The followers of Jesus were persuaded that Jesus was alive after the burial because someone pretended to be Jesus and convinced them that He had risen from the dead.

- A) Surely Jesus' mother or members of His family would have blown the whistle unless they were a part of the plot or went along out of their misguided sorrow. This seems out of character for Mary, and for James who was skeptical to begin with, not to mention Thomas.
  - B) How did this pretender get all the marks of scourging and beatings on his body not to mention the punctured wrists and feet?
  - C) This assumes that all the hundreds of people who had known Jesus were also fooled.
  - D) It begs the question, "Why perpetrate this plot?" And, what happened to this imposter? We are still left with a Messiah unable to deal with the Romans or with the expectations of the Jews. Who would believe this fellow?
  - D) Even if this were true, the dead body of the real Jesus was still somewhere. In the tomb? Open it and prove it all false. Not in the tomb? How did it come to be missing and why?
8. The account of Jesus' resurrection was never in the original writings.

It was interpolated or added later to justify church belief that Jesus was the Son of God and to keep people from joining other religions. This theory has been put forth, in some form, for a century now by "scholars" who believe they have the answers.

A) If Jesus never rose from the dead, what was the motive for the disciples to write the gospels and letters in the first place? They were crushed with disappointment, and had they written the documents simply to exhibit Jesus' teachings (As the Gospel of Thomas does), why did others later on add so much about His deity, mission and so on? This would serve no purpose in a "later" church. It is common that these same skeptics and critics also remove any miraculous element from the narratives in their "search" for the historical Jesus. If the miraculous and the resurrection are removed we have some serious observations and questions to propose.

First, there would have been no church into which to add these elements and no purpose for doing so. The church was well underway immediately following Jesus' "resurrection". So there would be no church about which we read in the New Testament for the church was built upon the firm belief that Christ rose from the dead. If He neither rose from the dead nor performed the miracles recorded in the Gospels, there would be no church. Hence, there would have been no motivation for the writing of the Gospels, no Apostle Paul to write to his readers. In fact there would have been no "Paul" at all!

Second, much of Jesus' teachings related to His personage, mission and purpose, often prophesying His impending arrest, death and resurrection. He was crucified for "making Himself God" and making statements that resulted in strong opposition from the Jewish leadership. If He made these claims and was unable to back them up, and was never resurrected, then He was not only a failed Messiah, but a fraud, liar, and deranged false prophet. In this case, something entirely different would have been written of Him, and He would be nothing more than a small footnote in Jewish history noting His tragic and deranged appearance, if that. If He did not make these claims or do the miracles attributed to Him, there would have likely been no effort to have Him crucified. It is possible that He, along with rabbis Shammi, Hillel, Gamaliel and others would simply be listed as a controversial teacher with a sect of followers like these others. Then today, the only "church" would be a Jewish denomination who followed the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, a rabbi from Nazareth – maybe. But for that to happen, Jesus would have to have been approved and ordained by other rabbis of note in a council. But He was not. In fact, His "authority", along with John the Baptist's, was constantly under question. "... for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

“When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. “The baptism of John was from what *source*, from heaven or from men?” And they *began* reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ “But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.” And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” He also said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.” (Matthew 21:23-27) “... and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority” (Luke 4:32). “The Jews then said to Him, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken” (John 2:18-22) .

So, without rabbinic approval, and in fact with rabbinic opposition, plus their universal condemnation of Jesus as a fraud and a deceiver, it would have been extremely difficult for Jesus to have found a faithful, public audience from among so many Jews – unless of course, there was some extraordinary reason to do so.

Third, even if He was just a teacher with a different approach to Judaism, the very first “church” would have been simply a group of Jews dedicated to recording and propagating His teachings. So why insert all the miraculous claims, works and the resurrection? What would be the motive?

Fourth, then John the Baptist becomes a tragic figure and a comedy. There is no point to his existence, let alone to his message. What about this man’s testimony? The tragic and comic pathos would also extend to Paul the apostle, to all the early writers and disciples, and to all the believers from that time onward.

The fact is, however, that the presentation of Jesus’ miraculous prophecies, works and the fact of His resurrection was the first claim and proclamation of the church. If not, then how did Luke of Troas, a Gentile come to hear of these things? And what about the spread of the gospel before the Apostles or Paul even set out from Jerusalem? The proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection was known early on by those who were not disciples. Luke is the prime example. Luke, a gentile, probably from Troas in Asia Minor (North-Western Turkey), came to be a believer due to the message coming to him while he was residing in his hometown. Later, he and Saul of Tarsus set out on their miraculous journeys specifically because they believed Jesus had been raised from the dead. The resurrection was at the core of Paul’s message. He mentions it in many of his letters. One would have to claim that not only were the gospels doctored, but so were the letters of Paul and the rest of the writers. But since copies of these documents were circulated around the Empire, there is no record of discrepancies between them of this magnitude. In fact, in the more ancient documents and records recently discovered that date earlier and earlier, we find no absence of the resurrection account in any of the canonical documents. In non-canonical documents, the consistency remains as well.

It has been noted that there are relatively few documents supporting the life and career of Julius Caesar, but no one seems to disbelieve what is written about him. Yet, with the abundance of documents (tens of thousands) attesting to the life of Christ there remains a large constituency of

skeptics and critics. One might be led to conclude that more than honest objective skepticism is involved here.

B) Why would anyone follow a dead and failed Messiah before the records were changed? The famous Jewish rebel, governor and military commander, Bar-Kochba (or Cochba), had a great following and some success against the Romans until he was killed in battle in 135 A.D.. He apparently claimed to be the Messiah of Israel or else others attributed this hope to him. But after his death and failure, his following ceased. In fact his name meant “Son of the Stars”, (Numbers 24:17) and was a self designated Messianic title. After the failure of his rebellion, he was called Bar-Cosiba (Son of Falsehood). So why follow and preach about an even more anemic Messiah (Jesus) for hundreds of years before the documents were created to justify this? There would have simply been no church! And since it was made up of Jews seeking a Conquering Messiah, word of Jesus would have never left the mouths of the few followers He had before His death – unless something extraordinary happened to turn the whole society upside down.

C) It is humanly impossible to believe that hundreds, even thousands of people would endure torture, suffering and even death for a hoax. Perhaps for an active attempt to overthrow Rome, but for a failed Messiah? A madman might endure this suffering. But there is no record that the early Christians were madmen. Quite the contrary.

D) Why would devoted people want to justify Jesus as the Son of God at some later date by adding these divine elements into a text (which probably wouldn't have been written in the first place) when they knew He really wasn't anything more than a failed Messiah and prophet? Why would they worship Jesus as the Son of God if they knew it was a fraud? Why, especially, would Jews? All it resulted in was persecution by several Roman emperors over hundreds of years. And even more significant, if you take away all the divine attributes attached to Jesus as would have to be the case in this scenario, Jesus would have never been crucified in the first place and all of this discussion would not be occurring!

The above lists the primary arguments for denying the resurrection of Christ and their rebuttals. In summary, there had to be a fraud perpetrated by one of the following parties: The disciples, Jesus Himself, Jesus' family, the Jews, or the Romans. One is forced to take each possibility and let the light of reason, history, science, and truth shine on it. Further, either Jesus was the greatest fraud, deceiver, liar, manipulator, and con man the world has ever seen – an act beyond human comprehension in view of the facts and records, or - He was exactly who He claimed to be.

This latter section then, has dealt with the arguments denying the resurrection of Christ. The interesting thing is that all the critics and doubters use the Biblical narrative as the tool with which to discount the resurrection, the miraculous or the divine. In other words, they give credence and veracity to (at least) the core of the record as being historically accurate and reliable. Why? Because it cannot be denied (except by those in total denial that any history has ever occurred) that these events took place. What caused them is the issue. For some, the cause cannot be outside the verifiability of scientific testing – in other words – spiritual or divine.<sup>11</sup> For others, the very events themselves are proof of the spiritual and divine. This next section deals with the evidence substantiating His resurrection.

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<sup>11</sup> See this author's work entitled ““Something Must Be Eternal”. In this essay, it is shown that Dr. Carl Sagan's attempt to disavow the eternal and spiritual actually demonstrates the very probability of its existence.

## **SUBSTANTIATING EVIDENCE**

### **1. Biblical testimony.**

The Biblical testimony is divided into three sections as delineated below. Those that would malign the testimony because they simply choose not to believe it must be dismissed even though they call into account “their expert testimony and study” to do so. For every one of these “scholars” there are a dozen scholars who accept the testimony of the Scripture as valid. Of course it is to be admitted that many of the accounts of Jesus’ miracles, for example, are outside the ability of science or history to prove. If they were within the area of science or history, they would not be miracles, would they? And that which was extraordinary about Jesus would be reduced to commonality thus bringing into question His deity, would it not? That is the whole point.

The unique thing about the Scriptures is that they introduce the supernatural and spiritual as real events. Yet, these events are not without sufficient evidence or witness to bring one to a point of faith. It is incumbent upon the teachers of the Scriptures to give those who seek for truth enough evidence to persuade them to seek further into the realm of the spiritual.

In the case of the New Testament accounts, it becomes more and more difficult to disregard their narrative as invented or made up when the documents are closely examined. For example, in telling the story of the resurrection of Christ, all four authors have something different to report or add. Critics point to these differences and say something like, “With all these confused and conflicting reports, it must be concluded that the New Testament is invalid as a source for truth let alone as a source of God’s word!” On the other hand, if each of the accounts were exactly the same, the critics would be saying, “It is obvious that these men conspired to concoct a single unified story proving that the New Testament is invalid and not worthy of the attention so many give it!”

But let’s look at it in an honest way, from a very human point of view. This was an extraordinary, unexpected, startling and shocking moment in the lives of these simple followers of Jesus. After His death and burial the women, after their Sabbath obligation was over, returned to the tomb to complete their anointing of the body. They brought products they had prepared shortly before. There was no expectation of resurrection. In fact, when they saw the open tomb, it was a shock and John says they ran immediately to get the men. After the men returned followed by the women, the men saw the empty tomb and went away puzzled. Remaining behind, Mary, confronted by a “stranger” told him, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him”. Is this not a natural question when discovering the tombstone rolled away and the tomb empty. Wouldn’t we all wonder, “What happened? Where is the body? Who would have taken it away and put it somewhere else? What’s going on? Of course this is the normal response. But if the story is an invention, why include this?

John, who was there with Peter, makes an odd, non-event, a part of his story. He includes a foot race between himself and Peter to the tomb after the women report the stone rolled away (probably flung away). This adds nothing to what “inventors” of a story would want to convey. These were not professional authors, so why include it? Because John won the race! None of the other writers included this account.

Another oddity, if this was an invented story, is that the angels did not appear to the men at all, but only to the women. In a Jewish, patriarchal society, women and especially their testimony was looked upon with skepticism. So why write it this way as all four do? Very odd if they

were seeking to be believed. Why and how would the men even come to believe what women were saying. Most men in those days thought the women were hysterical and were prone to fable and fantasy as well as exaggeration. Why would the men believe their tales? – unless they themselves ultimately verified them.

Then, all four have a slightly different story as to what happened that day. Think about it. Women come rushing back to a group of disintegrated disciples cooped up in a house in Jerusalem and tell the leaders the stone covering Jesus' tomb is cast aside and the tomb is empty. In the chaos that followed the story told to one person by one woman and then told to another person by another woman. Blending in the general wonder and confusion, would this not lead to differences in the remembering and recounting the story? Do we not have exactly this same phenomenon today with multiple witnesses to an event? A shock and stunning event such as this would lead each direct witness to fix on something that struck them particularly and it could well be a different element than that which struck others, couldn't it? So do the different versions add to the honesty, genuineness and credibility of the accounts? As much so, if not more so than to their lack thereof, if one takes into consideration human nature.

#### A. The testimony of the eyewitnesses.

##### 1. The testimony of Matthew, Mark, Peter, James (the brother of Jesus) and John.

These writers were direct eyewitnesses to the resurrection by their own account.

Two of them were not among the disciples of Jesus, namely, Mark and James. One of the most startling of these eyewitness testimonies is James, the brother of Jesus, who is credited with writing the book of James. He is also mentioned prominently in Luke's book of "Acts".

James, who is seen by Mark and John as highly skeptical of Jesus' sanity throughout His ministry, is known by the Biblical writers as becoming a self sacrificing believer and head of the church. He was well known outside of the early Christian community. Clement, Hegesippus, Eusebius, and Josephus all mention James and all agree that: 1) He was the brother of Jesus, the eldest son of Mary and Joseph (after Jesus), 2) He came to his faith after a direct post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to Him, 3) He became the head of the church at Jerusalem, and, 4) he was executed in the early sixties because of his firm and unshakable faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The question, of course, is why would James' life have changed so radically if Jesus was really dead, a hoax discovered about Jesus' "supposed" resurrection, and all the disciples were found to be frauds and con-men? There is no rational answer for this except to say that James at least believed Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to him. So the best critics can come up with is that James, not one of the twelve, and opposed to Jesus' ministry early on because it did not meet Messianic expectations of the Jews, decided to fake this encounter with Jesus or was under some delusion (as were hundreds of others).

##### 2. The testimony of Saul of Tarsus.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus is the strongest witness to the resurrection of Christ outside of those closest to Jesus because, not only was Saul not among the followers of Jesus, but he was actively engaged in trying to stamp out and destroy the early

movement that proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. Early documents apart from the Bible bear this out.<sup>12</sup>

The historicity of Saul and this change from persecutor to Apostle for the very cause he hated is not disputed by any historian or even by any reasonable critic. It just remains a mystery to those who can't believe Jesus rose from the dead. Saul's story is much like James' except for his total separation from the early ministry of Jesus. It cannot be taken lightly. To assume for a moment that Saul came under some delusion like the rest of the disciples is unacceptable by any scholar or psychologist who might lean toward this theory.

B. The testimony of the associates of the eyewitnesses. These include Luke, the unknown author of Hebrews and Jude.

1. There are some who would try to discount the witness of these authors as "hearsay" and so discredit it as valid. This is a shallow attempt to do so because if all this was contemporary and everyone of these writers were called into court to testify, the testimony of these three would be accepted in our courts and not relegated as hearsay.<sup>13</sup>
2. Not only that, it was Luke's commission to carefully write down the "exact truth" of everything that had occurred so that all the stories, myths and legends that had sprung up might be culled out, and there were hundreds all claiming to be true. Luke was a gentile from Troas of Asia minor, the location of ancient Troy. He was also a physician and apparently did not become a believer until the ministry of Paul in the fifties. His purpose was to clarify for his mentor or friend Theophilus the true story of Jesus. He has no axe to grind, no motive for perpetrating a hoax. Luke writes at the beginning of his work,

1:1-4, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

His manner and style of writing radiate his goal. For example, in the resurrection account, Luke notes:

24:1-11, "But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2: And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3: but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4: While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; 5: and as *the women* were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, *the men* said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6: "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7: saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." 8: And they remembered His words, 9: and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10: Now they were Mary Magdalene and

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<sup>12</sup> Clement of Rome, Epistle to the Corinthians, c. 95; Sulpicius Severus, Chron. 29:3; Eusebius, H.E. II.25.5-8, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Careful research on United States' "hearsay" laws will bear this out.

Joanna and Mary the *mother* of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. 11: But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.”

If one looks closely, one will see the dispassionate way Luke writes this. His account is a summary. He only includes that which he feels states the basic story. First, note in verse 4, he talks about the two men standing “near” them. He knows there are some differences in how this was reported and declines to state or speculate where exactly these men were standing. Second, he does not identify the “men” as angels. Third, the statement of these two men to the women is a general narrative comprised of the essence of the reports of the women. It captures the truth of the matter without any extraneous emotion. Fourth, the response of the men to the report of the women is noted as appearing “as nonsense, and they would not believe them.” This is Luke’s editorial summary of the response of the men, not the words of the men themselves. So Luke has a flavor of impartiality throughout his book, but it still describes the events as witnesses he believed retold them.

Where did Luke get his material? Well he traveled with Paul for several years but his material is far too intimate and personal to have received it from the great apostle. This intimacy from beginning to end reveals a contact with the family of Jesus itself, and quite probably with Mary the mother of Jesus and with many of Jesus family members. How and when could he have gotten this information? It happens that Luke accompanies Paul to Jerusalem where Paul is arrested and incarcerated for a year and a half. Luke writes about this in great detail in his book of Acts (chapter 21-26) notes his own presence at many of the events. It is easily concluded, that with the commission from Theophilus, Luke took the opportunity to travel to wherever he could locate the best sources for his history and wrote it down as we have it today. Luke was an educated man. His Greek is formal and impeccable which is not the case with the other writers. His work shows his medical training here and there as he observes, for instance, that Jesus’ sweat as He prayed in the garden was “like drops of blood, falling upon the ground”. This is a comment by Luke and only he employs it. There is evidence that Luke took months and months to get his book together. Why do this if it is all a fraud?

- a. The actual author of the book of Hebrews is not known for absolute certain. Some conclude that it was written by Paul. To be certain, Pauline influence is evident, but the content is of a different style and purpose than anything else Paul wrote. Yet, whoever the author is, Paul’s influence and teaching is present. Here is a theological treatise proclaiming such lofty things about Jesus, and the Old and New Covenants that it boggles one’s mind to believe this is a work of fiction. The book, like so many, primarily addresses both believing and non-believing Jews and is designed to evangelize and persuade those Jews outside of faith in Christ as the promised Messiah to believe in Him. He uses both Jewish tradition and Old Testament stories and passages to persuade his readers. It is presented as a life and death matter. The writer seeks nothing for himself or anyone else (unlike some of the writers of false gospels and epistles) except to save his people from the fate of those who are unbelievers and unfaithful. Why do this if the only reason is concern for the ultimate fate of others? Why perpetrate a fraud?
- b. Jude claims to be the brother of James and the Lord’s brother. The gospel records the names of Mary and Joseph’s other children after Jesus and among them is “Judas” (Matthew 13:55). Judah or Judas was a common and



respected name taken from the son of Jacob, Judah. After the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, those with the same name began to alter its form. So we have Jude. It is possible he was also a direct eyewitness to Christ after the resurrection. He does not mention this, however. He opens his brief epistle with, “Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

If we are to believe the gospel accounts (Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:24) all four record Jesus’ stating that He was not honored in His own home or town. Don’t we find this true today as well? And, again, we have a family member who was not a disciple and showed Jesus no respect or honor. Sibling rivalry was alive and well then as now. Yet note Jude’s words of awe about Jesus. Jude is writing to Christians being caught up in false teachings about Jesus – the Gnostic movement. Why do this if he was also perpetrating a fraud? Why not join this very strong and persuasive cult rather than fight it? In addition, all the other writers spent time in some of their writings fighting the same battle with false teaching and religion, some their total effort. Does this make sense if they themselves were among the deceivers? It is also interesting to note that those who taught false gospels were not so ready as the true believers to be executed for their beliefs.

### C. The witness of the prophets.

The prophets of the Old Testament as well as the Old Testament itself present a dilemma to skeptics. Here is a book comprising 39 books (in the English non-apocryphal versions) having been written over a period of at least a thousand years if not longer, by dozens of different authors at different times and different places all within a sequence of unified events and themes and all agreeing to the things they wrote both past, present and future. The prophets not only spent time addressing the religious matters of their own people in their own time over hundreds of years, but also offered insight to the coming of The One God would send to deliver His people. The insights were not always repeated from one writer to the next. As the centuries passed, the prophets added different and unusual insights to the nature and identity of this coming Messiah.

In all of human history, regardless of how long one believes that to be, no one has even come close to fulfilling even a few of these prophecies, let alone all of them. Estimates of dozens to hundreds of prophecies are made but Jesus of Nazareth is the only person whose birth, life, death (including the manner), burial, resurrection and dual fulfillment of both aspects of the prophecies regarding the Messiah fulfills them all but one – His triumphal return.

This does not even begin to mention the mass of prophecies about other individuals, kings, cities, nations, and so forth replete in the Old Testament. The Gospel writers draw upon the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies to buttress their work showing Jesus is indeed the

promised Messiah. It is an additional witness from the past, a witness no one could have invented to support their claims. How can this be explained away? <sup>14</sup>

## 2. Extra-Biblical Testimony

- A) The pro-Christian witnesses. Already mentioned are the writings of Clement, Hegesippus, Eusebius, and Josephus all mentioning James. But we also have the testimony of Polycarp, a disciple of John, who was so beloved that, as he was burning at the stake, he blessed his persecutors. In the early second century we have personalities such as Irenaeus, Ignatius, Papias and Tertullian with much to offer in support of the authenticity of the gospel writers. Some of them were companions of the apostles themselves or of their close followers. Papias writes, for example, what Mark said about his own gospel record. We have Papias' works. In addition to the New Testament documents, we have collections of non-canonical writings numbering in the dozens that attest to the valid testimony of the New Testament.
- B) The anti-Christian writers. Among the writings of the first and second century, we have the writings of dozens of witnesses of competing religions against which the Christian church fought so hard for the purity and truth of the Gospel story. Yet they all attest to the genuineness of the gospel story even though they want to use the information for false or twisted purposes. In fact, if it wasn't for those who sought to subvert and twist the truth for their own purposes, much of the New Testament would have never been written for much of the writings of the Apostles was to refute these teachings.

Among the most noted of these "enemies" of Christ and the truth of the gospel is Marcion, who actually copied and published a "New Testament". This book contained the four gospels and much of Paul, but Marcion cut and pasted the writings into contrived texts he wanted to thrust upon the unsuspecting. This was done as early as about 140 A.D. Though his work was ultimately discredited, his sources were not. For further information regarding several kinds of unorthodox movements, one can study several quality books on the history of the early church.

- C) Contemporary non-Christian and Christian documents. These include the histories of Romans such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, who refer to the Christian movement and its roots and history, as well as letters by Pliny, governor of Bithynia, to Trajan, Emperor of Rome. These are all written well within 70 years of Jesus ministry and during the times when some of the apostles and early church leaders still lived. Numerous correspondences are extant between Roman officials and church leaders regarding Christians.

## 3. Historical, geographical, and archaeological evidence.

- A) It is odd that the further away we get from the actual events how much more information we have access to. It is not a boon to the skeptics and critics. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on through today monumental discoveries have been made supporting the Biblical record. It continues to occur. Scrolls, inscribed walls and stones, coins, discovered tombs and graves,

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<sup>14</sup> A list of these prophetic passages and their fulfillment is readily available. There have been many studies produced on this subject.

ossuaries, pottery, historical excavations such as cities, wells, caves, plus the finding of tablets, writings, books, manuscripts and inscriptions are among the monumental quantity of recent elements adding to the veracity of the Biblical documents.

The critics that attempted to discredit the Biblical account a hundred years ago for example, are quiet. They have no followers or disciples anymore. They themselves have been silenced by, of all things, science. These discoveries are available to any who wish to pursue this avenue of ancillary Biblical support. This does not mean that there is no debate as each of these discoveries is made. But the overwhelming evidence attesting to the historical accuracy and apostolic veracity becomes more difficult to ignore as the years go by. Isn't it odd that in a great age of skepticism all this is being uncovered?

Finally, it is encouraging that recent findings have given incredible support for the faithful transmission of the gospel record over these two millennia. When the Reformation Bibles were published (16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century) in concert with the invention of the Guttenberg Press, they had to rely on a handful of rather late manuscripts, none predating the ninth century and all either translations or copies of some version. So the reliability of the transmission of the actual accounts written by the apostles was in question. But with the discovery of hundreds if not thousands of manuscripts during the last century, many dating back to the fourth century and earlier, it has been discovered that no significant differences had occurred during the copying and transmitting of the New Testament for over a thousand years.

B) There is no possible way to ignore the growth and history of the Christian Church itself. It is still with us today, and its constituency numbers in the millions if not the billions. Of course there is controversy, just as there was in the early church, about how the worship is to take place or as to the methods and practices of the church are to be conducted or about what some of it all means. There are those claiming to be “Christian” who have simply grown up in a national heritage and have no idea whatsoever about any of it. Some “Christian” peoples or nations have created atrocities beyond measure among which can be counted the Crusaders of the Middle Ages as well as the Nazi's under Hitler. But examples like these are neither true reflections of the teaching of Jesus of His manner, nor of the apostles as any thinking person would agree. Some might argue that Islam, for example, also has a great following and the necessity of a “risen founder” is not essential to their religious fervor. This is true, but the point of Jesus coming and His purpose would be negated by a dead Savior, and Christianity would be nothing more than a sect of Judaism and Jesus just a teacher or philosopher in the pattern of Hillel or some other Jewish sage for which we have no separate following. There would have been no New Testament, for there would be no reason for writing it. A simple collection of Jesus' sayings might exist such as we find in the Gnostic based “Gospel of Thomas”. But neither Jesus nor the apostles give us the option of placing Jesus in such company. One is compelled to ask “Why”?

So we have the testimonies and convictions of devoted Christians for two thousand years regarding a real and viable encounter with the unseen spiritual realm revealed to them through their simple faith in Jesus Christ as risen Lord and Messiah. Though one could argue that a similar faith holds true for the followers of Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna or any other religious teacher or philosopher, one is still compelled to ask why the Christian Church would set up such an incredible roadblock to the possibility of having an even greater influence by claiming that its founder and teacher has risen from the dead? This question

must be taken seriously for since the event occurred two thousand years ago it has not been dismissed nor can it ever be dismissed by those attempting to do so.

#### C. Personal testimonies.

Many Christians today (hundreds of thousands, if not millions) will tell you of a personal experience that is impossible to prove except that they swear that their lives were dramatically altered and changed for the good from the moment they placed their faith in Jesus Christ and asked Him in prayer to make the truth and His living presence real to them. Now this experience is either a continuation of some mass hallucination from two thousand years ago, or a delusion, or something phony that still carries on today or there is something to it which is attributed by these people to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead and is actually spiritually working in the lives of people who come to Him in faith. If it is a mass delusion or some religious or psychological phenomenon, then why can't we twenty-first geniuses figure out what it is and how and why it works so effectively? In my own case, I set out on a lengthy journey to prove I was not manipulated or tricked. I was not the first.

#### 4. The effort of some dedicated skeptics and opponents of Christianity.

There have been some credible and qualified scholars who set out to prove once and for all that the entire Christian foundation as described in the gospels is without substance. These have not been simple critics who throw out an argument and do no work of investigation to determine once and for all whether their hypothesis holds water. The people described in this section did so and their record is available to anyone who wishes to examine it.

Here is the premise. The resurrection of Christ is the most heinous, heartless, evil fraud ever imposed upon the minds of countless millions of men and women throughout history, or it is the truth. If it is the truth, it thereby establishes that Christ is indeed God's son and all that He said and did is verified, true and demonstrates that God revealed Himself to us in Christ for only God can raise the dead. The existence and nature of God Himself as pictured in the Scriptures is at stake for if Christ is not raised from the dead then all is false and faith is futile. Finally, if it is true, it is life effecting, and a choice to ignore it carries dire consequences. So the stakes are pretty high. Many have determined this to be true and so have set out to disprove the resurrection of Christ.

A) One was Dr. Simon Greenleaf, one of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century American legal minds. He helped put Harvard Law School on the map. He wrote a standard legal work still referenced today, a three-volume set on the rules of legal evidence acceptable to a court of law. He did this while serving as the Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University. He is listed in the Encyclopedia Britannica. This man often ridiculed the Christian faith in his classroom as he was a noted skeptic and found opportunity to frequently mock the faith of his Christian students.

One day the Christians in his class challenged him to either disprove the resurrection by the laws of legal evidence that he himself had developed, and that were accepted by the United States courts, or shut up. It was a pretty good challenge. He was taken aback at this. He didn't immediately pursue this but over the years the challenge intrigued him. So he took a leave of absence to meet the challenge and assumed the role of prosecuting attorney. He studied the evidence for a lengthy period of time and, after examining the evidence according to the rules he himself had established, came both to a conclusion and a decision. His conclusion was that there was no way, according to the evidence, that Jesus could not have been actually raised from the dead. His decision was to personally believe in and accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He

then adopted the role of defense attorney for the faith in his book entitled, *The Testimony of the Four Evangelists*”, published by Baker Book house. In the book he confirms the fact of Jesus resurrection according to the laws of legal evidence acceptable in a court of law. This book is still in print today.

B) In 18<sup>th</sup> century England two other scholars, Lord George Lyttelton and Gilbert West published books also in print today. West, the son of a clergyman, departed from the traditions of his family as a college student and pursued the life of the world, first taking up a military commission and then entering civil service in the capacity of legal clerk and then as chief clerk for the Secretary of State. After some years he married, settled in Wickham in Kent, and began to once again examine the roots of the Christian faith. It appears he had been a critic of Christianity to this point. West wrote about many things and was a poet of note, but he spent considerable time examining the foundation of the faith, which was the veracity of the resurrection accounts. In 1747 he published his, “*Observations on the Resurrection*” for which he was awarded a “Doctor of Laws” by Oxford University in 1748. Many who bought his book expecting it to be a scholarly destruction of Christianity (not knowing his change of heart) were taken aback and responded in a variety of ways, some persuaded to faith and other ridiculing him. But West’s life was transformed and he soon gathered both his family and his servants into a regular time of teaching, devotion and prayers each morning for his family, Sunday for his servants. On the flyleaf of his book he wrote, “Reject not until you have examined the evidence”. Good counsel. He did not live long enough to complete his work on “*The Evidences for the Truth of the New Testament*”.

During this time at Wickham, West was frequently visited by his friend George (Lord) Lyttelton. Lyttelton was an objector to the Christian faith and labeled an “infidel” by those who knew him. His frequent visits to West and West’s delving into the evidences for the Christian faith moved Lyttelton to do likewise. His goal was to set aside the foolishness of the resurrection once and for all. But he approached the work as objectively as possible not wanting his efforts to be dismissed as prejudicial. Lyttelton was also trained in law. So as he set out to discredit the faith, he took up the challenge of the conversion of the Apostle Paul while West was examining evidences for the resurrection of Christ. After much research he also was convinced that Paul’s conversion and subsequent life well could not have occurred outside of a life-changing phenomenon. This phenomenon could only be ultimately traced and credited to the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His book, “*Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*”, published in 1785 is still available today.

C) Early in the twentieth century, another scholar, Dr. Frank Morrison, like West, had abandoned his religious roots (Methodist) and sought truth in the rationalistic tradition of Jefferson, Paine and others. He had admired the life and teachings of Jesus, concluding, as many do, that Jesus led the most beautiful lifestyle a person could commit to and taught impressive philosophy but stopped at the point of believing that Jesus was deity or that he performed miracles, died “for our sins” or rose from the dead. In other words, he deleted all the testimony of the gospel writers except that which he felt was acceptable to the rational mind. The gospel writers had, in his thinking, simply tacked on the spiritual and mythical attributes of Jesus for some perverted reason. But the kernel of how Jesus lived and what He taught was admirable.

Still, he was challenged to prove that the apostolic account was untruthful. So he set out to dispel the myth of the resurrection, which he recognized was the crux of the entire matter. He believed that a rational, intelligent approach to history would do the job. Morrison was so

determined to set the record straight that he spent much of his own money and several years in Israel to study on his own. After this work, he finally published a book telling of his discoveries and conclusions. In his preface he stated, "It (this book) is essentially a confession, the inner story of a man who set out to write one kind of book and found himself compelled by the sheer forces of circumstances to write another." In his first chapter, "The Book That Refused To Be Written" he notes his unbelief in the miracles and resurrection and determination to sift out the fiction of the apostolic writers and report on what was really the truth. He ends his book with this statement, "There may be, and, as the writer thinks, there certainly is a deep and profoundly historical basis for that much disputed sentence in the Apostles Creed – the third day He rose again from the dead". So that which he formerly denied he now believed – Jesus rose from the dead just as the apostles stated. Morrison's intellectual, rational approach to history concluded with him becoming a Christian. His book, "Who Moved The Stone?" is still in print and asks an excellent question.

D) In 1937, Dr. C.E.M. Joad held the chair of Philosophy at the University of London. He was such a worthy enemy of Christianity that one rector of the Church of England preached a sermon on, "God, The Devil and Professor C.E.M. Joad". Professor Joad held that there was nothing wrong with human nature that better education, better opportunity, and a better environment could not cure. He laughed at the "problem of sin". Then came World War II which brought desolation to half of Europe. The blitzkrieg brought the war and reality of human nature to Joad's doorstep and refugees, telling the stories of concentration camps, mass torture and executions of the Jews cause his "righteous soul to revolt". His mind was challenged and he changed his views completely. "What", he thought, "is history but the records of the follies of mankind, man's inhumanity to man". Dr. Joad decided that theologians had a better grasp and deeper insight into human nature than that of contemporary science. The doctrine of "original sin" he once derided began to make sense to him. His struggle to admit the possibility that the Biblical teachings and accounts are true is easily seen in a cursory glance at his writings.

But Cyril E. M. Joad continued on further than that. He followed the argument until he reached an inescapable conclusion, that though the truth of the spiritual is impossible to believe solely on rational grounds it is, nonetheless, true. As David A. Noebel, Ph.d. wrote of Joad, "Philosopher C.E.M. Joad found Christ and Christianity because he was seeking ethical truth. "I now believe," he wrote, "that the balance of reasoned considerations tells heavily in favour of the religious, even of the Christian view of the world."<sup>3</sup> Joad recognized the need for absolute truth, rather than a truth that evolves with each new discovery: "A religion which is in constant process of revision to square with science's ever-changing picture of the world might well be easier to believe, but it is hard to believe it would be worth believing."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3, 4</sup> C.E.M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955), p. 22.

E) Similar stories of the changed lives of noted skeptics and opponents of the Christian are numerous. Included, for example, are: Martin Luther, John Bunyan, John Wesley, C.S. Lewis, Billy Graham, Josh McDowell, Charles Colson and a multitude of others in every field of work including the sciences.

## **5. The argument from silence, a letter to Dr. James Kennedy, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church.**

Dr. Kennedy,

I have spent a number of years in studying the validity of the resurrection because this is what I direct my listeners to as the foundation for the truth of the gospel and the Christian faith. To buttress this fact as much as possible in the minds of the hearers, I believe I can contribute to its invulnerability with a simple observation or two I have yet to see or hear presented in other efforts.

Having either gathered or read as much information as possible opposing the resurrection, arguments going back to the early church era, there is one I have never come across and I believe it is telling. It is simply the argument from silence.

I have found no argument, document, letter, papyrus, codex, any statement of any kind or the report of a statement of any kind simply stating that what the disciples proclaimed or wrote was false, or a lie, or without foundation.

One would think that after the centuries of vociferous attacks upon the Christian faith that the emotions behind them would have even been more heated in the first century. This is stating the obvious of course, in light of the brutal murder of Jesus and of Stephen and of many of the church including Polycarp, Paul, Peter and others. One would think, in the heat and hate of the time against the disciples and the early church, that someone with first hand knowledge in the first century would have written a contrary statement stating that he was a witness to the fact that the disciples were liars, and had first hand knowledge of this fact because he witnessed the dead body himself.

(Even the Koran, written over 600 years later, validates the resurrection by denying that it was Jesus who was crucified. Instead, it claims the crucified individual was a “phantom” or substitute. This tacitly underscores that the foundational book of Islam agrees that the disciples confronted a living Jesus after the crucifixion and burial, albeit it claims, so foolishly, that it wasn’t Jesus on the cross.)

The reason why there is no such extant document or recording of such an eyewitness claim is perplexing in light of the furor over this event, both for the Romans as well as for the Jews. The world was being turned “upside down” (Acts 17:6 KJV). The last thing Pilate wanted was another criticism by the Jews at Rome against his already shaky position. There is also ample evidence of Antipas’ effort to quell both the man Jesus and his follower’s devotion to him as it raised a division in his territory. His difficulty over the beheading of John was not yet over as John’s martyrdom endeared him even more to his followers. One would think that the death of Jesus would shut it all down. Imagine what emotion reports of His resurrection caused. Then, the Jewish leadership was in no mood for further anarchy and later, Saul of Tarsus, who had had it with this movement, went to the defense of the cause of “peace” in Israel. So why wouldn’t there be simple, eyewitness accounts preserved stating clearly and factually that the disciples claims were blatantly false? I have discovered none. Have you heard of any legitimate documents of the early first century or copies thereof stating such a thing?

If not, perhaps this is because the Jews, though willing to hire false witnesses against Jesus, could not bring themselves to actually state a lie in voice or writing for fear of being accused by their Jewish Christian brothers (according to the flesh) or other Jews who were not believers, of violating the commandment regarding false witnesses thus putting themselves in jeopardy. The legal penalty for being a false witness could be as extreme as death, but certainly removal from position and ostracized by the community. Further, if the claim was put forth that the disciples were lying, then

the burden would be upon those making such a statement to provide evidence underscoring the truth of the accusation. But neither is the statement nor the evidence in existence. Investigation of a false accusation would, perhaps, not only bring the matter to even wider public attention and perhaps even persuade more to believe the disciples message. So it apparently was left alone. Why?

But if what the disciples claimed was untrue, then why didn't someone with credentials say so? And, if the church quashed such documents, why isn't there complaint or report of this? Where are the nay Sayers? Isn't it odd that there is the continual haranguing regarding the resurrection but stumbling about when it comes to accusation the disciples and Paul were lying. The claims that the disciples preached an untrue gospel exist in arguments against the resurrection today, but they are very weak and can't stand up under scrutiny. But more importantly, where were these claims during the period of the early evangelism when they would carry maximum weight?

Along this same line, if Jesus was never crucified or never rose from the dead, the consequences of this would be astounding in that none of us would be believers today. The influence of early Gospel truth has captivated millions over thousands of years. The influence of true evidence and testimony confuting the disciple's claim would have a similar effect (Note: Bar-Kochba's attempt at Messianic overthrow of Rome. Do we have a Bar-Kochba church full of worshippers today?). Further, we haven't needed the sword to force people into sheep-like submission to a religion as has Islam, for example, and, when we have used the sword it has backfired. Neither Constantine nor the Crusades bring credit to the church founded on Jesus - quite the contrary, the crusades discredit Christianity as nothing else ever has. Yet Christianity thrives. The Gospel (or the Holy Spirit) has never need the help of weapons to motivate people to believe. If anything, a combination of the sword and a false religion would never have convinced people of our national stock to believe, not here, not in Europe, not with the mentality we inherit from the Greeks, Celts, Nordics and Goths which is unlikely to submit to so much sentimental prattle-unless it were true on its own merits!

Again, if Jesus never was crucified or raised from the dead, how much investigation would it have taken to find this out? With the resources in place in that day, no method was spared to get Jesus tried and arrested, including paying an informant. And yet, the very best the Jews could muster did not convince Pilate of His guilt, a governor who was desperate to prevent another uprising. Did Pilate hear of the incredible news a few days later? Probably so. Why then didn't he launch a complete investigation himself and arrest disciples for interrogation? His seat was on the line. It wouldn't have taken C.S.I. or the F.B.I. to prove the falsehood of the claim. Someone or something would have cracked easily, and the case of the disciple's foolish claim solved quite easily I'm sure - especially if it were false. Didn't the disciples and early believers all see the consequences of resisting when they saw what happened to Jesus? There were probably more than a few that would have taken another thirty silver coins to lie. Please! It was just too phenomenal. I can remember as a youth that all a bully had to do was put me in a hammerlock and force it until I cried "uncle". I cried it out, even though I didn't want to. And look at Peter. He denied Christ at just the thought of discovery. So what provoked Peter and the rest to remain staunchly faithful to their story to the point of severe torture and sure death?

Silence, so much silence!! It is a huge silence! It is unnatural considering the temperament of the times.

Further, even if such a single document or testimony were found, how much validity would it have? For example, if someone witnessed such a thing and it was true, he or she would be rushing about to share this discovery. Multitudes would be in on it and the hoax discovered! The disciples and their message would have been the laughing stock of the world, a humiliation and embarrassment of the



highest magnitude (I Corinthians 15:15-19). But, in light of a discovered hoax, how does one explain the growth of the church? Liars in religious positions are hardly respected let alone believed to be the Son of God! (Admitting that there are folks that will believe just about anything if they see a personal advantage in doing so) Still, the fact that the church grew and still exists is testimony in itself of the actual truth since the evidence contrary to the resurrection is non-existent. Bring on the doubters and the nay sayers. We can handle all of this. But bring on a consistent and proven testimony of authentic and reliable first century witnesses against the truth and we may well be done. But they don't exist. The silence is deafening.

A final note on the - on again, off again - debate on who is responsible for Jesus' torture and death. It wasn't the Jews, it wasn't the Romans, it wasn't our sin or even me. I am not the causation for my own salvation! As I read my Bible, it says, "For God so loved the world that He gave..."

Thank you for looking over this brief document. If these are not fresh thoughts then my apologies for taking your time. On the other hand, if they are, I hope they add to the arsenal!! They are a part of a study I use to help Christians to know why we believe what we believe (so many have no idea) and to persuade non-believers to focus on Christ as the Way, Truth and Life. -Robert Stewart

## **SUMMARY**

To refute the resurrection of Christ from the dead, it is necessary to deal with three elements of the gospel record stated as facts by the writers. First, it is true and factual that Jesus actually lived in history. Second, Jesus' contemporaries and followers wrote the accounts. Third, the facts reported by the writers about Jesus' life are assumed to be true and historical. None of these factors is seriously questioned by critics. So, the four seminal considerations,

- 1) The empty tomb.
- 2) The proclamation of the resurrection of Christ from the dead by the witnesses
- 3) The behavior of the disciples and of Saul of Tarsus.
- 4) The motive behind why all this was written about and why these historical events occurred if indeed none of it is true.

If the resurrection did not occur, each of these elements must be explained. But we've seen more questions are raised, for example the most mysterious, "Then what actually caused these things to be written?" "How can the fervor of the early disciples, followers and believers be explained?"

This excursus is not exhaustive, but has attempted to deal with these elements in a brief way.

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By Frank Morrison

**The Testimony of The Four Evangelists**

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**Observations On The Resurrection**

By Gilbert West

**I Believe In The Resurrection**

By George E. Ladd

**CONCLUSION**

After careful study, the sincere seeker for truth must make a decision and must recognize in his or her own heart the reason for the decision. If one decides to act in faith in these presentations of truth, then the next step is to simply come to God in prayer asking for the evidence to become real in their own lives in the person of the Living Savior, Jesus Christ.

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