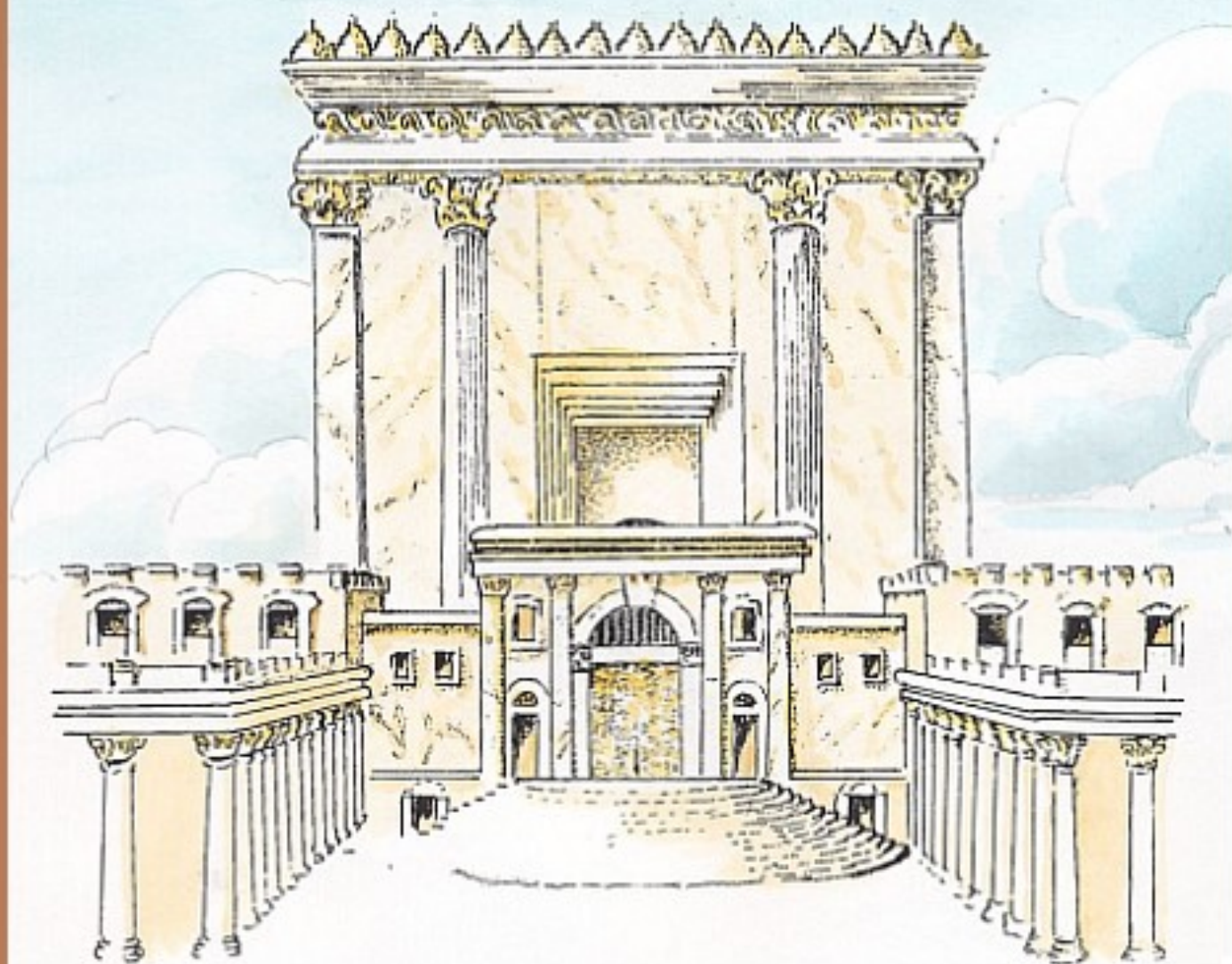


THE NEW TESTAMENT BIBLE STORY

VOLUME 1



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**THE GOSPELS AND
THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST
(PART 1)**

Keith Hunt

PREFACE

I would like to give much thanks and appreciation to Roger Waite for the work of reading, correcting spelling, grammar, and the final editing of this manuscript. I would also like to thank Muriel Crawford for her part in the illustrating this New Testament Bible Story.

Especially, of course, I give praise and thanks to the heavenly Father for answering my prayers for help and guidance. As a human being I realize this work may not be without errors. If errors can be proved, may they be found and corrected by those who come after me.

The main desire of this work is to lead people to Jesus as personal Savior, to make the Gospels a very readable story for children and youths as well as adults, and to bring out the fact that Jesus was BOTH human and divine, Immanuel, God in the flesh, and the sinless Savior, the perfect sacrifice to save all who will come to the Eternal God through Him.

Truly it is written: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16, KJV)

This work is dedicated to all the children and youths who may read this story, and all the children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere.

Keith Hunt

FROM THE EDITOR:

A favourite book series amongst young people in the Worldwide Church of God in my teen years was a 6 volume series called “The Bible Story” written and illustrated for children by the late Basil Wolverton. This Bible series for children brought the Bible alive for many children.

The 6 volume series covered the Old Testament except for the prophetic and wisdom books (http://www.herbert-w-armstrong.com/bible_story.html).

A New Testament Bible Story series was began around 1990 but did not get very far before the Good News magazine was cancelled.

Following that there was great turmoil as the new leadership of the Worldwide Church of God, following the death of Herbert Armstrong in 1986, rejected those key doctrines that clearly distinguished the church from mainstream Christianity.

This led to a breakup of the church with many new groups forming who still felt convicted that those key doctrines that differentiated the Church of God from mainstream Christianity were the true doctrines taught by the Bible. I was amongst those and currently attend the United Church of God in Brisbane, Australia.

Our author, Keith Hunt, attended an earlier split-off group during the 1970’s before Herbert Armstrong’s death until circumstances led him away from that group and he currently pastors as an independent minister in western Canada.

This New Testament Bible Story has its genesis in my lamenting the fact that the old Bible Story series never got as far as the New Testament. I was discussing this with my late friend, Richard Nickels, who used to publish a newsletter entitled “Giving and Sharing”. As I was backed up with a series of other projects and felt that trying to do it myself would be too time consuming, I ended up placing an ad in Richard’s newsletter calling for a volunteer writer and artist.

I was delighted with Keith Hunt’s capability and eagerness to take on the project and that he has done such a magnificent job with what he has written. He has done a wonderful job following on from Basil Wolverton’s past legacy with this New Testament Bible Story which we hope will make the New Testament come alive for children as well as those young at heart!

I have added editorial notes where I have wanted to further expand on some key points as well as offer an alternate point of view where I occasionally have a differing point of view.

One of the projects that I created at the time that Keith was writing this New Testament Bible Story was a 12 lesson Young Adults Bible Study which covers the major doctrines of the Bible (www.rogerswebsite.com/CD.htm) and is available on my website. It can also be ordered on disc. Keith also has many informative articles available on his own website (www.keithhunt.com) which he makes reference to in many of his comments.

Currently another volunteer, also from Canada, Muriel Crawford, has done a number of the early illustrations. I have filled the rest of this series with other illustrations that

I have searched for on the internet. These illustrations will be phased out over time as Muriel and possibly other volunteers create others which will replace these.

Once we have replaced all the images in this online version with illustrations we have ownership to I have a couple of organisations in mind to approach to fund a hard copy print run of this series and make it more widely available not just within the greater Church of God but also to a much wider audience by offering it at cost price on amazon.com.

I asked Keith to give an overview of each of the New Testament epistles and slot them in chronologically (as when they were written) into the Book of Acts before covering the Book of Revelation. He has covered all the New Testament epistles in much detail.

I have since changed that order to the original order of the New Testament canon which differs from the order of the New Testament in most Bibles. In the original New Testament canon the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude follow the Book of Acts and then comes the epistles of Paul starting with those written to whole churches and finishing with the pastoral epistles written to individuals such as Timothy and Titus. Following that, of course, is the Book of Revelation.

The writers of the general epistles had seniority over Paul within the early church and that was one reason for their epistles being included first.

The second reason that motivated my change of order with this New Testament Bible Story was that the general epistles cover fundamental themes such as faith (James), hope (Peter), love (John) and truth (Jude) before Paul covers more complex subjects finishing with how ministers are to run the church in his pastoral epistles such as those to Timothy and Titus.

Putting this New Testament Bible Story in that same order with its gradual rise from the simpler to more complex subjects made perfect sense for this series aimed at teaching children the wonderful truths of God's Holy Bible.

Volume 1 covers the story of Jesus ministry in the Gospels up till His last Feast of Tabernacles.

Volume 2 covers Jesus ministry in the Gospels in His last 6 months and after His resurrection.

Volume 3 covers the Book of Acts and the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude covering the fundamental themes such as faith (James), hope (Peter), love (John) and truth (Jude).

Volume 4 covers the epistles of Paul written to whole churches.

Volume 5 covers the pastoral epistles of Paul and the Book of Revelation.

We truly hope that this New Testament Bible Story makes the Bible come alive to you and that you enjoy it and learn much about the wonderful truths of the Bible through it!

Roger Waite

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CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

There was approximately 400 years between the last writings of the Old Testament and the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. The following overview I will give here is in part taken from a writing by Leon J. Davis in 1960.

The great Persian Empire was used by God to restore the chastened Jews to their home land and to help them re-establish their old way of life. The Jews were ruled by high priests, who acted under the Syrian governors who had annexed Palestine. These priests were both spiritual and civil heads of state. An assembly of leaders, called the Sanhedrin, advised the priests and checked his power.

In religious life, scribes replaced the prophets to guard and recopy the sacred Scriptures. It was while in captivity that the Jews started to assemble in small groups throughout the land on the Sabbath day, in order to keep alive their religious worship towards God. This was the start of the popular synagogue gathering custom that was firmly established as a part of the religious practice by the time of the birth of John the baptist and Jesus.

The Persian Empire under which the Jews were granted favor to re-establish themselves in the land of promise, reached the height of her power in about 500 B.C., but in time of her fifth emperor, Nehemiah's Artaxerxes I, she weakened. The seat of power gradually changed from Asia to Europe, and Greece became the world power.

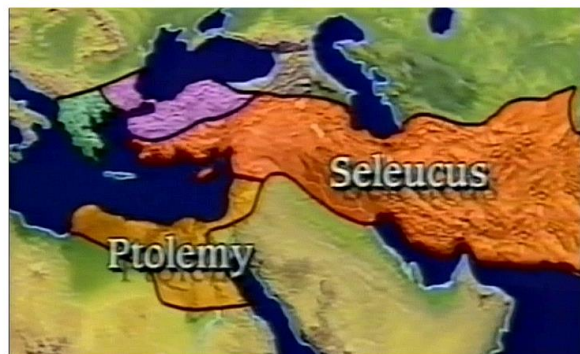
In 334 B.C. Alexander the Great defeated the Persians. afterwards, he took possession of northern Africa and went on to conquer Jerusalem. He treated the Jews well and encouraged them to settle in new cities, particularly Alexandria, Egypt.

In 301 B.C., after Alexander's death and a time of civil strife, four generals began to divide the empire.

Greek Empire Divided Up Between Alexander's 4 Generals

KING OF THE NORTH - SELEUCIDS - BASED IN SYRIA

KING OF THE SOUTH - PTOLEMIES - BASED IN EGYPT



Palestine went to a man named Ptolemy from Egypt, as did Libya and Arabia. Another one of the four generals was Seleucus, who obtained Syria and the Asian countries not given to Ptolemy. Hence, Selucid kings were kings from Asia, and Ptolemy kings were from Africa.

The Palestinian Jews had their own priests as they had under Persian domination, but now they had to pay tribute to the Egyptian government. Ptolemy had brought many thousands of Jews from Palestine to Egypt and gave them religious freedom and full citizenship rights. Greek culture prevailed there and Jews found it difficult to maintain their separation.

In about 280 B.C. a group of Jewish scholars began to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, the common language of the day, for the Jews in Alexandria and other places were now speaking Greek. Seventy-two men did the translating; it was to many a holy and supernatural event; each translation produced the same words and phrases, which was seen by many to be a miracle from God's guiding hand. It took 150 years to complete the entire Old Testament and is called the Septuagint Version today (translation of the seventy).

During these centuries from the return of the Jews to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah and the Ptolemy kings there arose two distinct religious parties among the Jews. They were the Sadducees, who mainly came from the higher class intellectuals and sophisticated members of the Jewish people. Some claimed they were descendants of the priests of Moses' time. The Sadducees did for most of the time, right down to the days of Christ, govern the physical aspects of the Temple in Jerusalem.

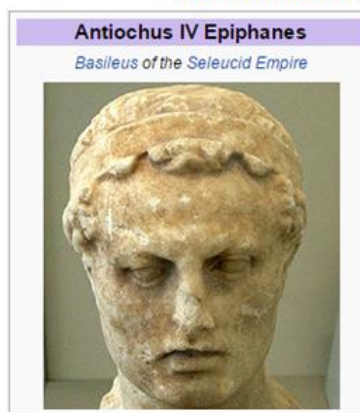
The other part of religious leaders were called the Pharisees. They were religious leaders from mainly the common people. They were very orthodox and as time went on they added hundreds of laws to the basic laws of the Old Testament. By the time of Christ they taught that it was unholy and sin to break even all these hundreds of added laws. It was these religious leaders that governed the Sabbath services in the local synagogues throughout the land of Palestine.

The famous Jerusalem Sanhedrin (a governing body of men that set the announcement of the new month day, as well as other religious and non-religious matters for the Jews), by the time of Christ consisted of men from both the Sadducean and Pharisean parts, as well as elders (men who had gained local respect as older wise men of the community) from the Jewish population.

In 204 B.C. the last strong Ptolemy ruler died and their rival, the Selucid kings began to control Palestine. It was Antiochus the Great who took Palestine from a weak king of Egypt. His son, Antiochus I, wanted to make a great empire for himself. His goal was to destroy the Jewish religion and its teaching that they had the One true God and His true religion.

Abomination of Desolation

In Palestine he replaced spiritual priests with unspiritual ones; he outlawed Judaism, desecrated the temple, abolished worship of the Jewish God, and set up pagan worship with its sacrilege and immorality. Further, in 168 B.C. he forced the Jews to sacrifice on heathen altars to heathen gods.



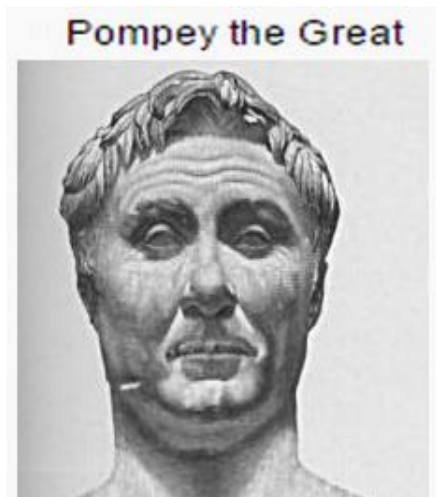
Antiochus IV erected an altar of the god Zeus (Greek) in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig upon it.

The Jews eventually rose up and prepared to oppose the decrees of this king. Mattathias, an aged priest objected and killed a Syrian officer. His son, Judas Maccabeus, became the Jewish military leader and organized people to oppose and fight what they considered an evil and satanic government.

Thousands of Jews were killed in the ensuing conflict, including Judas himself. His two brothers, Jonathan and Simon led the fight to bring political and religious independence and freedom back to the Jews.

The Jews began to make alliance with Rome at this time, to help guarantee its independence. By December 25, 164 B.C., the Jews had cleansed and re-dedicated the Temple.

Civil war broke out in Palestine led by two opposing brothers. One brother, Aristobolus, who was in power in Jerusalem, was planning to lead a revolt against Rome. Pompey, a great Roman military leader, quickly besieged Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and took it over; 12,000 Jews were killed. Pompey made the other brother, Hyracanus, the governor of Palestine and required him to pay annual tribute or taxes, a certain amount of money to him each year.



A man named Herod reigned from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C. over Jerusalem and Palestine. It was this man that was responsible for the orders to kill the Bethlehem children, as he wanted Jesus the baby to die. All this and the reason why we shall see later as we go through the birth of Jesus Christ. In 20 B.C. this man Herod began to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, partly to please the Jews and partly for his own glory.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

I would like to add to what Keith has presented here with some additional historical background which comes from a presentation that I gave to our young adults at a Bible Study in my own church area (United Church of God, Brisbane):

The Jewish family of the Maccabees (also known as the Hasmoneans) liberated Israel from the Greeks in 164 BC. The Jewish festival of Hannukah (also known as the Feast of Dedication or Feast of Lights) comes from this time when the Temple was cleansed and rededicated following its defilement. Hannukah occurs in late December.

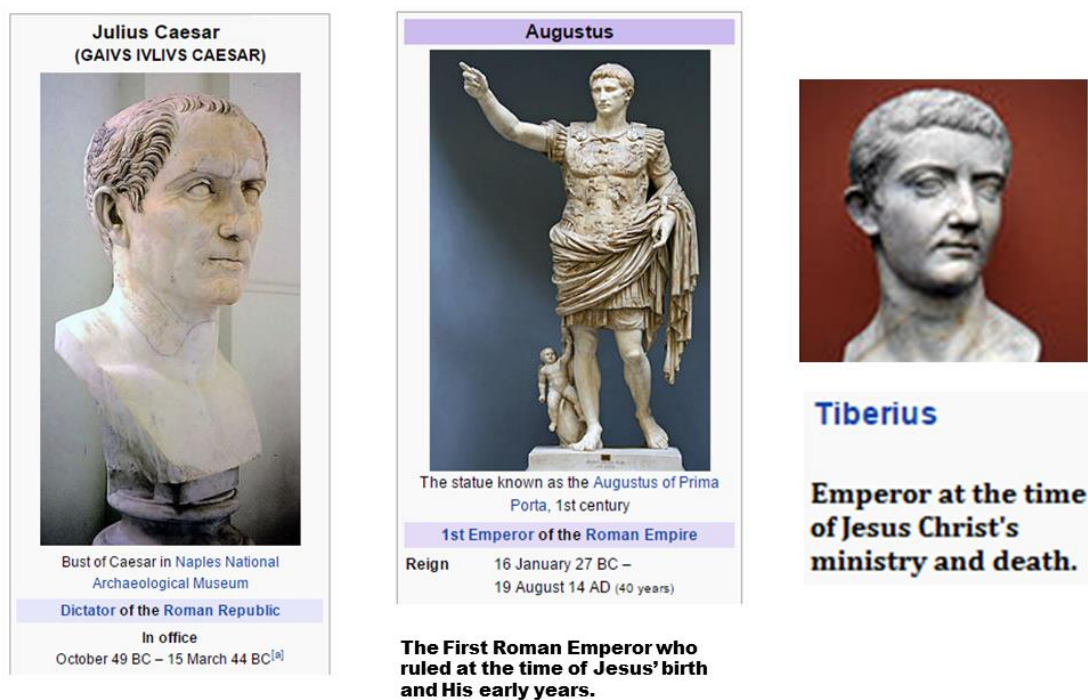
One miracle alleged to have occurred at this time is where the Jews only had enough oil for the Temple lights for one day but the lights miraculously stayed on for 8 days when they finally had some new undefiled oil.

There is evidence to indicate that the Maccabees rebuilt the Temple stone by stone interpreting the defilement as similar to the Old Testament statute about mould rendering a house no longer livable and needing to be pulled down and rebuilt.

What you have to appreciate in the New Testament is the recentness of the independence that the Jews enjoyed for almost 100 years under the Maccabees. This fed their strong desire for independence in the time of Jesus.

Following the Roman conquest of the Holy Land Rome conquered Egypt in 31 BC. Cleopatra was Egypt's last ruler.

The Roman republic, which was ruled by the Roman Senate, was severely destabilized in a series of civil wars and political conflict, during which Julius Caesar, who conquered much of France, was appointed as perpetual dictator and then assassinated in 44 BC. Civil wars and executions continued, culminating in the victory of Octavian, Caesar's adopted son, over Mark Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC and the annexation of Egypt.



After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC a comet appeared in the sky for seven days and witnesses came forth saying we saw Julius ascending to heaven to sit at the right hand of Zeus (or Jupiter as he was called by the Romans) and that Julius is a god and Augustus Caesar is the son of a god. From that time on witnesses came forward publicly after the death of an emperor saying we saw his ascension and his son therefore is a divine ruler. In a sense this was a counterfeit of Jesus' ascension to sit at the Father's right hand as witnessed by His disciples.

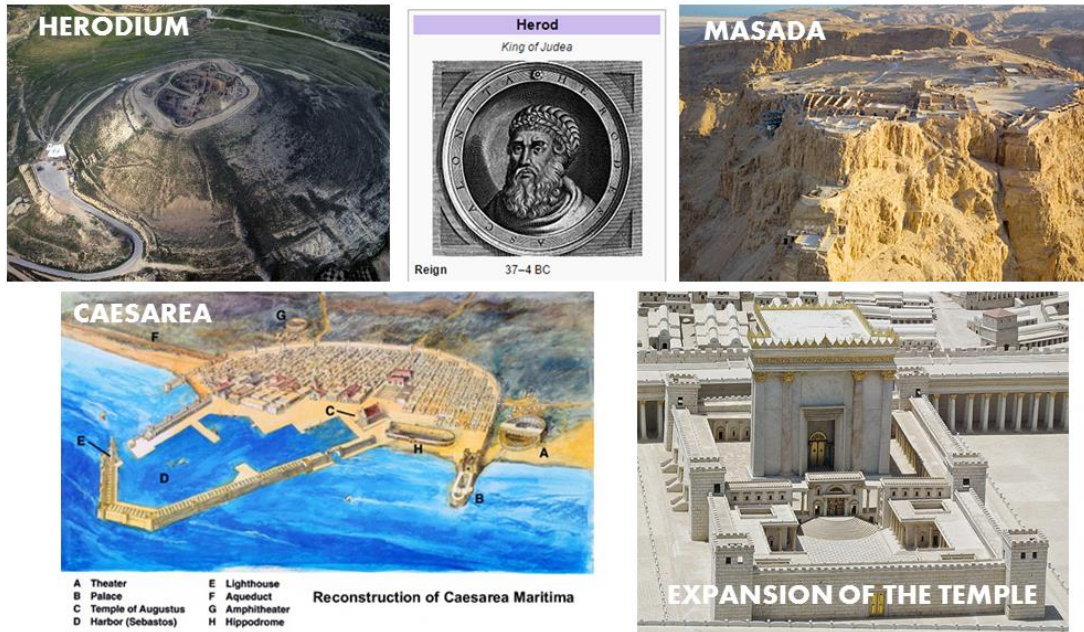
Octavian's power was complete by 27 BC and the Roman Senate formally granted him the new title Augustus. His other title of Caesar has also been carried on through the titles of the Russian tsar and German kaiser. Augustus Caesar was the first Roman emperor and ruled for 40 years from 27 BC to 14 AD.

Jesus was born during his reign. His successor was his son Tiberius who was Roman emperor at the time of Christ's ministry and death. Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas built and named the city of Tiberias on the SW shore of the Sea of Galilee after the Roman emperor Tiberius.

After Rome took over Judea in 63 BC Pompey's Judean representative, Hyrcanus, was succeeded by his courtier Antipater the Idumaean as the first Roman Procurator over Judea. Antipater was the father of Herod the Great who was an Idumaean, a descendant of Edom, who have been traditional enemies of the Jews.

Herod the Great ruled from 37 BC to 4 BC. The reason that the first Herod was called “the Great” probably has a lot to do with his building accomplishments. Herod had some very talented builders working for him.

Herod the Great's Building Achievements



Some of his great building achievements include the Herodium, a mountain fort with a great palace on top not far from Bethlehem, his palace with 3 tiers with great pools with mountain views on the top of Masada, his great maritime port and palace out in the Mediterranean Sea at Caesarea which included a Roman theatre and hippodrome for chariot racing and a great water aquaduct he had built for bringing in fresh water. Herod also enlarged the Temple in Jerusalem.

Under the great stone platform built in Herod's time where the Dome of the Rock stands and close to the Wailing Wall is one raised stone about 15 metres long and 3 metres high that weighs 520 tonnes that engineers even today would struggle to lift with the world's largest cranes.

Herod the Great died in 4 BC. His will divided his kingdom up between his three sons. Herod Antipas was given the area around Galilee and also Perea on the east side of the Jordan River. Herod Archelaus was given the area of Judea surrounding Jerusalem and Herod Philip was given the land to east of the Galilee.


All three sons contested the will and sailed to Rome. A delegation of Jews also went to Rome to convince Caesar not to allow Herod Archelaus to rule over Judea. The Roman emperor Augustus Caesar honoured the will of Herod the Great and the kingdom was split three ways as per the will.


When Herod Archelaus returned he brutally killed the Jews that protested his rule along with their families. In the parable of the pounds (or minas) Jesus drew on this story of Herod's family when he said:

"Therefore He said, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive a kingdom for himself, and to return. And He called his ten servants and delivered ten minas, and said to them, 'Trade until I come back'. **But his citizens hated him. And they sent a message after him, saying, 'We will not have this one to reign over us' ...**

"But those who are my enemies, who did not desire that I should reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me" (Luke 19:12-14, 27).

Rulers of the Holy Land during the Life of Jesus Christ

Judean Governors			Herod Antipas	Herod Philip
			<i>Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea</i>	
			Reign 6 AD – 39 AD	Reign 6 AD – 34 AD
Name	Reign	Category		
Herod Archelaus	4 BC–6 AD	King of Judaea		
Coponius	6–9	Roman Prefect		
Marcus Ambivulus	9–12	Roman Prefect		
Annius Rufus	12–15	Roman Prefect		
Valerius Gratus	15–26	Roman Prefect		
Pontius Pilate	26–36	Roman Prefect		



Limestone block discovered in 1961 with Pilate's tribute in Latin to Tiberius. The words [...]TIVS PILATVS[...] can be clearly seen on the second line.

Herod's son Herod Archelaus killed the Jews that protested his taking over Judea after his father died in 4 BC.

Despite the brutal retaliation by Herod Archelaus, only 10 years later in 6 AD, the Jews appealed to Augustus Caesar again to have Herod Archelaus removed because of how badly he ruled. This time they actually succeeded and Augustus Caesar removed him as ruler over Judea.

Herod's other two sons, though, continued to rule in Galilee and further north but now Rome began to more directly rule Judea in the south of Israel by appointing a Roman Prefect over Judea. The most well-known of these was the 5th Roman Prefect, Pontius Pilate who ruled from 26-36 AD over Judea. An inscription with his name was found at the port of Caesarea north of today's Tel Aviv.

Herod the Great, shortly before his death, tried to kill newborn Jesus following the visit by the Magi. Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt. Once they got word that Herod the Great had died they returned from Egypt apparently wanting to settle in Bethlehem where they had travelled to for the census counting.

In Matthew 2:22 we read that “when he heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea in his father Herod's place, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee.”

After Herod the Great's death his son Herod Antipas took over the area around the Galilee and begun construction of a brand new city to be his administrative capital. This city, which has been recently excavated, was called Sepphoris which is very close to the small town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up. It had a Roman theatre, a colonnaded street, many of the other amenities known to be a part of other Roman cities and probably was home to many thousands of people.

The Greek word for the trade of Jesus' father, Joseph, is “tekton”. This is usually translated as a carpenter which gives the impression that he mostly worked with wood. The Greek word, however, is more accurately translated as a builder. Anyone who has visited the land of Israel knows that the vast majority of ancient buildings in the land were constructed out of stone, not wood. Joseph was more than likely a stonemason though he may have also had some carpentry skills as well.

As Nazareth was a small town around that time and Sepphoris was so close it is likely that Joseph was involved in stone construction in Sepphoris which was being built at the same time and, no doubt, Jesus also visited the city from time to time.

Herod Antipas who ruled the Galilee area and Perea on the east bank of the Jordan was the Herod who had John the Baptist decapitated.

Herod Antipas happened to be visiting Jerusalem at the time that Jesus was crucified. Pilate initially passed the buck of convicting Jesus to Herod Antipas when he found out Jesus was a Galilean which was governed by Herod Antipas.

In the minds of most people Rome ruled the whole civilised world at this time as an unchallenged superpower. The great British historian George Rawlinson wrote:

“...the picture of the world during the Roman period...put before students in ‘Histories of Rome’ was defective, not to say false, in its omission to recognise the real position of **Parthia...as a counterpoise to the power of Rome, a second figure in the picture not much inferior to the first, a rival state dividing with Rome the attention of mankind and the sovereignty of the known earth**” (The Sixth Oriental Monarchy, p.5-7).

The material that I am about to cover comes mostly from Steven Collins' series of books on the Lost Tribes of Israel which I recommend (www.bibleblessings.net/categories/Hebrew-Heritage-Books). Apart from his view that Germany comes from Gad, I feel that his historical views are solid and really add very well to what we teach about the modern identity of the tribes of Israel.

Parthia was a forgotten ancient superpower that was based around the area south of the Caspian Sea where the Assyrians deported the House of Israel several hundred years earlier. Steven Collins provides much historical support to show that the ruling class was descended from the tribes of Israel. While its empire included different ethnic peoples, a great many Israelites and Jews resided in its

empire. The Euphrates formed part of its western border with the Roman empire and Josephus alludes to this when he speaks of where the so-called lost tribes were in the first century. He wrote:

"The ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates till now, and are **an immense multitude**, and not to be estimated by numbers" (Antiquities of the Jews, Book XI, Chapter V, Section 2).



The Parthians took over most of the lands previously controlled by the Seleucid Greeks who were based in Syria. While Parthia was ruled by a dynasty known as the Arsacids there was no custom of the throne being inherited by the oldest son. Any relative of the king could be chosen as the king. The Roman historian Strabo wrote:

“The Council of the Parthians...consists of two groups, one that of the kinsmen, and the other that of [please note this] **the wise men and magi**, from both of which the kings were appointed.”

They even had the power to depose and a replace a king as in the case of Mithridates in 56 BC.

The Roman general Crassus, known for his greed and avarice and for defeating the slave army of Spartacus, invaded a few of the vassal states of Parthia in the Middle East for its gold and treasure including a solid gold beam weighing over 300 kilos from the Temple in Jerusalem. It was offered by the high priest in exchange for him sparing the rest of the Temple’s gold but he broke his oath and took all the gold.

At the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC he lost his life in one of Rome’s greatest ever defeats with seven Roman legions being massacred. Carrhae is also known as Harran, near the Syria-Turkey border where Abraham lived before he moved to the land of Canaan.

Parthia's superior archers on horseback broke the back of the Romans much like Henry V's longbow archers at the famous battle at Agincourt when the English beat the much larger French army. The untrustworthy Crassus had his right hand cut off as well as his head into which molten gold was poured into in front of the Parthian and Armenian kings when they made peace after the battle.

In 40 BC Parthia attacked the Romans and defeated them again conquering Syria and Judea and parts of Turkey. The Jews re-asserted their independence and a Jewish prince Antigonus ruled Palestine as a Parthian satrap for 3 years to 37 BC when Rome counterattacked and reclaimed their lost territories including Judea which Herod the Great then began to rule.

Rawlinson records that the short period of Parthian rule was mild and just and preferred to Roman rule. Like the 100 year period of independence under the Maccabeans this brief period of Parthian rule played a part in the strong desire for Jewish independence from the yoke of the Romans.

After recapturing their lost territories of Syria and Judea the Romans under Mark Antony invaded Parthia in 37 BC with a force 3 times that of Crassus'. The Parthian army wiped out Antony's supply columns and 10 000 Romans. Mark Antony was lucky to escape with his life and as many soldiers as he did as the Roman invasion turned into a complete Parthian victory.

A ceasefire of hostilities between the two great empires followed this second great Roman defeat. In 1 AD when another Roman invasion seemed imminent Parthia and Rome avoided hostilities diplomatically as each army stood on either side of the Euphrates. It was Roman policy at this time not to do anything that would provoke a war with the Parthians who had kicked their behinds twice before.

This background helps to explain certain events in the life of Jesus Christ. We saw in an earlier quote that the wise men of the Parthian nobility and their priesthood were known as Magi and we know from Matthew 2:1 that wise men or magi from the East came to visit Jesus when He was born.

The Parthian ruling family of Arsacids often bore names that derive from Phares, one of the sons of Judah and possibly may have even been related to the royal family of David. The magi enquired of him who was to be born king of the Jews. They had an interest in His royal bloodline and it is possible Jesus could have been considered closely related enough to the Parthian royal line to be a candidate for the Parthian throne given the lengths they went to travel from Parthia into Roman territory.

Herod the Great, known for his cruelty, is surprisingly deferential to the Magi when they enquire of him who was born king of the Jews. This is only understandable in light of the relations at the time between Rome and Parthia and Caesar's policy of not provoking the Parthians.

In Matthew 2:3 it says that "ALL Jerusalem was troubled" when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem. It was a very public affair. Given the treasures they presented to Jesus, which could have been later used to fund His ministry, it is likely that there would have been a huge escort of perhaps a few thousand Parthian soldiers to protect these Parthian nobles and the treasures they brought with them.

Luke 4:16 says of Jesus "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up." From this we have to conclude that he did spend most of his childhood years in Nazareth. This is all that is written of Jesus' life between 12 and 30.

We read in Matthew 13:54-56: "And when He had come into His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so much so that they were astonished and said, From where does this *man* have this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? *Is* not his mother called Mary? And his brothers, James and Joses and Simon and Judas, and his sisters, are they not all with us? Then from where does this *man* have all these things?"

Their quizzical response to Jesus may indicate that after he grew up and entered His 20's that Jesus had been gone from Nazareth for a long time. It seems very surprising in such a small town as Nazareth was that the locals spoke as if they were unaware of either His wisdom or power and so He may have been away for some time.

In Matthew 17:24-27 we read the story of Jesus being pulled up to pay a tax from which, by His reply, He indicates that He didn't have to pay but He paid it anyway through the miracle of the coin in the fish so as not to cause offence.

Some commentators feel that this may have been a stranger tax, which, given He was originally from Nazareth, He was not obligated to pay but since He was away for so long He paid it anyway.

The term honourable counsellor applied for Joseph's uncle, Joseph of Arimathea in Mark 15:43 is translated from the word "Decurio". Raymond Capt notes that "In the Roman world a decurio denoted an important Roman office usually connected with the general management of a mining district."

This gives us a hint as to where Jesus might have travelled during his 20's. Given his royal bloodline and that the Parthians showed much interest in him at His birth He may have visited Parthia where many of the House of Israel were. There is also a significant amount of legendary evidence supporting the view that He travelled to western Britain such as Cornwall where most of Rome's tin came from.

In Matthew 15:24 Jesus said: "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the House of Israel". Now the House of Israel is generally a term that is more often used for the ten tribes rather than to the Jews who descend from only one of the 12 tribes (Judah). In John 10:16 to the Jews Jesus said "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold."

Just as a fun little aside, have you ever been struck by the similarities between Jesus and the fictional hero Superman? Just like Jesus, the story of Superman starts with him as a baby sent away to avoid destruction then jumps to him briefly in his adolescent years while his human father is still alive before jumping again to when he is 30 years old where his human father is no longer alive and then starts to serve humanity in a public way. The story of him being sent away as a baby also mirrors the birth story of Moses. This is not surprising when you understand the creators of the Superman comic were actually a couple of Jewish boys.

We saw before how Rome's policy of not antagonising the Parthians explained Herod's deferential response to the Magi. It also explains the great reluctance by the cruel Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas to convict Jesus. It was like the two rulers were playing pass the parcel in an Irish pub when they tried to pass the buck of being the one to convict Jesus. They were well aware of the interest that the Parthian Magi had showed in Him and desperately avoided being the one to convict Jesus. Pilate's public act of washing his hands was an attempt to avoid personal responsibility of Jesus' death as demanded by the crowd that refused to relent.

There is one more sidenote regarding the connections between Jesus and Parthia. There is a preserved record quoted in Steven Collins' book of a correspondence between a Parthian vassal king called Abgar of the city of Edessa and Jesus. Abgar wrote of hearing the miracles of Jesus and asked him come and cure him of a sickness that he had, even offering him sanctuary in his city.

The reply from Jesus sounds very much in the style of things He says in the gospel of John and Jesus says that he has to complete what He has been given to do before being taken up to the One who sent Him but mentioned he would send one of his disciples to cure him. Thaddaeus, mentioned in Mark 3:18, according to records did go to Edessa and Abgar was healed. Abgar is quoted as saying that he believed in Jesus so strongly that he wanted to take an army and destroy those who crucified Him had he not been prevented by the imperial power of Rome to do so.

It is interesting to note the locations of the visitors to Jerusalem that saw the miracle of the tongues of fire over the disciples on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. **Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia** are at the top of the list. All these were within the Parthian empire at the time.

The original apostles were sent primarily to the House of Israel while Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. Many of them went into the Parthian empire with the gospel. Peter himself went to Babylon (1 Peter 5:13).

James opened his epistle by saying: "James, a servant of God and of *the* Lord Jesus Christ, **to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion**" (James 1:1). Like Josephus, he would have been aware that the descendants of the ten-tribed northern kingdom of Israel taken into captivity by the Assyrians centuries earlier lived mostly in the Parthian empire.

Like the Persians before them the Parthians showed a high degree of religious tolerance. Not so their conquerors, the Sassanid Arabs who conquered Parthia in 226 AD. Gone was the old Parthian custom of religious tolerance. In its place Zoroastrianism was imposed as a state religion.

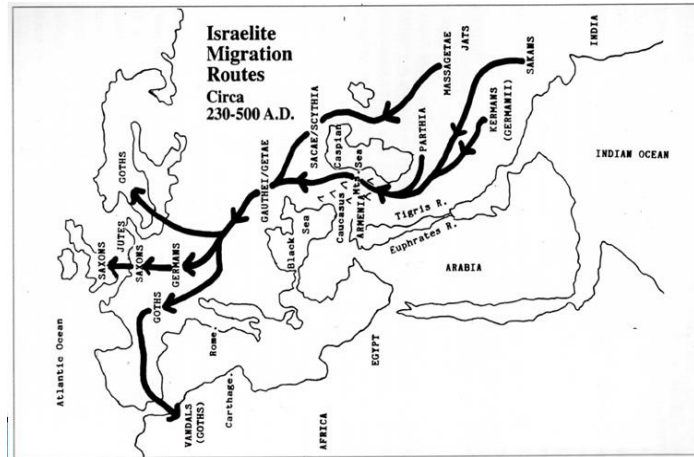
Their religious intolerance, not unlike that seen in the Muslim world today, saw the majority of white peoples still dwelling in the Middle East being driven out. This not only included those descended from the tribes of Israel but Assyrians and Elamites as well.

The term 'Caucasian' is a traditional, historic name commonly applied to the white race. It gets its origin from the major Caucasian migration into Europe mostly via the Caucasian Mountains that occurred after the fall of Parthia.

At this same time a whole host of so-called barbarian tribes pour into central and eastern Europe and into the Roman empire itself and contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire.

Fall of Parthia (226 AD) catalyst for Great Caucasian Migration into Europe

Israelites to North-West Europe
Assyrians to Germany
Elamites to Eastern Europe



The Israelites migrated to north-west Europe and behind them were the Assyrians who migrated to Germany and the Elamites who migrated to eastern Europe.



CHAPTER 2

ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS CHRIST

In the days of Herod, the king of Judea, one of the priests serving in the Temple at Jerusalem was a man called Zacharias and his wife was called Elizabeth. They were both very dedicated to the work of God and were righteous in the eyes of the Lord. They lived and walked in all the commandments of God blameless.

This does not mean they never sinned or made mistakes in their life, for all human beings make mistakes at times. But their attitude of wanting to walk humbly with God and to keep His commandments meant that God forgave them their mistakes, remembered not their mistakes and so were in His eyes blameless.

This priest and his wife had no children, and now as they were getting very old, it certainly looked like they would never have any children. They had given up hope of ever expecting to have any children (Luke 1:5-7). But one day while he was doing his priestly work in the Temple, and the people were praying outside, an angel from the Lord appeared to him. He was very fearful and became troubled as to what this was all about.

The angel said to him, "Fear not Zacharias for your prayer has been heard by God, and your wife Elizabeth shall have a child, a male child, and you shall call him John. You both shall have joy and gladness, and many others will rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the eyes of the Lord. He shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from the time he is within his mother's stomach, before he is born. He shall help bring many of the children of Israel to walk in the ways of God, and shall speak as the prophet Elijah, with the same attitude of mind and power of life. At his preaching many people will be brought together to acknowledge what are the true values of life and family. Those many shall turn to the wisdom of the righteous and so a people will be prepared for the Lord to work with" (Luke 1:13-17).

The promise that this man John would come in the spirit and power of Elijah had been a promise and prophecy from the Lord hundreds of years before. The prophet Malachi (the last book of the Old Testament in most Bibles bears the name of this prophet Malachi) wrote about a man that would come in the likeness of the famous Elijah. Jesus Himself also reaffirmed that John fulfilled this Elijah prophecy in Matthew 17, which we shall come to later.

Zacharias wanted to believe what the angel had said. Oh, how his wife and he had wanted a son, so he really did want to believe the angel, yet Zacharias was a human man and he knew that both he and his wife were very old, and he knew his wife was passed the years of being able to have a child. So he asked the angel how he might know that this miracle would take place.

"I am Gabriel, that stands in the very presence of God," said the angel, "and I have been sent to speak to you this truth and give you this good news. But if you need to have a sign, then this is what it shall be." The angel Gabriel continued to say, "You shall lose your voice and shall not be able to speak until the child is born, because you have doubted that which the Lord has promised to you and your wife" (Luke 1:18-20).

The appearance of the angel to Zacharias took some time, and so his stay inside the Temple was longer than usual, and the people outside knew that he was taking longer to fulfil his priestly duties. They marvelled at how long he was within the Temple. When he did come out they soon realized he could not speak to them, and by the look on his face and by his hand gestures they knew he had seen a miraculous vision of some sort in the Temple.

Zacharias continued to serve his allotted time in the Temple for that season of the year (the many priests took turns of a certain number of days to work in the Temple, what the Bible calls "order of his course" - Luke 1:8), and then returned home to his wife.

It was not long after he returned home that his wife Elizabeth got pregnant, and so was going to have a baby just as the angel from the Lord had announced to Zacharias.

Elizabeth was overjoyed, yet she stayed around home for five months, not telling anyone that she was going to have a child (Luke 1:23-25).

God the Father had promised and prophesied many times in different ages under the Old Testament period that one day He would send a Messiah Savior to earth to not only live a holy sinless life, to show people the perfect ways of the Lord, but also to die for the sins of every person who has ever lived. This Savior would have to be more than just a human person as you and I are, in order to be able to take upon Himself the sins of every person. He would also have to be a God being in the family of God.

It was during the sixth month of Elizabeth carrying the baby John that God the Father would start to fulfil those many Old Testament prophecies concerning the one to come who would be a part of Himself, would be His very own Son, yet born of a physical woman, and in that way this Messiah would be both of the human family and the God family. It would all come about in such a manner that it would be a miracle never done before nor again after.

The angelic messenger Gabriel was sent to a town in the district of Galilee in Palestine, called Nazareth. He was to go to the cousin of Elizabeth, to a young lady called Mary, who was to be married to a man named Joseph. She had never been married, and had never slept with a man, so she was what we call a virgin.

Gabriel came to her and said, "Hello Mary. You are highly favored, and the Lord God is with you. You are very blessed among women."

When Mary saw the angel Gabriel she was troubled and perplexed. She wondered in her mind what these words from Gabriel meant. The angel could see that she was troubled by the words he spoke and went on to explain to her why God had favored her and what the blessing would be that she would receive.

"Fear not and be not upset Mary, for you have truly found favor with God. You shall become pregnant, have a baby growing inside of you, in your womb. The baby shall be a male child, and you shall call him Jesus (meaning Savior, someone who saves others). He shall be great, and shall also be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God shall give unto Him one day the throne of the ancient king David, whom

you are descended from, and shall reign over the people of Jacob [Israel] for ever. And of His Kingdom there shall never be an end."

We have seen from the Bible Story of the Old Testament that Jacob was the father of 12 sons who became, through their descendants, the 12 tribes of Israel. David was later the second and most famous king of Israel. God had promised to him that his throne, his line of children, would always exist. And the most famous and by far the greatest of his line of children would be this promised Messiah Savior, whom today most of the world knows as Jesus Christ.

To this Jesus, God the Father had also promised Him the throne of king David and a Kingdom that would never end. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that confirm these two important promises to be given to Jesus one day. Those two promises were never realized or fulfilled in the physical lifetime of Jesus, but they still stand, yet to be given to Him sometime in the future.

Mary was now even more puzzled at all these words from Gabriel, telling him that she could not understand how this could come about, becoming pregnant with a child, for she was not married and had never slept with any man.

Gabriel answered her, and explained more, "The Holy Spirit, the very nature and power of God shall come upon you, work a miracle in your body, and you shall become pregnant with a holy child. This child shall not be from a physical man but a child from God, so He shall be called the Son of God."

The angel wanted Mary to know that for God there was nothing He could not do, and so went on to say, "Your cousin Elizabeth is very old, passed the years of normally being able to have a child, yet she is also pregnant with a baby, and this is the sixth month of her pregnancy. So you see, with God there is nothing that is impossible for Him to do."

Mary being a godly and faithful woman, now had trust and assurance in her heart that what Gabriel had told her would indeed come to pass, and be fulfilled just as God had said. She was happy and delighted to be the one whom the Lord God had chosen to bear His Son. She told the angel this and Gabriel then departed from her (Luke 1:26-38).

What a blessing indeed this was for Mary. I'm sure she must have been stunned and speechless for a few days, as she meditated and thought about these words from the angel Gabriel.

God the Father would need a woman of outstanding service, loyalty, and spiritual dedication, to be the mother of His Son. Someone who would care and protect and guide His son in every physical and spiritual way. What an honor indeed to be the woman chosen by God to undertake this service and duty.

The honor is even more when we consider the very possible age of Mary when she would become the mother of the Son of the Most High. The Jewish society back then was much different than most of our nations of the western world today.



IIIJC

**MARY REFLECTS ON THE AMAZING THINGS THAT
SHE WAS TOLD BY THE ANGEL GABRIEL**

It was the general practice and custom of the Jews in those days to marry very young. In fact it was looked upon as a family disgrace if the son was not married by age eighteen. And the young girls, or ladies of the family were often only in their middle teenage years when they married. So it is very probable that Mary was not yet out of her teens when Gabriel came to her with the wonderful news that she was the woman chosen by God to bear His son Jesus.

Mary must have truly been a wonderfully serious and dedicated woman in the ways of the Lord, living and loving Him with all of her heart, all of her life, and all of her mind.

Mary Goes To Visit Elizabeth

After the wonderment of all this had finally sunk into the mind of Mary, she was all excited and quickly wanted to visit Elizabeth her cousin. With speed she headed for the hill country of Judea and entered the home of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

As Mary entered the home and called out the usual greetings of those times and culture of Jewish society, the baby John in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy and Elizabeth was filled even more with the Holy Spirit, being inspired to know that Mary was carrying in her womb the very Lord Messiah. With a loud and electrifying voice Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women Mary, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. What an honor to have the mother of my Lord come to visit me, for as soon as your voice was heard in this house, greeting us, the babe in my womb leaped for joy. And what a blessing that you believed what was told you from the Lord God."

In passing we can note here that the reaction of baby John in Elizabeth's womb, to the entering of Mary into the house, and the baby Jesus in her womb, shows that babies not yet born but still inside the mother's stomach, are little persons, who can have feelings and reactions of their own, independent from the mother. They are small living persons not just a kind of nothing mass of bones, blood, and skin, that people can kill and tear out of their body at the pleasure of their own heart and mind, as if it is a bothersome sore or pimple to get rid of.

Mary was also inspired by all this, and burst out in praise to God with these words, "My life does praise the Lord, and my mind does rejoice in God my Savior. For he has looked down upon His handmaid, and all generations will know I am blessed. He that is mighty has done great things in my life and body. He is truly Holy, and His mercy and love is indeed upon them that respectfully fear Him, from generation to generation. He can put down those who are proud and mighty in their own eyes, and exalt and set on high those of humble attitude of mind. Those who are hungry for good righteous things He fills, and those who think they are rich in knowledge He gives none of His truths to. He has been faithful with the promises He gave to Israel, and remembers His mercy that He said He would give to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever."

Here we see some of the mindset attitude of this young lady Mary. An attitude of humbleness and a willingness to be filled with the true ways, the good ways of the Lord God. She was even as a young woman, a fine example of what a servant and child of God should be. And Mary stayed in the home of Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to her own household (Luke 1:39-56).

The Birth And Childhood Of John

At last the nine month period of pregnancy for Elizabeth had come to an end and it was time to bring forth her boy into the world for all to see. All went well in her delivery and many of her neighbors and cousins rejoiced with her, knowing that God had performed great mercy towards her in her old age by giving her and Zacharias a son.

As was the law of God the parents came on the eighth day to circumcise the child. And as was also the common custom of the day, the child was going to be given the name of his father. He was going to be called Zacharias. But his mother protested and said, "No, he is not to be called Zacharias, but he is to be called John."

The people around were taken a back by this, for there was not one in the immediate descent of the family that was called by the name of John, and calling a child by a name that none in the family was called was just not done in those days. The people looked at Zacharias, making signs to him with their hands, for as yet Zacharias could still not speak. They wanted to know what he had to say on this matter of the naming of the child.

Zacharias asked for a writing tablet which was brought to him. He wrote, "His name shall be called John." Everyone just marvelled at this whole thing. It was not the way it was usually done. As soon as Zacharias wrote those words God performed another miracle, as He immediately gave him his voice back, which he used right away to praise God.

You can imagine the scene. Many were there who were there when Zacharias came out of the Temple about nine months earlier not able to speak, and now when Zacharias officially named the baby with the name of John (according as Gabriel the angel had said he was to be named nine months earlier), his voice was restored to him and he could speak once again. A fear of God came upon all that stood there, and what had taken place was told to others all over the hill country of Judea.

People that heard all this began to wonder and think about what this child John would do in his lifetime. They knew something special was to become of this child. Indeed it was to be so, and the hand of the Lord was with John, for the Lord did have a special work for him to perform later in his life.

God inspired Zacharias at that time to speak forth that which was the overall teaching and promises of the Lord by the holy prophets from the Old Testament.

"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has come to visit and to redeem His people, and has raised up salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as was spoken by His holy prophets from old time. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from those who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to us from the time of our ancient fathers, to remember His covenant and the oath which He swore to our father Abraham. To grant us deliverance from our enemies, so we could serve Him without fear. To serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life."

As we read these words spoken by Zacharias we could be puzzled by them somewhat. For, even today, two thousand years later, the Jews are not delivered from their enemies and from those who hate them. Over in the land of Palestine

there is still much trouble, fighting, killing, and hate going on between the Jews, the Arabs, and the Palestinians.

Yes, God had given a promise, a covenant, and swore by an oath to people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the great fathers of the Jews and people of Israel) that one day the children of Israel would be fully and completely delivered from their enemies to serve God in holiness and righteousness, without any fear of being persecuted or killed. Many of the prophets of the Old Testament have so written also. God will in His time bring all those promised to pass. The ancient prophets show that the literal fulfillment of those promises and of what Zacharias was saying, will not take place until Jesus the Messiah comes again in power and glory to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Then the people of Israel will be delivered from the fear of hate and killing that often comes from their enemies.

So how are we then to understand these words of Zacharias in the context of the birth of this man-child John?

We are to understand them in a "spiritual" sense, that the time had come for God to work a wonderful work of salvation in many of the lives of the Jews and people of Israel. Many were to be delivered from all the mental and emotional sorrow of the mind, from the inner fear of the heart. They would find deliverance from sin and guilt, so they could live with peace in their mind, to serve God in holiness and righteousness.

This understanding is clearly what Zacharias wanted to convey to the people there at that time and to us today, as we read the remaining words that he spoke.

"And you child (referring to John) shall be known as the prophet of the Most High; for you shall go before the Lord (Jesus the Messiah) to prepare His ways. To give the knowledge of salvation to His people, the forgiveness of their sins, through the loving mercies of our God. When the day then comes from on high to give light to those who are in darkness and in the shadow of death. To then guide our feet into the way of peace."

Ah yes, the wonderful promised time had arrived when God the Father was about to fulfil the sending of His Son to earth to take upon Himself the sins of the whole world, so His mercy could be given to all those who would be called to receive it. So many in Israel and in all other nations could find the forgiveness of their sins, and be guided into the way of salvation and peace of heart and mind.

In this plan of God, it had been decreed that a human man would go before the coming of the Messiah Savior, to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all who would listen. To prepare the hearts of some for the coming of the Son of God, and the true spiritual deliverance He would bring. This prophet of the Lord God to go before the Messiah Jesus, was to be this child called John.

And so it came about as we have just read. And this child John grew and became strong in his mind for the truths and the ways of the Almighty God. And he lived most of his life in the outdoors and the wilderness, until the day came to go forth to preach and teach the word of God to the people.

CHAPTER 3

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

An Angel Comes To Joseph

Mary was engaged to be married to a man called Joseph, who was descended from the famous king David we can read about in the Old Testament. As we read the account in the Gospel of Matthew chapter one, it also says that Joseph was Mary's "husband" and Mary was his "wife" but also that Mary was engaged to Joseph, which means to us in the western world that she was not yet Joseph's wife, only engaged or promised to him as to be his wife one day. This all seems contradictory and hard to understand. The truth of the matter all comes clear when we understand the laws and customs of marriage in the Jewish society of Joseph's and Mary's day.

The marriage customs of those days in Jewish life were very different from our customs today. When a couple were engaged or promised in marriage to each other, unlike our custom, they were already looked upon as married (even though they had not yet had a wedding day ceremony and they were not living together in the same house or sleeping together in the same bed). Even if the man should die before they came together on the wedding day and started to live together after that day, then the woman was looked upon and even called a "widow."

The engagement of two people back in those days among the Jews was a lawful marriage. If the man for some reason wanted to break the engagement and not have a wedding day and not want to live with the woman, he was obliged to have to give her an official divorce, written on paper.

So, under Jewish law in those times, an engaged couple were also officially and legally looked upon as "husband" and "wife" to each other. It was often many months later that the actual wedding day occurred, which was often not just a day but a week (seven days in length) of celebrations.

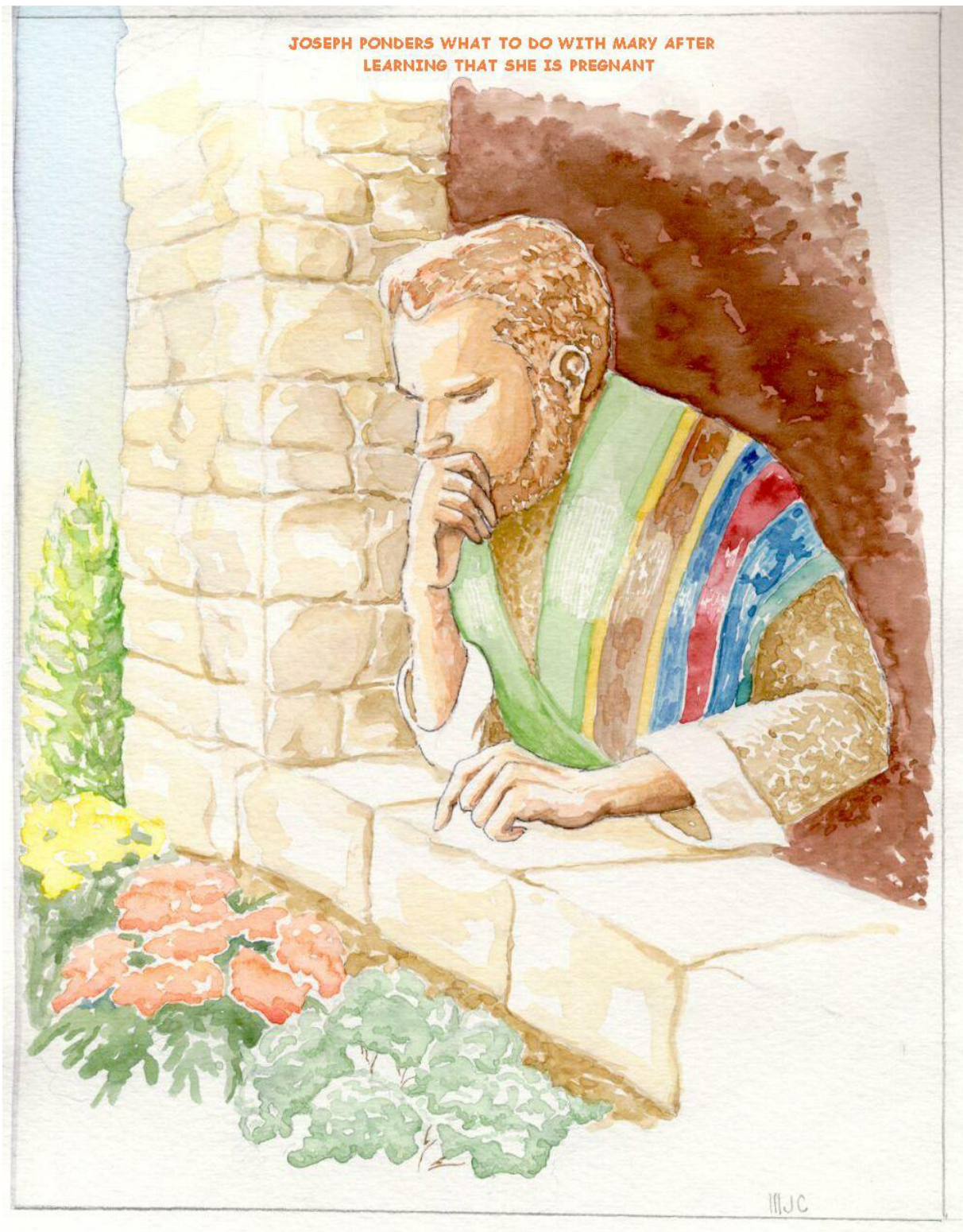
Although they were legally husband and wife during the engagement period, the man and woman did not come together to sleep in the same bed and live in the same house, until the wedding day.

This may all seem very odd to us today, but that was the way couples were married back then in the Jewish society of those days. With that background we can now understand the words of Matthew when he wrote:

".....Mary had been betrothed (or engaged) to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child (pregnant, carrying a baby inside her) of the Holy Spirit (Joseph had no idea it was a miracle from God, but thought Mary had slept with another man, and was pregnant from him). And her husband Joseph, (being kind and merciful) a righteous man, was unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly (Matt. 1:18-19).

It was also within the laws of the Jews that if a woman was unfaithful to her husband, she could be publicly announced as breaking the 7th of the great Ten Commandments of the Lord, as found in Exodus 20.

Under the Old Covenant such a woman could be put to death by stoning. All of that would certainly have "put her to shame."



It was also a point of the old laws of Moses under the Old Testament, to be merciful at times. Many forgot that part of the writings of the Old Testament, but Joseph being a righteous and just man, a man who knew all the teachings of the Old Testament, had not forgotten those laws and precepts of showing kindness and mercy, and was determined to act with mercy towards Mary. He would divorce her with no public declaration and humiliating commotion or hullabaloo, but in a quiet and private way.

As Joseph was thinking Mary was pregnant from another man, and considering he would then divorce her, an angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said:

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife and have your wedding day and live with her, for that which is conceived in her womb is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus (meaning, to save) for He will save many of His people from their sins. All this is in fulfillment of what God has spoken through the prophets of old: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Immanuel (which means, God with us) ' (Matthew 1:20-23). This prophecy is found in the book of Isaiah, chapter seven and verse fourteen.

Joseph woke from his dream and knew that the Lord God had spoken the truth to him about the situation with Mary and her being with child, not from another human man but from God Himself. So with faith and confidence he did as the angel commanded and went ahead with the planned wedding day and living with Mary his wife. But until after the baby Jesus was born he did not sleep with Mary nor have sexual relations with her (Matt.1:24,25).

Jesus Is Born At Bethlehem

In those days when Mary was carrying the baby Jesus, the Jews were under the domain and governing authority of the mighty Roman Empire and the great Caesar Augustus. He was the Emperor or what today might be called the President (if living in such a country as the United States of America). His first name was Octavianus. He was nephew of the very famous Julius Caesar of Roman Empire history. He obtained the rulership of the Empire after Julius' death. He took the name Augustus (meaning honorable or mighty) as a compliment to his own greatness in his eyes. And it is from him that we get our month in the Roman calendar called August, which before him was called Sextilis. He thought he was so great that a month in the Roman calendar should be named after himself.

During the months Mary was pregnant, Caesar Augustus sent forth a commandment that all the Jews in Palestine should be enrolled. In some old translations of the English language of the New Testament, it is given as a commandment to be "taxed." To us today we think of "tax" as money given by the people of a nation to the government of that nation, so that government can use it to do certain things with, such as running the public school systems or paying the wages for the police or firemen. But in the original language of Greek that the New Testament was written in, that is not the meaning.

It means rather, to "enroll" or to take a list of the citizens with their employment, the amount of their property, etc., equivalent or the same as to what we mean today by taking a "census" which most nations do from time to time. As most adults know, in a "census taking" the nation will often ask many questions, some get so personal that many people are offended by it all, and think the government is getting too nosey in people's lives and business affairs.

Well, whatever else this enrollment was all about, Caesar Augustus demanded the male heads of households go to their original home city of their family tree line. Joseph then had to travel to Bethlehem, near Jerusalem, because he was from the family line of king David, who was from Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16).

In talking about this enrollment, Luke, the author of the Gospel that bears his name, uses a phrase that we need to always keep and understand within its context. He says, "Caesar Augustus decreed that 'the whole world' should be enrolled."

The clear fact is, as proven from historical sources, that of course people living in China, North or South America, people on the African continent, or in India, as well as many other parts of the whole earth at the time, did not come to Palestine, to be "enrolled."

This was a decree and commandment for the Jews of Palestine only. Such a phrase as used by Luke, in a specific context use, really means "all the people of the land." The land being that of Palestine, or the Jews within the lands of the Roman empire. So all the male heads of household went to the town of their family descent to be counted and enrolled (Luke 2:1-4).



As we continue to read in the account by Luke, we see that Joseph took Mary with him from Nazareth in the area of Galilee, to Bethlehem near Jerusalem, not a short distance. Mary was in her ninth month of pregnancy, very close to giving birth to the child Jesus. There were no quick ways to travel in those days. No airplanes, no buses, or trains, or cars. Travel in those times on land, for people such as Joseph and Mary was either by foot or on donkey. Mary did not need to go with Joseph to be enrolled under Augustus' command. So why then did Joseph take Mary all that way to Bethlehem?

The answer probably lies, as many have seen, in two main areas. Firstly, the Jews came to Jerusalem to keep the Feasts of the Lord, and, second, there was the will of God and the prophecies that God had given in the Old Testament prophets about where the child Jesus would be born, in the town of Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2).

Going back to the first reason mentioned (Jewish religious festival practices), many Bible scholars and those who study Bible chronology (putting events into time frames of the year or years all events were within) have seen that Jesus was not born on

December the twenty-fifth or even in the month of December. They have come to see that Jesus was born around the great Jewish feast of Tabernacles.

They have come to see that it was certainly during the fall Festival days of the seventh month on the Jewish calendar (from about the time of the Feast of Trumpets to the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, see Leviticus 23) that Jesus was most likely born in Bethlehem. This would correspond to our September / October months on our Roman calendar we use in most of the western Christian world.

This being the case, as most Bible scholars now admit, then it becomes clearer as to why Mary also went with Joseph to Bethlehem near Jerusalem for this enrollment. Bethlehem was less than a days walking distance from Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary would also observe the great fall Festivals on the Jewish calendar at the same time as Joseph would enroll in Bethlehem as decreed by Caesar Augustus.

It was a long tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem for both Joseph and Mary, but especially for Mary, yet they knew this was God's child Mary was carrying, and they had faith the Lord would protect and give them strength in this undertaking. Joseph was wanting to give Mary a nice restful room and bed in the local inn or hotel as we would call it today, with a soothing hot bath and some good food prepared and cooked by the hotel staff. But, as it was the fall festival time, Jerusalem and the surrounding towns were overflowing with people from all parts of Palestine and even various far away places of the Roman empire where many Jews had settled, and who travelled to Jerusalem to observe the Feasts of the Lord.

There was no room for them in any of the Inns in Bethlehem. Desperate for any reasonable warm and dry place for Mary to rest, Joseph asked if there was anyone who could offer any place for them to stay.

"I'm sorry I have no room for you in my home," said one man, "My house is just jam packed with relatives, but.....well I'm kind of embarrassed to say it.....I do have a stable. I know a stable is a pretty poor substitute for a room in an Inn or home, especially when your wife is close to giving birth, yet, it is warm and dry. You are welcome to bed down there, if you cannot find a room in a house somewhere."

"Thank you kindly," replied Joseph, "yes, we will take your offer as it seems there is no room anywhere in any Inn or home in Bethlehem. And my wife needs to lie down and rest even if it is on a bed of straw. The warmth and dryness will be appreciated." So with smiles and thankful hearts Joseph and Mary made their way to the strangers stable of hospitality.

And while they were there the time came for Mary to give birth to the baby Jesus. This would be Mary's firstborn son as Luke recorded, for she and Joseph did have more children later on as they lived a normal life as husband and wife.

Among the lowly stable animals, no relatives or friends of Joseph and Mary being there with them, the Son of God came into this world as a human being. It was no fancy home, or large richly decorated and furnished palace that Jesus was born in and breathed His first breath of air. It was in an animal stable where He was born, maybe dry and warm but an animal stable nevertheless.

The Son of God, the King of kings, the one to rule and govern this whole earth one day, was born in a straw laden stable among a bunch of animals. Now that is a

lesson in humbleness if there ever was one. And that is taking greatness and still being down to earth with it. Greatness does not have to be surrounded with pomp and material splendor. Greatness is what you are with God and how you serve Him and your fellow mankind. And as we shall see the baby Jesus grew up to be the greatest of any human in both of those areas of life, setting us the perfect example.

There was no splendid hospital bed or crib for God's Son. Mary took Him and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, a blanket or whatever cloths she and Joseph had brought with them from Nazareth. And laid Him in a manger, the part of the stable where the hay and other foods for horses and donkeys are put for them to eat from.

But the God of heaven was not about to let the birth of His Son go completely without notice and praise from at least a few. Oh, it was not going to be announced on worldwide TV or make headlines in every newspaper in all nations of the world. He was not going to send millions of angels flying around the earth to announce the birth of His Son to all peoples on earth, which He could have done. Yet He would send an angel to let a few people know about this miracle birth.

An Angel Sent To Nearby Shepherds

Yes, sent to shepherds, not to some wealthy, famous, or powerful people at all, but to common everyday shepherds watching over their flocks out in the field, as Luke records.

They were still at this time of the year out in the fields, the flocks and the shepherds. This also proves the time of year was not December, for it is too cold in Palestine in December to still have the flocks of sheep out in the fields. The shepherds bring their flocks in from the fields before the month of December arrives.

"Look, what on earth is that up there in the sky?" shouted one shepherd with excitement in his voice.

"I see something also," exclaimed another shepherd, "but I must be going crazy. I have to be seeing things."

"Oh, it is something very terrible I think," added yet a third shepherd.

"We are all going to die," a fourth shepherd chimed in with trembling in his voice.

A magnificent and exceedingly bright light shone all around them. It was as if it was the sun shining in full strength on a cloudless day. Great fear came sweeping into their hearts as they all felt sure they had not long to live.

"Fear not," said the angel, "for, behold I bring you good news of wonderful joy, which shall be good for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ (meaning in the Greek language "anointed") the Lord. And this shall be a sign for you; You shall find the babe wrapped in everyday blankets, lying in a stable manger."

Suddenly, out of nowhere it seemed, the shepherds could see that there appeared with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is well pleased."

God the Father took note of the day of His Son's birth. To Him it was a very blessed day, for the potential that could arise from the life of Jesus was like nothing that the whole universe had ever experienced before. The potential of this one life, this Immanuel life, this God with us in the flesh life, would mean that many millions of others could one day reach the potential that they were created for, to become very sons and daughters in the family of God.

After the angels were gone from them back into heaven, the shepherds busily talked among themselves and they all decided they wanted to walk over to Bethlehem and to see for themselves that which the Lord had made known to them. They went as quickly as they could. We are not told how many stables, if more than one, that there was in Bethlehem, or how long it took them to find the correct stable, but we are told they did find it, where Joseph and Mary were, and indeed found the babe Jesus lying in a manger.

After seeing the factual truth of what the angels had said to them, the shepherds immediately began telling others in Bethlehem what the angels had told them about this new born child, and many who heard all this kept the words in their heart and mind, and wondered what it could all mean. Mary also was one who would never let anything slip out of her mind, but would ponder on them often over the following years to come.

The shepherds returned finally to their jobs of watching over sheep, but they returned glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them (Luke 2:8-20).

CHAPTER 4

JOSEPH AND MARY PERFORM THE TEMPLE RITUALS

As prescribed in the laws of Moses in the Old Testament when the eighth day arrived after the birth of the child Jesus, Joseph and Mary made sure He was circumcised, and at that time the babe was officially named "Jesus" (as we have seen, meaning, one who saves), as the angel from the Lord had said to them that He should be so named. Having a male child circumcised on the eighth day was in accordance to Leviticus 12:1-3.

The laws of Moses further prescribed that if a woman gave birth to a male child, she should continue in her body's blood cleansing, the healing and restoring of her body back to a more normal condition as when not carrying and giving birth to a baby, for another 33 days. During that time she was not to come into the Temple or Tabernacle to participate in the ritual religious practices of Israel as given by God from the days of Moses. This law is found in Leviticus 12:4.

Also in the laws of Moses for the people to observe was a law that if the first child that a woman gave birth to, was a male, then he was to be dedicated to the Lord. Originally he was to be given to serve the Lord in the physical work of God in the religious life of Israel, working in the Tabernacle. Then God decided to have one tribe of Israel, the tribe of Levi, to do all that work and be the priests to serve in the Temple. All this can be seen from Exodus 13:1-2,12-16; 22:29; Numbers 8:15-17.

The firstborn of males among the animals could not be redeemed or bought back, but were to be offered in sacrifice to the Lord (except for those born to unclean animals, as noted in Numbers 18:15). The firstborn of male children were to be redeemed, by using other offerings, so they did not automatically have to serve in the physical work of God.

The reason for all this is stated by God in Exodus 13:14-16. It may seem a little strange to us today, but under the circumstances as to how and what God did in order to bring the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage and slavery, to the Israelites back in the days of Moses and for other generations to come afterwards, it was a constant reminder of the miracle God performed in delivering them from Egyptian domain and slavery.

As we have said, God then decided to take the males of the tribe of Levi to serve in His physical work in the Tabernacle or Temple, as we find in passages such as Numbers 3:11-13, 41, 44, 45; 8:13-22; 18:6.

Joseph and Mary came then to the Temple in Jerusalem not only to have the baby Jesus circumcised on the eighth day after His birth, but came again to redeem and dedicate Him to the Lord, after another 33 days had gone by. With that dedication they offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons according as it is written in the laws of the Lord, for those who were not able to offer a lamb for whatever reasons. This was all allowed for in the law of Leviticus 12:8.

From this passage as written in the Gospel of Luke (chapter 2:21-24) we see that Joseph and Mary stayed in the area of Jerusalem for at least 40 days and maybe

longer, before they left and returned to their own town of Nazareth in the region of Galilee (note verse 39).

The wise men from the East had not yet come to pay respects to the child Jesus. We shall see shortly that it was not till after Joseph and Mary with the new born Son of God, had returned to Nazareth, that the wise men arrived in search of the new child to pay homage and present their gifts.

In The Temple With Simeon

Joseph and Mary had entered the Temple enclosure to perform the ceremonial rites and sacrifices as ordained in the laws of Moses. Unknown to them there was also another man within the Temple grounds by the name of Simeon. He was a very devoutly religious man, righteously following the ways of the Lord God, and was looking for the comfort and salvation of Israel that God had promised in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit had been upon Simeon for a long time. In fact so close to God was he and so dedicated to serving Him that the Holy Spirit of the Lord had already revealed to him that he was not going to die until he had seen with his eyes the very man child that was the Son of God, the Lord's Christ or Messiah, the Anointed One (Luke 2:25-27).

Simeon saw Joseph and Mary with the little babe Jesus and through the revelation of the Holy Spirit guiding him, he knew immediately that this baby was the Lord's Anointed One, the Messiah.

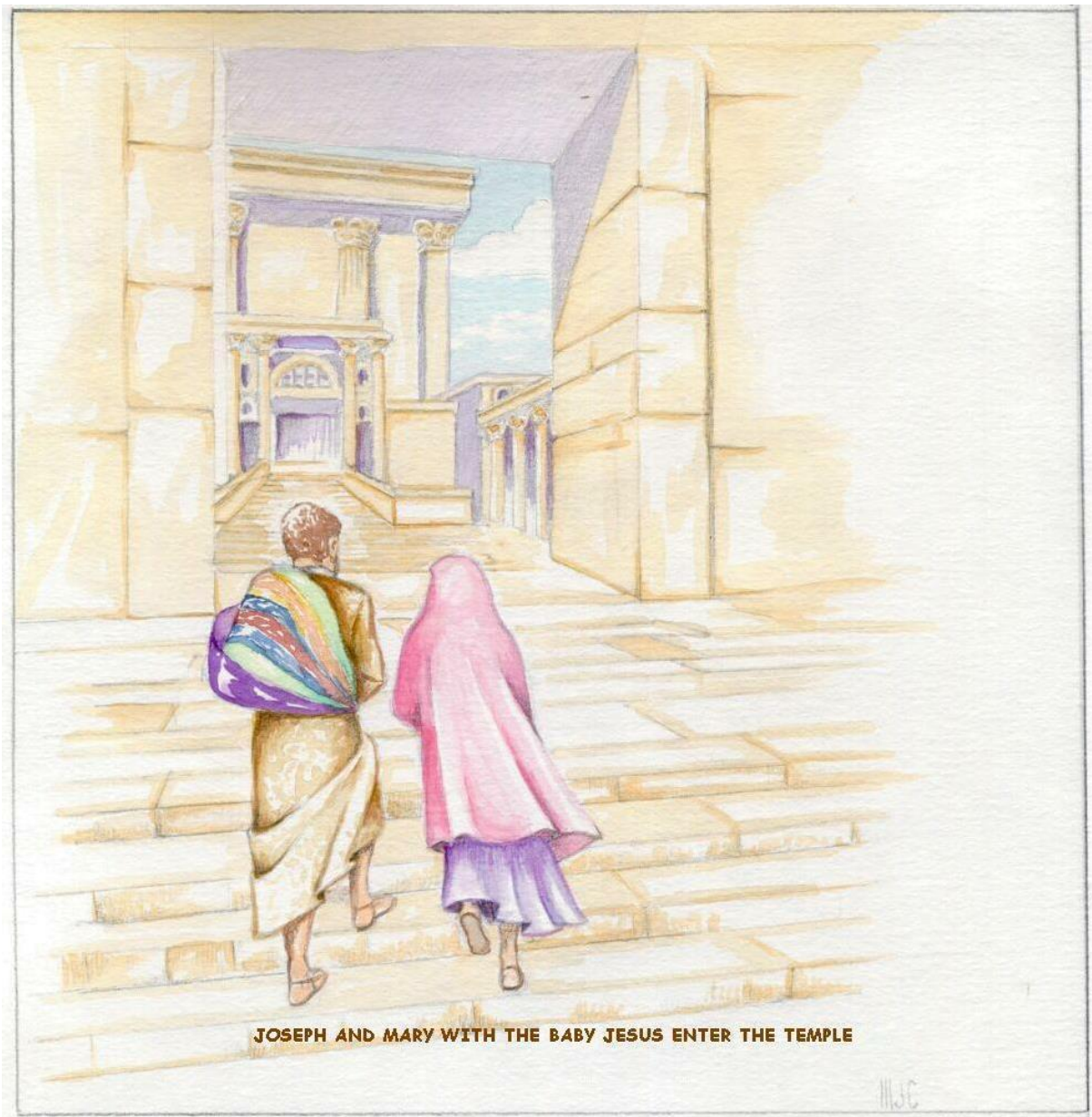
His heart started to pound inside his chest, great joy and excitement overwhelmed his mind, walking over to Joseph he politely asked if he could hold the baby in his arms, and Joseph replied that he could.

Simeon, taking the baby Jesus in his arms, and looking up to heaven with praise, said, "Lord, now I am ready to die in peace. You have fulfilled your promise towards me. I have seen the Savior that you have brought into this world for salvation to all people. He is the light to the nations, and is the glory of your people Israel. "

Both Joseph and Mary, although they had seen and been told many things by the angels sent to them, were still in some amazement on hearing the words of Simeon. Then under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Simeon blessed them both.

Afterwards he turned and looking more at Mary than Joseph, said, "This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and so it will be their undoing and loss. But He will be the greatest joy to many others. The deepest thoughts and attitudes of minds will be revealed. A sword of mental pain will pierce your very life."

Mary would have seen how true and how drastically that prophecy of Simeon came to pass as she later would have to suffer the mental and emotional pain of seeing her firstborn, the Son of God, put to death in a most horrible manner. But before trying to relate that event in human words, there is much to recall and expound to you about the life and the teachings of God's Messiah. We shall come to how He died much later.



Anna The Prophetess

The Lord, in doing His work and proclaiming His truths, would sometimes give a special spiritual gift to some women. Those women could often see ahead of time, certain events that were to happen. Sometimes God would give them a special message that they were to tell His people about or pass on to other leaders of His people. Then on the other hand the Eternal God would just inspire them to preach His truths to others in a dynamic way. These women are called "prophetesses" as a group, or "prophetess" as a single person, in the pages of the Bible.

Such a prophetess there was in Jerusalem when Joseph and Mary came to the Temple with the baby Jesus.

Her name was Anna. She came from the tribe of Asher, one of 10 northern tribes of Israel, known as the House of Israel in the books of Kings and Chronicles and in the prophetic books from Isaiah to Malachi. She descended from the few who escaped the captivity under the Assyrian armies that progressively took the northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity from around 745 to 718 B.C.

Some of the northern people of the House of Israel fled to the south and became a part of the Kingdom of Judah. The descendants of Anna were some of those who came to live in Judea. She was the daughter of Phanuel, but nothing is recorded about him in the New Testament, except he was of the tribe of Asher.

Anna, it is recorded was of "great age." She had been married to a husband for seven years from the time of her virginity, which is another way of saying from the day of her wedding and marriage. Somehow she lost her husband, but we are not told under what circumstances she lost him and became a widow. The word "widow" is given to a lady who was married but lost her husband in some way.

As we have seen, most young women in the Jewish society of that time, were married in their teenage years, often in their middle teens. If this was the case with Anna, then she may have been around the age of twenty-two or twenty-four when she lost her husband.

The Greek in Luke 2:37 can be understood as saying she had been a widow for eighty-four years, or, being a widow she was now eighty-four years old. If the first understanding be the correct one then Anna could have been over one hundred years old. This is not out of the question, for an increasing number of people today in North America are living to be over a hundred years of age. If the second understanding is the correct one, we can still see that the age of eighty-four could be termed "great age" especially to younger people and children who have not yet even become adults.

It is stated by Luke that at this old aged Anna did not depart from the Temple, probably meaning that it was her daily way of life to be in the Temple each day. She was in constant worship to the Lord with fastings and prayers night and day, which is again a way of saying that she had dedicated her life to doing lots of fasting (missing meals during the week) and spending much of her day and evenings in prayer

She must have been in fine physical strength to live this kind of lifestyle, most of us feel pretty weak in the knees after missing just one meal now and again. Well, I'm sure she was given strength from the Almighty to dedicate herself in this manner as she served Him as one of His prophetesses.

Anna, coming into the Temple when Joseph and Mary were there with Jesus, instantly knew that this baby was God's Anointed One, the promised Messiah. She immediately started to praise the Lord God. And Luke also records another very important job that Anna then performed. She went out and shared the good news of the man child that would bring saving redemption and salvation to the people of Jerusalem and others from around the world.

Luke records that Anna, "spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." This tells us a few things we need to take note of. Anna did not necessarily go up and down the streets of Jerusalem knocking on every door of every house, to preach God's truth to them. She spoke of this Jesus the Messiah to all that were of the mind of God and who were looking for the redeeming Savior that God had promised was to come. She was speaking in a personal way to people who were spiritually minded about the things of God.

And this example also shows us that if there are times when God works with us in a special way, in clearly revealing His will and way and promises to us, then we should

get excited and enthusiastic, and share it with other members of the Church of God, or those looking for and desiring to know the word of the Lord.

When Joseph and Mary had performed all the laws of Moses, which were the laws of God given under the leadership of Moses, it is said that they returned into Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. We have seen this was at least 40 days after the birth of Jesus. Up to this time the wise men from the East had not yet arrived in Jerusalem. Indeed they would come from the East to inquire of Herod the king where this Christ child was, but not till after Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had returned to Nazareth. They did not find the infant that was born to be King of kings and Lord of lords in a stable as did the shepherds. All this we shall see in chapter five.

Luke finished this part of his Gospel by telling us that Jesus, while in Nazareth growing up, grew in physical health and strength, that He was filled with wisdom, and the favor and grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:36-40).

CHAPTER 5

EASTERN WISE MEN COME TO JERUSALEM

It was Matthew (who was the author of the Gospel that bears his name) who was inspired to record for us the coming of the wise men from the East to Jerusalem to inquire about the one born to be king of the Jews.

We do not know from where they came in the East, some have speculated from which nations or nation they may have come from, but there is nothing in the Bible or secular history that shows in any certain manner where in the East these wise men made their homes.

Nor do we know how many wise men there were. Just because three gifts are mentioned that they finally present to Joseph and Mary and Jesus, does not prove that it was three wise men only, it may have been more. They arrived in Jerusalem asking where this child, that they understood to be born to be a king, was to be found. They had come to worship him they said, and they told people they had seen this King's star in the East.

We now have a question as to what was this "star" that they saw. A few have written technical studies trying to show at that time in history there was a great physical "star" phenomenon in the heavenly sky over the East and over Palestine. It may be hard to understand how a physical star in the heavens could eventually come and rest over the dwelling place where Jesus lived, as Matthew records. But it may be possible if you are skilled in the movements of the stars in the heavens and if God had sent a special meteor type star to guide them to the Christ child. On the other hand the first chapters of the book of Revelation use the word "star" to represent "angels" of the Lord.

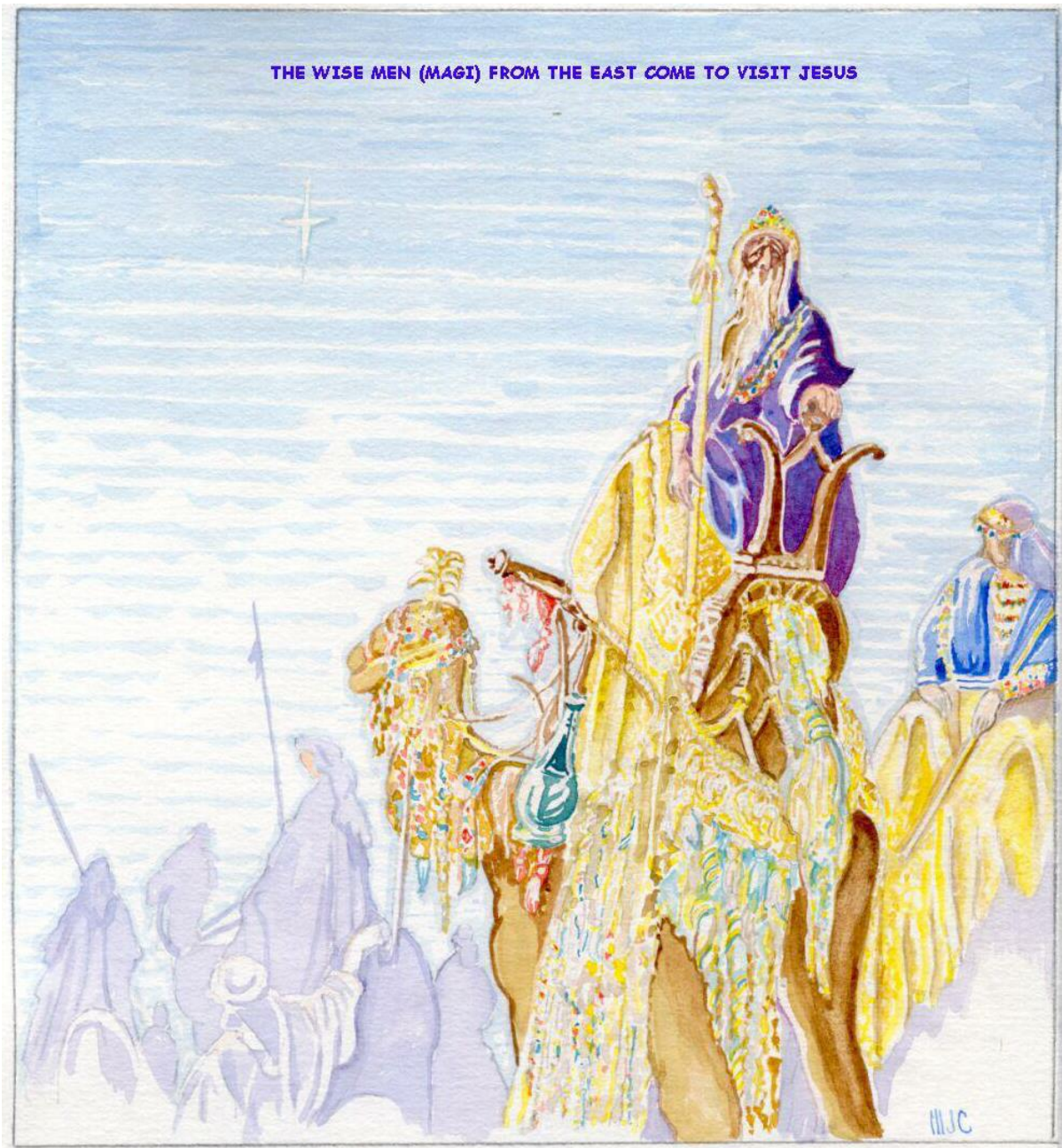
Could it have been that God sent an angel, which to the wise men looked like a star in the sky, to guide them to the very place where Jesus was now living? Yes, it could be possible that is how the Lord God did it.

Either way, we know God's guiding hand was in all of this, to bring the wise men from the East to worship this new born king that was named Jesus. And further, the wise men must have had some earlier knowledge from some source that a special king was to be born in the region of Jerusalem, in Palestine. It may have been possible that they had copies of the Hebrew Old Testament as we call it today.

The Jews had been in captivity in Babylon and many did not return to Palestine with Ezra and Nehemiah about five hundred years earlier, but chose to live in other parts of the known world. Some may have gone further east and taken their Holy Scriptures with them. Hence, others coming into contact with those Jews could have had access to God's known word of that time. They could have read and understood the prophecies concerning the human birth of the Messiah and the area of the world He was to be born in. Part of why they were called "wise men" by Matthew may have been because they were wise in the understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.¹

¹ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** As discussed in my notes at the end of chapter 1 these Magi would have come from the Parthian empire to the east of the Roman empire.

Well, these men from the East arrived in Jerusalem asking about this child born to be king, and when the one who was ruling as king over Judea, Herod the king as he was called, heard this questioning from these men, he was naturally very troubled, upset, and not a little disconcerted. He thought his power and might and authority was going to be challenged and ripped away from him, by someone who was to grow up and lead the Jews in revolt against himself.



All Jerusalem, Matthew states, was also troubled by the questions from these men of the East. So troubled was Herod that he called for the Jewish chief priests and scribes (kind of lawyers of the day) to inquire of them where their Scriptures said this Christ was to be born. They told him that the town of Bethlehem was the place that the prophets of old had said He was to be born or to come from. This was foretold by the prophet Micah. We can see that prophecy in the book that is called after him, chapter five and verse two. The prophecy reads:

"And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel; whose going forth and living have been from old, from everlasting (or as the Hebrew can read, the days of eternity)."

This also shows us why Isaiah said the Jesus child would also be Immanuel, which word means "God with us." For He existed as God, a member of the Godhead or family of God before His human birth. He truly was from the days of eternity. The first chapter of the Gospel of John also bears witness to this truth, that the one we know as Jesus existed as God yet with God (the one we now call the Father) before He came to earth to be born of a woman called Mary (Matthew 2:1-6).

Maybe you, or your parents reading this to you, would like to stop here for a moment, and read the first part of the first chapter of the Gospel of John.

Herod Secretly Talks To The Wise Men

Herod was a cunning and crafty king, he sent for the wise men by secret and brought them to himself without anyone in Jerusalem knowing. He wanted to ascertain from them what time in the past they saw the star. Oh, how nice and sweet he talked to them, just as sweet as honey. He made out that he was on their side, telling them, "You go to Bethlehem, for I am told he should be there, search diligently for the child, and then when you have found him, bring me word of where he is there, so I can come also and worship him."

King Herod had no intention at all in wanting to worship the child Jesus. He had much darker and more evil plans as to what he would do to Jesus if he could find where He was.

The wise men departed from Herod, and no sooner were they getting ready to leave Jerusalem, when the star once more appeared to them. They could see it was moving and leading them further and further away from the city of Jerusalem. Finally it came to stop over the very place where Jesus was dwelling.

Matthew records, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and they bowed down and worshipped Him."

We have already seen that Luke recorded that after the Temple rituals had been performed for the birth of a firstborn man child, Joseph and Mary returned to their home town of Nazareth, way north of Jerusalem, in the region of Galilee.

The baby Jesus is now called a "child" and the wise men go into a "house" not a stable. All this (and something else that we shall note shortly) bears evidence that the wise men did not come from the East until sometime later, when Jesus was no longer a baby but thought of as a child, and was living in the home or house of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth.

Well, the wise men had finally found the one they had come looking for, the one born to be king of the Jews.

They had brought treasures with them, and opening their containers they offered and gave three gifts, the first being that of "gold." Now, pure gold is one of the most incorruptible substances on the earth. It can rest in water for hundreds, even thousands of years and never rust or decay.²

The life of this Christ child would be pure gold so to speak. He would never do any wrong in actions, in thoughts, or in words. He would be always purely incorruptible, what the New Testament calls sinless. It is written that Jesus never sinned, no not once.

The wise men gave the gift of "frankincense." The Hebrew word is "lebona" and is a whitish, greasy, sticky, gum resin substance from a bush type plant that especially grows in Persia, east of Palestine.

It was one of the constituents of the sacred incense that was burnt on the altar in the Temple. By itself it has a pungent odor and taste, but which, when mixed with fragrant substances, has the effect of increasing the odor and keeping the then fragrant smell lasting longer.

Jesus was to endure forever as the first begotten and first born Son of God the Father. His life on the sacrificial altar was to be an everlasting sweet smelling odor to God.

The third gift that the wise men gave was that of "myrrh." The Hebrew is "mor" which means distilling. The Greek is "smyrna" which we translate as "myrrh." It is a well-known gum resin extracted from the Arabian "Balsamoderndron Myrrha." It was used as a perfume for embalming, and as an ingredient of the holy anointing oil.

This was to represent the lovely smell to God the Father that the death (embalming was done to the body of the dead to help preserve it for a while and to see that the body decayed in a nice smelling way) of Jesus would bring for His plan of the salvation of mankind to His glory.

The plan of the Almighty could be carried out in no other way than that a God type person should come as a human to live a perfect life, to take the sins of mankind upon Himself and to sacrifice Himself in death for those sins.

We shall talk a lot more about all this when we near the end of the Gospels which record the facts and the reasons of the death of Jesus.

The wise men, being deceived by the cunning king Herod, would have returned to him to inform him of the location of this child Jesus, but an angel from the Lord came to them in a dream to warn them of the real intent of Herod (the intent being to kill the child).

So once that was explained to them they departed for their homeland another way, and never saw or spoke to king Herod again (Matthew 2:7-12).

² **EDITOR'S NOTE:** It is possible that this gold was held in trust and later used to help finance Jesus' ministry.

Herod Kills The Children Two Years Old And Under

Back at Herod's palace, the king is walking the floor with more and more agitation as the days pass by in which the wise men do not return to him with information as to the whereabouts of the boy born to be king of the Jews.

"I am King Herod, look what I've done for these Jews. I've built them a great and magnificent Temple here in Jerusalem, as well as other fine buildings around Palestine. And what do I find? They claim their Scriptures say a child is to be born to them in Bethlehem who is to be king of the Jews. I am their king, they will have no other."

More days passed by and still the wise men did not return. Finally Herod knew he had been tricked and that they would not return with the information he so desperately wanted.

"I will show these Jews," he shouted as his face grew red with anger, "I will show them who has the power and who will be their only king," he continued in his now furious rage. With his hands trembling in fuming hateful thoughts, and the veins of his neck protruding in stark enlargement, Herod shouted out that the chiefs of his army should come to him immediately. On entering his presence they heard these chilling words from his mouth.

"The men from the East said they saw a star of this child king about two years ago. You will take some of our soldiers and go to the city of Bethlehem and the region round about, and they will kill all the male children that are two years old and under."

Even those hardened men of war were taken aback and stunned by this command they had to carry out, but they knew it was either carry out his demand or they would lose their own heads by the sword. They felt they had no choice but to comply and do as Herod commanded.

So it was done. All the male children from the age of two and under in the region of Bethlehem were put to death by the order of king Herod, in his hope that one of the dead children would be this child the Jews claimed was born to be their king.

It is hard to imagine the weeping and anguish of mothers and entire families where all male children under two years old were put to death. It had been foretold by the prophet Jeremiah. God had known beforehand it would happen, and the great prophet Jeremiah under inspiration from the Lord had spoken of it when he had said:

"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud sorrow. Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they were no more alive."

But Herod could not fight against the Almighty God, who knew the intentions of his evil heart. After the wise men from the East had departed, God had sent an angel to tell Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt because Herod was planning and hoping to kill the child (Matthew 2:13-14). All this was also fulfilling the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 that had said, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." God knew that Herod would have then killed babies in Nazareth after the ones he killed in Bethlehem when he eventually found out that was where the wise men went to.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were now safe in the land of Egypt, when king Herod killed the children of two years and under. It was not that many months later when the king suddenly died. Probably the hand of the Lord was in that untimely death of his. Well, upon it happening, an angel from the Lord once more appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Pack up your things Joseph, and take the child and His mother back to the land of Israel, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead."

Joseph was pleased to hear this news and quickly did as the angel instructed. He was thinking it would be nice to settle in the area of Judea, somewhat near Jerusalem, but on hearing that Archelaus, the son of Herod, was now reigning in Judea in place of his father, he decided it was better to live outside of the region of Judea. Joseph decided his old stomping ground of the city of Nazareth would be the best place to raise this child of God.

No doubt the Lord God was inspiring him to make this decision for it had been prophesied by the old prophets that Jesus was to be called a Nazarene, meaning one who was from the city or town of Nazareth (Judges 13:5).

As we look at this prophecy in the book of Judges, it is hard to relate it to the time of Jesus, but the nature of some prophecies can have a number of different applications down through the centuries. Obviously this one in Judges is a case in point (Matthew 2:13-23).

Jesus At The Passover At Age Twelve

We are told nothing about the life of Jesus or Joseph and Mary, from the time they returned to the land of Palestine from Egypt, until they all as a family, went to Jerusalem to observe the Passover when Jesus was twelve years old. This account is recorded for us in Luke 2:41-50.

We can be assured that Mary would have raised the child Jesus in the very best Jewish manner, as to schooling and religious education. I think we can correctly assume that Jesus' childhood life was without any great noticeable declaration. He was probably like many other Jewish boys of His time, enjoying His education both in secular and religious studies, as well as the fun of the great outdoors.

We are not told that He did any miracles or tried to manifest any super-natural power as a child and young adult, hence it is likely He did not. Yet, as the Son of God, who was sinless all His life, His thoughts, words, and actions, as a child would have been noticed by adults, I'm sure. Most people will take note of a child that is outstandingly mannerly, polite, kind, thoughtful, respectful of adults, and self-controlled in actions and words.

Joseph and Mary made it a custom to attend and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem each year in the spring time, when the Passover feast is celebrated. This is one of the 7 great festivals of the Lord as outlined and described in Leviticus 23.

This time when they were leaving to return to Nazareth, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. For the first day of the journey they did not miss Him. We might wonder why this was. When we read in Luke that they sought for Him among their kinsfolk and friends, we are perhaps given the answer. There were many of Joseph's and Mary's family relatives as well as close friends with them on this journey.

The Jewish people tend even today, to be a very close knit group of people. It is natural for them, especially blood related family members, to mingle with each other, as one large family. Joseph and Mary simply thought Jesus was somewhere within the larger family of their relations and friends, and so did not get concerned until after the first day had gone by. Jesus not returning to be with them for the night (without asking) was something He obviously did not do before in His life as a child, so then they missed Him and went looking for Him.

Jesus could not be found among any of their relatives or friends. There was only one other place they could think of where He might be. That place was the city of Jerusalem. So, back they went to Jerusalem and started their search for Him up and down the streets, in every place where they thought a twelve year old could or would go. For three days they searched for Him but He was nowhere to be found.

Whether it was some people in Jerusalem or God putting the thought in their minds, whichever it was, they finally decided the only place left to look for Him was in the great huge Temple of Jerusalem. And sure enough, there He was, sitting among the Jewish Temple teachers, listen to them and also asking them questions, and obviously answering some, for all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

Joseph and Mary, bless their hearts, still could not see the clear picture of the life of this child from God that they had been given to raise and care for. They were very upset at what Jesus had done and all the trouble they thought it had caused them over the last four days. Mary said to Him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

Jesus, relying to her said, "Why have you sought me anxiously? Do you not understand after twelve years that I must be in my Father's house."

Joseph and Mary did not understand what Jesus was meaning by this answer to them. They had been visited by angels twelve years earlier, had seen miracles happen, had seen how Jesus had grown from a baby into a child and up to this age of twelve. Seen how He had grown without ever committing one sin. They knew there was something very special about this person, but just could not at this period in His life put the picture in clear focus.

Jesus was now at age twelve, to really get into first gear so to speak, in a spiritual way, heading for third and fourth gear and full speed ahead, to do the work of His real Father in heaven.

Many of us today in the Western world would think Jesus was at age twelve, being very disrespectful and high handed towards Joseph and Mary in His actions at this particular Passover season as recorded by Luke. But when we understand that in that time of Jewish culture, the age of twelve was when you were deemed an adult, to take on an adult mindset, and adult responsibilities, then we see that was just what Jesus was doing. He was taking a serious adult mindset towards His Father in heaven and the spiritual work He must now really focus on as He moved from childhood to adulthood. Not that He had not done so in the past, but now as a young adult it took on even more importance.

Jesus Grows In A Four Fold Way

Luke records in very simple and short sentences the growing life of the now young adult Jesus, until He was made manifest with might and power to the masses of the people of Israel. Luke says, "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man " (Luke 2:51-52).

Jesus, as the very Son of the Most High, was not handed it all on a silver platter, just having the perfection of God as if falling off a log, having it so easy that it was just a "shoe in" as we often say.

Jesus was also born of a woman, of Mary, and so was also very human as we are. He had to learn, to study, to think and to meditate, as we also have to do. As we should do, Jesus increased in wisdom and in mental stature, and in favor with God and man.

CHAPTER 6

JOHN BEGINS HIS MINISTRY

We must not forget about John, the child born to the priest Zachariah and Elizabeth his wife, also in a miraculous way. Many years have now passed, a dozen or more, since the account of Jesus at the Passover when at the age of twelve. It was now the appointed time from God for John to fulfil his ministry, for which he was especially born.

It was in the days when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great (whom was the Herod in our previous chapters) was ruler over Galilee and Perea (east of the Jordan), that John did his preaching and teaching in the wilderness of Judea.

He went into the region about Jordan and so fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold, I send my messenger before your (the Messiah's) face, who shall prepare your way." John preached a baptism of repentance, and so became known as John the Baptist.

Luke says, "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God' " (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Many prophecies have a dual meaning and fulfilment. As we look at this prophecy in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, as we note the whole context before and after, it becomes evident that this is one of those dual prophecies. It was to have a fulfilment at the first coming of the Messiah, but it is to have a fulfilment also at His coming with power and glory, with a strong hand and when He is to rule and do much work during the time the book of Revelation calls the 1,000 years (see Isaiah 40:10-11 with Rev. 20:1-4).

The things to be made straight, the hills to be brought low, the rough to be made smooth, and the salvation to be seen, in the first fulfilment at the time of John and into Jesus' ministry, was an analogy and typology of spiritual and repentance matters, being humbled and finding the straight and smooth truths of the salvation of God.

Matthew records that John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist, and that a good part of his diet was wild honey and locusts (Matthew 3:4).

There are strong indications from what the angel said about John when announcing his birth to Zachariah and Elizabeth (which we saw in earlier chapters), that John may have been under a Nazarite vow (mentioned in Numbers 6) from birth. If so, then his hair would have never been cut. By the time he started to preach in the wilderness of Judea, his hair would have been extremely long, probably reaching half way down his back or even more.

From what Matthew records we may want to jump to the thought that John looked something like a wild cave-man type person we often see in school books on the history of mankind.

This thought could be very wrong. Garments of camel's hair could be spun and made to look quite attractive. It would also be very warm for him as he faced the cold nights that could come in the desert of Judea. We today do not think twice about wearing leather belts around our waist, so a leather band around John's waist should not cause us to think of him as a wild cave-man type.

Tens of thousands today eat wild honey in many different countries around the world as part of their regular diet, so nothing unusual about that per se. As John was preaching in the wilderness, his honey eating would have been from the wild bees, as opposed to those in towns and villages who had bee hives, and so what we would call "domestic" bees.

To our Western ear the strangest thing might be the fact that John ate locusts. But, that is mainly because in our Western nations we have never practiced eating locusts. We do not even import them to eat as food. God, in giving Israel His food laws as found in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, gave the laws regarding what insects were fit to eat and which ones were not. It was all a matter of how He had created them in the "cell" and "atom" construction to jive with our cell and atom construction. Some, for health purposes we could eat and some God has never wanted us to eat.

The locust was within the "good" food laws as given in the books of Moses. Maybe most of the city dwellers in Palestine, were not in the habit of eating locusts, hence Matthew records that John ate locusts. Different maybe, but certainly not outside of the food laws of the Lord God.

John preached and taught with such power and conviction the Gospels say that most people from Jerusalem and all Judea with the region about Jordan, went out to hear him, and most of them were baptized by him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. This was indeed a time of great spiritual revival and humble repentance before God. John was preparing many hearts for the coming of the work of the Messiah Jesus.

John was indeed different from most of the religious preachers of his day. He did not mingle with the established popular religious leaders of the two main theological groups or "denominations" as we would call them, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. John lived in the desert and was certainly known as an independent preacher of the word of God.

He also knew that much of the teaching and practicing traditions of the Pharisees and Sadducees were way off base from the truth of God's word. He knew that a great deal of their theology was founded upon wrong ideas and interpretations of the Scriptures, as well as man-made customs and traditions that had crept into their religions over the centuries.

He especially had insight into the heart and mind of most of the teachers of those two religious parties. He knew they did not want to know the pure truths of the Lord, that they were quite content to maintain their religious positions with its "status quo" - keep it as it had been for centuries. He knew they were not of a humble, teachable,

repentant mindset, willing to be corrected and to change when shown and proven to be wrong in their teachings, beliefs, and practices.

John had become very popular with the masses of the people, they thronged to go out and hear him speak the word of God. All this of course was noticed by the religious leaders of the two dominant denominations.



One day many of them as a group looked at each other and said, "This man John is causing quite a commotion of sorts. The people are flocking to hear him. Many are being baptized by him. We as a group of theological leaders need to go and see this man in action, so we can first-hand get a better plan as to how to combat him and safe-guard our positions that we have held with the people for so long a time."

So, off they went into the desert by the river Jordan to hear John preach, but it sure was not because they wanted to repent of their wrong teachings and practices. Some were even willing to be baptized by him in order to try and gain his respect for them, and to fool the people into believing they were really humble repentant fellows.

Matthew records that John knew some of them were willing to go as far as being baptized by him, but he knowing their hearts, seeing them come, looked upon them with righteous anger, and lifting up his voice with power and clarity, said to them in front of all the crowds around about, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee God's coming judgment? Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. Don't just say, 'We're safe - we're the descendants of Abraham.' That proves absolutely nothing of and by itself. God can change the stones here into children of Abraham. Being physical flesh of anyone, even Abraham, does not automatically mean you are the children of God in the spiritual sense."

Looking upon them with further discontent, John went on to say, "Even now the axe of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

Most of the crowd hearing these words were sincerely struck in the heart and wanted to know from John, in specific ways, what they needed to do to be on the Lord's side and to have His love and mercy and favor.

John answered them by saying, "If you have two coats, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."

John was telling them that real true godliness, wanting to walk with the Lord and to do His will and way of life, contained a very practical aspect. You had to not only be religious in beliefs and attending church, reading the Bible, praying, fasting at times, but you had to serve others in a down-to-earth manner. It meant giving to people in tangible ways, some of the physical blessings that God had given you. A willingness to share with others less fortunate than yourself, some of the physical goods you possessed.

Some of the corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized of John, asking him what they needed to do to get their lives in order with God. John told them, "Be honest, show your honesty in how you collect taxes for the Roman government. Do not collect more taxes than is required by the Roman authorities."

Some you see, collected more taxes than required, so they could line their own pockets with extra money, above that which the Roman government paid them for collecting taxes.

Even soldiers employed by Rome, came to John asking what they should do to be in favor with God. His reply to them was, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation."

It would have been relatively easy with the authority and the physical skills and weapons they had as soldiers, to rob people in a forceful and violent manner, as well as by false accusation of alleged wrongs (people fearing what would happen to them, and so paying the soldiers money) they could bring to higher government leaders, which could have led to imprisonment and even death. This would be

termed "bribery" today. The soldiers would say to people that they would report them as having done this or that evil (when not having done so) unless the person gave them a certain amount of money.

John also told the soldiers to be content with their wages. It is probably very easy when employed by the National Government in work that is dangerous and could cost you your life, such as those employed as soldiers and police and firemen, to moan and groan and complain that you should be paid a wage twice or three times more than what you are receiving. While people with dangerous jobs should be well paid, it is just a fact of economic life that governments just do not have a never ending wealth of money to pay astronomical wages to such persons in dangerous government occupations. Hence John told them there comes a time when such people must learn to be content with their wages.

Luke in his third chapter records that many people were in expectation of the coming of the promised Messiah. They knew the time was near from what God had written in the prophets of old, that the Messiah would appear. Some were questioning in their minds if this promised Messiah was not in fact having its fulfilment in this very unusual man who was preaching and teaching the word of God with such power and conviction, in the desert. Many were thinking that John was indeed the Christ, the anointed one to come.

John himself answered them by saying, "I baptize with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am - so much greater that I am not worthy to untie His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the grain with His winnowing fork. Then He will clean up the threshing area, storing the grain into His barn but burning up the chaff with fire that cannot be put out."

It is said that John used many such warnings and analogies as he prepared the way for the Messiah to come.

In the analogy above John was saying what the twentieth chapter of Revelation and other passages of Scripture (such as Malachi 4; Psalm 37; 2 Peter 3) tell us. Namely, that God will in His plan give everyone a chance to know the truth, to repent, to accept Jesus as the saving Messiah, and to enter the Kingdom of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. All that will refuse shall be destroyed in a worldwide fire that shall burn them and this earth up, that cannot be put out by humans hands, at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. Then shall come the new heavens and new earth and all that is foretold in Revelation 21 and 22.

Luke also tells us that John was bold enough to publicly criticize and denounce Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, for taking Herodias, his brother's wife, and for many other wrongs he had done. Herod finally put John in prison, but had no intention of executing him, for he feared the people would rise up in armed revolt against himself, as they held John with such admiration. It was through some trickery that Herod gave command to execute John. How that came about we shall see later.

As to the story behind John's denouncing Herod Antipas for his taking of his brother's wife, it goes like this.

Herod's brother was called Philip, and his wife was named Herodias. They had a daughter called Salome. Josephus the Jewish historian of the first century, says that this marriage of Herod Antipas with Herodias took place while he was on a journey to Rome. He stopped at his brother's; fell in love with his wife; agreed to put away his own wife, and Herodias agreed to leave her own husband, and live with him.

There was no Roman or Biblical law from God that allowed them to do such a thing. This was pure lusting after another man's wife, which in the first century A.D. even Roman law frowned upon men taking another man's wife through covetousness.

Then adding to all this, Herodias was grand-daughter of Herod the Great, who was the father of Herod Antipas. This relationship would have been classified as "incest" and not allowed under God's law. Close relatives were not permitted to marry under the laws of the Lord. As Herod was governor of a part of Palestine, and so was also upholding Jewish laws, allowing them freedom of religious faith and proclamation of it, John would have felt quite at liberty to denounce Herod for this and other wrong conduct in his life.

Jesus Is Baptized By John

Going back again to the time John was living and preaching in the wilderness by the river Jordan, one day Jesus came to him to be baptized. John was shocked at such a request from Christ the Messiah, and with amazement said to Him, "It is I that need to be baptized by you. Why on earth do you request to be baptized by me? No, this should not be Lord. I do not understand why you request this."

Jesus, with a soft tone of voice and an understanding heart as to why John would think this way, replied, "Let it be as I request, for it is right and proper for me to fulfil all that is the righteousness of God."

John then understood when Jesus put it this way. For baptism was something that John knew God had ordained for the New Covenant age, as a part of the very perfection and righteousness of Himself. John knew that Jesus wanted to set the full and perfect example of doing all that was the will and the plan and the righteousness of God. Although Jesus had never sinned, had nothing to repent of, and so had no need to be baptized for the remission of sins, John now knew Jesus wanted to set the perfect example of doing God's will, and so consented to baptize Him in the river Jordan.

Jesus, after being baptized, went up out of the river Jordan, and the heavens were opened, and John saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove upon Him. Three of the Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) relate that a voice came from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus had continued to grow in favor and in grace with the Father in heaven during all of His life. His Father in heaven, the one who can be our heavenly Father, was well pleased with all that Jesus put His hand to do, especially as He now prepared Himself to fulfil the reason as to why He had been born as a human being.

The time had come for the Christ Messiah to fight one more final battle against Satan the Devil, and then to march on into His ministry of proclaiming salvation and the Kingdom of God to those living in Palestine.

CHAPTER 7

JESUS' THREE TEMPTATIONS FROM SATAN

Many of the servants and prophets of God before the time Jesus was to enter His teaching ministry, had fasted (going without food and water) for a certain number of days, in order to really draw close to God, and put their mind on the task that lay before them. Moses and the prophet Elijah were two that it is said and written of them, that they fasted for 40 days. Moses did it twice, so it is written in the book of Exodus.

Jesus was certainly no less than those two great men. He was in fact greater than them. So it should be no surprise for us that Matthew and Luke both mention, "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, He was very hungry" (Luke 4:1-2).

Jesus needed to prepare Himself for the job ahead of Him. He needed to draw very close to the Father, and Satan the Devil knew he had one last big chance to do battle with Jesus and to try and defeat Him before He even got started.

At the end of the forty days Jesus was very hungry indeed. Oh, the Devil may have tried tempting Him all along during all those forty days, as His body began to weaken. Mark implies that was the case, as he records that angels came to serve Him, probably giving Him protection from evil demons trying to hurt Him in some way. But at the end of those forty days, when Jesus was really physically weak and so very hungry, Satan himself, personally, came to Jesus to tempt Him to do wrong, to sin, and to sign up for his team against the God in heaven.

The Devil with sarcasm in his voice, said to Jesus, "Now IF you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread."

Actually, the Devil knew very well that Jesus was the Son of God, so it was with a sarcastic voice he said those words, trying to needle Jesus into getting upset at his seeming doubt that He really was God's Son.

Satan hoped Jesus would slip up and angrily abuse His power and authority, and do exactly as the Devil wanted Him to do - make bread to eat, from stones. If He had, it would have all been from the wrong motive under this seductive temptation from the Devil.

Jesus did not fall for this trick from Satan. He knew His Bible, and replied to the Devil by quoting it. He said, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

Satan then took Jesus to Jerusalem and up onto the top of the Temple. As He looked out over the land before Him, Satan once more and said to Him, "IF you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge over you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

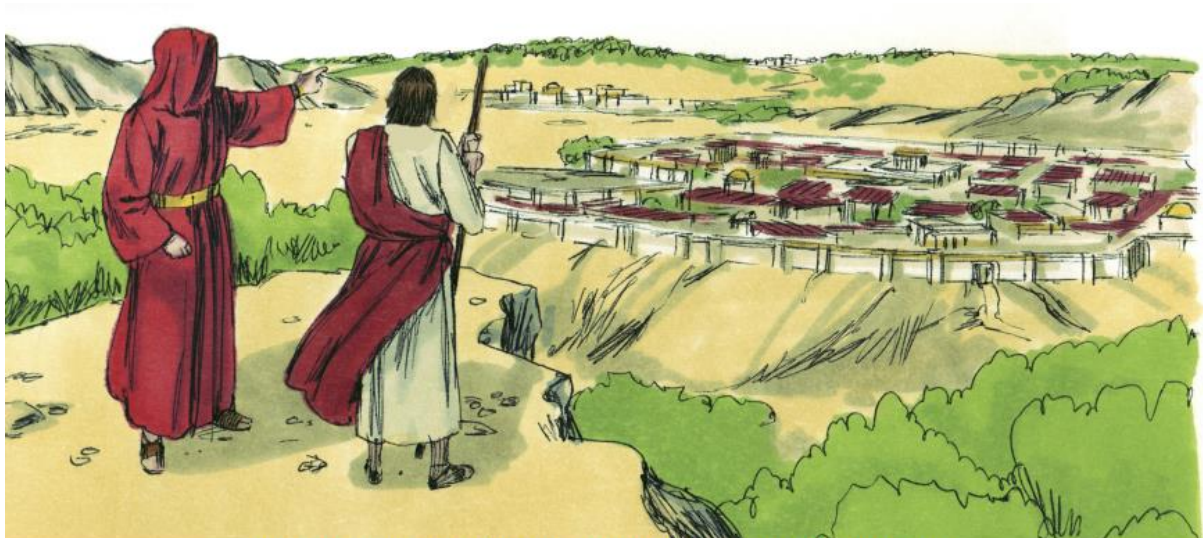
Not only was the Devil still being sarcastic and acting by trying to put doubt into the mind of Jesus by saying, "If you be the Son of God" but he was now even quoting Scripture to tempt Jesus to abuse and play with His power and also the Father's will that there should be no harm or death to His Son before the time appointed.

Jesus knew that no Scripture stood as an island unto itself, but must always be understood in the light of all other Scriptures written through the inspiration of God. So, Jesus, knowing all the other Scriptures, was able to answer the Devil by saying, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' "

It is very true that God can protect us from harm such as falling from a high place, or if in a car accident, but because we know that God can send angels to protect us from physical harm, does not mean we deliberately jump from a ten story building, or stand in front of an oncoming train, to say to God that we want Him to prove He will protect us.

Satan then took Jesus to the top of one of the high mountains around Jerusalem. He could see far off into the distance. His mind knew many kingdoms of different nations and empires were out there in the world, including the great Roman Empire, that ruled much of the known world at that time.

"Ah, see all these mighty kingdoms," said the Devil to Jesus, "Do you see in your mind all the glory they have. Well, if you will come on my side, worship me, and do my will, I will give you control of all the world. You can in this physical life be the greatest world ruler this earth has ever seen."



All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me.

Now, at this temptation, Jesus got righteously angry with Satan. "Get out of here, be gone, Satan," was Jesus' reply to him. "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve' " (Matt. 4:3-11).

With those final words from Jesus, the Devil left Him. For the time being he left Him, for Luke recorded in his Gospel account that Satan departed from Him until an opportune time came once more (Luke 4:13).

We are not told in any of the Gospels that the Devil ever had another opportunity like that, to tempt Jesus to sin, as when He fasted for forty days.

There are sections of the Gospel of John that are very hard, if not impossible, to put into chronological order in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. There is no specific indication as to when exactly they may have taken place during His ministry and years of teaching and preaching, leading up to His death.

Some, who have tried to compile a "harmony" of the Gospels, trying to put it all in chronological order, have placed these sections of John at the very beginning and very early on in the public ministry of Jesus.

We also will do the same. Some from their very nature of events are indeed at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but some others are not so clear that they were.

Jesus' First Disciples

It was the next day after John the baptist had baptized Jesus in the river Jordan. The sun had risen over the desert hills of Judea, the air was clean, the birds were singing their merry songs. John was getting ready to once more proclaim the salvation and the Kingdom of God to the people coming out to hear him speak the words of God. He was reflecting on the preceding day, how he had known somewhat of this one called Jesus, that through the years he had borne witness to how perfect and sinless this man was. He had known there was something special about Him, but yet, not having any direct revelation from God during those years, he was not sure if this Jesus was the Messiah Christ to come.

Then the Lord God had spoken to him and told him that the one whom he would baptize and the one whom he would see the Spirit of God descending like a dove and remaining upon Him, that someone would be the very Son of God, the very promised Messiah.

Oh, John surely knew now who the Anointed One was. And as he was standing and talking to and teaching a few of his disciples, who should walk by but Jesus once again. John noticed Jesus the Christ and said to those within ear distance of him, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Two of John's disciples heard what he had said, and immediately started to follow Jesus. John had taught them that one greater than he was to come, who would be the promised Messiah. The two disciples knew this was the man for John had now clearly pointed Him out to them.

Jesus knew two men were following Him. He turned and said to them, "What do you seek?"

They answering said, "Rabbi (which means Teacher), where are you staying?" To which Jesus replied, "Well, why don't you come with me and see."

They needed no more invitation than that, and so went with Jesus and stayed with Him, as it was about 4 p.m. by the time they arrived where He was lodging for the evening and the night.

One of the two men was called Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and this Peter is well known by those who have read the four Gospels, being an outspoken and forceful man, who became one of the inner twelve disciples chosen by the Lord Jesus, a little later in His ministry.

Andrew was very excited at finding this Christ (which word meant Messiah to them). So excited was he that he just had to run off and find his brother Simon Peter, and not only tell him the good news of their find, but to bring Peter back with him to meet Jesus.

When Jesus sees Simon He knows his basic human character and personality, and says to him, "So you are Simon the son of Jona. You we shall call Cephas (in English we say Peter, and which means, a stone or boulder)."

I'm sure they had lots to talk about with each other that evening. The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He wanted to find a man called Philip and He did find him. And Jesus told him to follow along and be one of His disciples. Philip happened to also be from the same town as Andrew and Peter, the town of Bethsaida (which word means, house or place of fishing), and is situated on the north-east coast of the sea of Galilee. You may want to look it up on a map which some Bibles contain.

Well, Philip ran off to find a friend called Nathaniel, and said to him in an excited joyous voice, "Oh friend, we have found the man whom Moses and the prophets have written about, He is called Jesus, comes from the town of Nazareth, and is the son of the man called Joseph."

Nathaniel, with a slight grin, more like a smirk on his face, answered by saying, "Oh, tell me another one. Can anything good possibly come out of a pip-squeak town like Nazareth?"

"Well, you come and see for yourself then, if you think you have the answers to this whole expectation we are looking for," Philip answered back to him.

Nathaniel was up to that challenge, and so off he went with Philip to see for himself this man called Jesus the Christ.

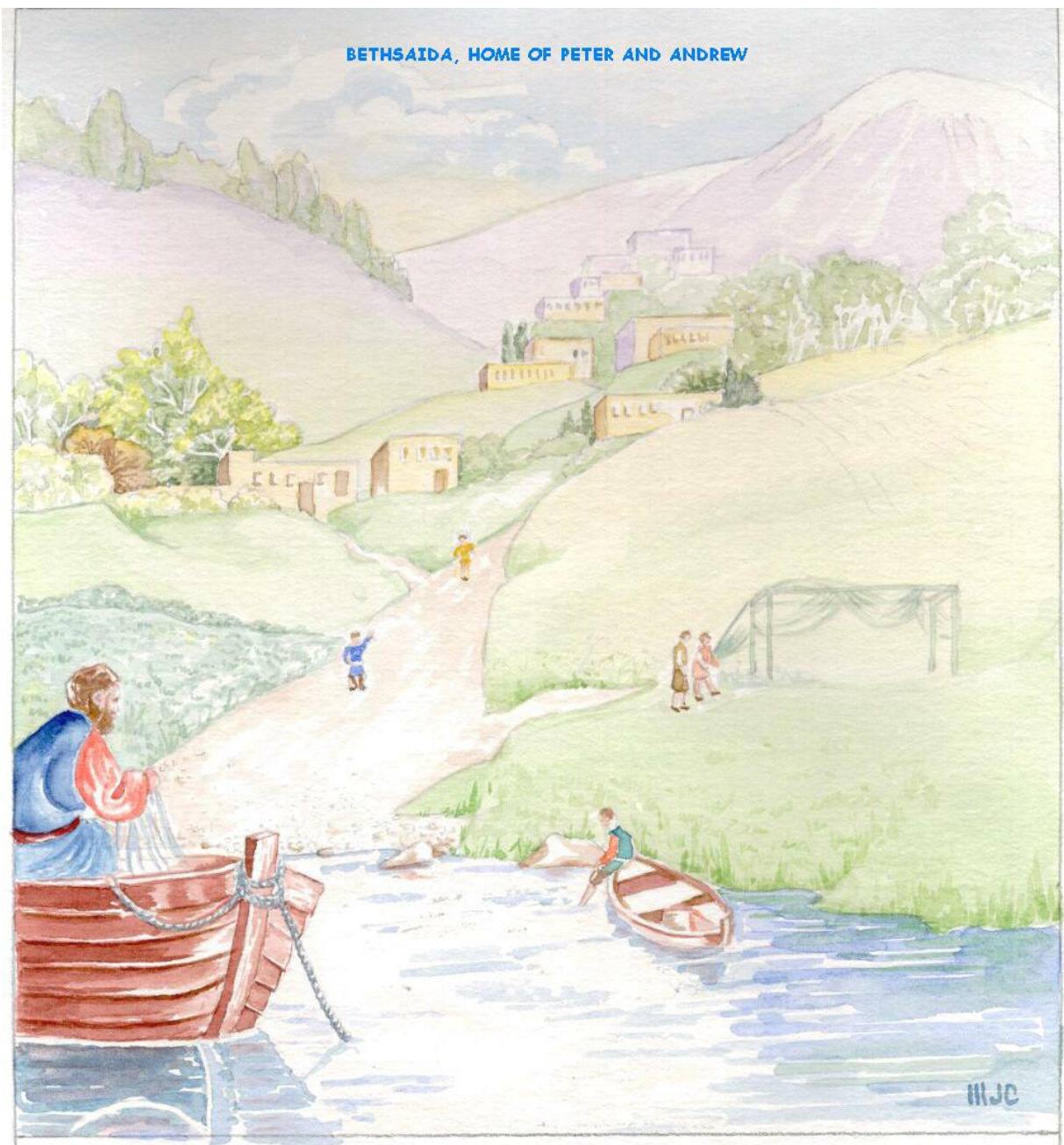
Jesus sees him coming from a little way down the road. He looks intensely at him as he got closer and closer. When within ear shot, Jesus raised His voice and said to Nathaniel, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, and one in whom there is no deceit, an honest man."

"How do you know about me," Nathaniel asked Jesus.

"Oh, I could see you under the fig tree, before Philip came to you," replied Jesus, just astounding Nathaniel even more, for he was very sure that neither of them had ever met or seen each other before this moment.

With wonder and joy in his voice, Nathaniel exclaimed, "Teacher, you are the Son of God - the King of Israel!"

At this faithful statement, Jesus said, "Do you believe all this, believe that I am the Son of God, because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? This is really nothing as to the things you will see. For you will see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down upon the Son of Man."



Jesus was pleasantly surprised that Nathaniel could so quickly come to recognize that He was the Messiah, the Son of the Most High, and related to him the greater wonders he would yet see one day. He would see the angels serving the Son of Man.

That is all that is ever said about what Nathaniel would one day see. When it took place, if it was for Nathaniel's lifetime in the flesh, or for when he shall be in the Kingdom of God, we are not told (John 1:35-51).

Jesus Attends A Wedding And Performs A Miracle

A few days later (according to the continued reading in the Gospel by the apostle John), there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee. Jesus, His mother and His disciples were all invited. And they all went.

A Jewish marriage back in those days could be a very large, festive occasion, often celebrated for a number of days, even up to a week in length. Good wine for all the guests was the common drink, as people came and went, offering their congratulations and best wishes for the bridegroom and his bride.

So many people came to this wedding that all the wine was used up, or as we would say today, "they ran out of wine."

Jesus' mother, knowing of course that He was from God, and had special powers, came quietly to Him and said, "They have no wine." The way she looked at Him and the way she said those words, Jesus knew instantly what His mother was requesting Him to do - miraculously make more wine.

Jesus Himself was not intending to do a public miracle, or make some kind of a big show, at this wedding. He answered His mother by saying, "O woman, this does not concern you and me. My time has not yet come." This meant He did not yet want to go public with His miracle working power.

But, His mother (as mothers often have an inner sense for things) knew He would supply the needed wine. And so she told the servants to do whatever Jesus instructed them to do.

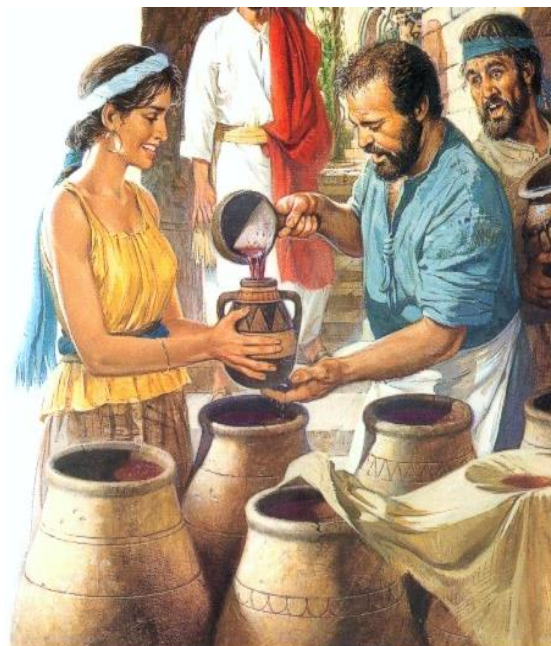
There were six stone water-pots in the area, used for the Jewish ceremonial purposes, and held about twenty to thirty gallons each. Jesus told the servants, "Fill those jars with water." And when they had been filled to the brim, He told them to dip some out and take it to the master of the wedding feast. And the servants did exactly as Jesus told them to do.

When the master of the wedding feast tasted the water (which had been made into wine), not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over saying to him, "Usually a host serves the best wine first, then when everyone is full and has enjoyed the best wine, he brings out the less expensive wines. But you have kept the best until now!"

Jesus not only did an instant water into wine miracle, but "aged" it, as it is called in the wine making trade. The very best wine must age for a long period of time. Some wines that have been bottled for a hundred or so years, are the best, and expensive to buy.

This, John says, was Jesus' first open display of His miraculous power. The servants knew who did this miracle and would have soon whispered it to others, until everyone there would have known it was Jesus who had turned water into the best of wine.

With this miracle, the knowledge that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, was deeper imbedded into the minds of Jesus' disciples.



Turning water into wine at the Cana wedding feast

After the wedding the apostle John tells us that Jesus went to Capernaum for a few days, with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples.

It is more than just interesting, that John puts Jesus' "brothers" and His "disciples" into two distinct and separate groups.

We have evidence from the other Gospel writers also, that Joseph and Mary had biological children, as most married couples hope for when they marry. Jesus had brothers, well they would have been what we term as "half brothers" - all having the same mother (Mary) but not the same father. Joseph was not the father of Jesus, as we have seen, God was His father (John 2:1-12).

CHAPTER 8

JESUS TEACHES ABOUT BEING BORN AGAIN

Jesus Clears Out The Merchants From The Temple

The apostle John early records a Passover that Jesus attended in Jerusalem during His ministry. The Temple in Jerusalem did not only consist of the sanctuary of the "holy place" and "most holy place" (the Temple, as the original Tabernacle in the time of Moses, was divided into two sections), but also had different court-yards around it. It was a very elaborate building indeed. You may want to take time to read about it all in a good Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia.

It was in one of those court-yards of the Temple that Jesus found those who were selling oxen, sheep, pigeons, and such animals and birds used by the people to fulfil the sacrifices that were prescribed by the laws of Moses (see the first chapters of the book of Leviticus) under the Old Covenant.

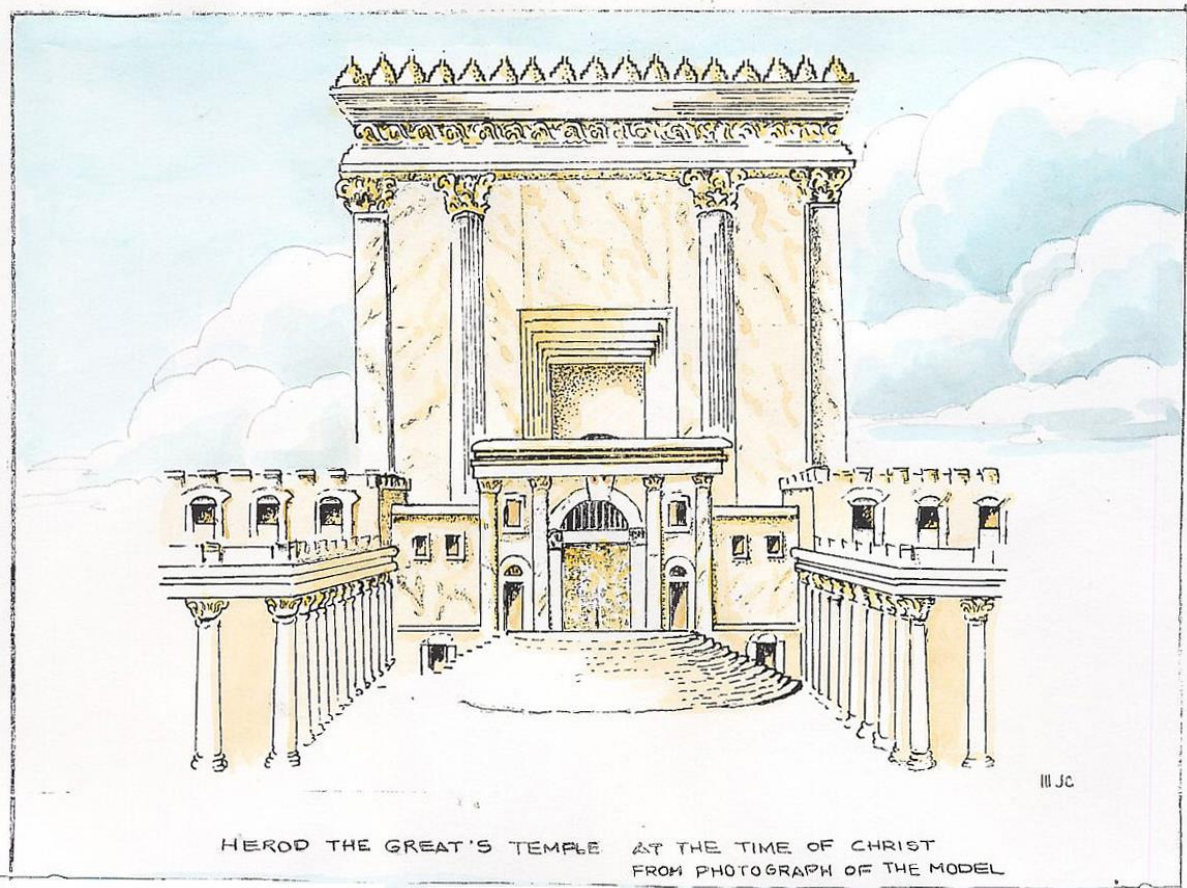
There were also the money-changers who exchanged Roman money for Jewish money, charging extra for their own profit. People who came from different parts of the Roman Empire needed to exchange Roman money into Jewish money so they could offer money to the Temple priests for the service and upkeep of the Temple.

The mindset and character of those selling and exchanging money Jesus knew was far from pure and honorable. They were out to line their own pockets, to rob the people, to cheat them, to simply do a business and take advantage of the pure hearts of the people coming to worship God at the Temple and fulfil the laws of God as given to Israel through Moses.

This is a good illustration that shows God accepted the enlarged Temple structure, because the people as a whole accepted it in their minds, as being and belonging to God and as an extension of the holy Sanctuary proper. This shows that there is a "spirit" of the law that goes beyond the "letter" of the law, which God honors, sometimes even under the Old Covenant.

The original Sanctuary and Temple under Moses and Solomon, only needed to be a tent or building of one structure divided into two parts, a "holy place" and a "most holy place" inside just one fenced area or courtyard. By the time of Christ, the Jews had extended this building to include a number of courtyards. The outer courtyard was where the merchants had set up their market place. To them, and so to God, this was part of the overall Temple of the Lord.

Jesus could see that those merchants were making the very House of God into something it was never intended to become - a merchant market place for profit. His anger grew more and more as He saw what was going on. The Bible says, "Be angry, but sin not." There is a time to become righteously angry. Many passages show that God can and does get righteously angry at times. Yet, it is always righteous anger, without any sin. There are times we must get very upset at sin and wrong doing. This was one of those times for Jesus.



He made a long whip from string cords that came from boxes and packages that were sent to those merchants or that were used to tie up the animals they were selling. Jesus whirling the whip around His head, much like an American cowboy whirls his lariat over his head when roping a steer, drove the animals out of the temple, and threw over the tables of the money-exchangers, the coins rolling all over the place.

As He was doing all this, He raised His voice and exclaimed to those thieving and wrong minded merchants, "Take these things away! You shall not make my Father's house into a house of merchandise and business trade."

The disciples of Jesus, many of them knowing much of what was written in the word of God, remembered the verse where it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me" (Ps. 69:9).

But, most of the Jews and merchants there, were not so perceptive and so spiritually in tune with who the Messiah was or what were the true ways of the Lord. They just looked at Jesus and declared, "Who gave you this authority to do this thing, drive out the merchants from the Temple? What sign will you give us to demonstrate and prove what you have done has the authority of God Himself behind it?"

Jesus answered them by saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Once more the Jews had no idea what He was really speaking about, and thought He was talking about the physical stone building of the Temple they were all standing within. They, laughing at Jesus said, "It has taken forty-six years to build

this Temple, and you say that if it was destroyed you could build it back again in only three days. You must be out of your head, vain and mad, by saying such words."

Jesus was not speaking about the physical Temple in Jerusalem, but was speaking about the temple of His body. The Holy Spirit dwelling in Jesus made His body as like a temple of holiness to God the Father. So it is with anyone who had God dwelling within them (see 2 Cor. 6:16-18).

Jesus was indeed giving them a sign of His power and authority from God. He was foretelling them that one day though the Jews would kill Him, He would rise from the dead after three days. He was foretelling them of His resurrection to life and glory.

His disciples at the time, did not understand fully what Jesus was referring to either. It was only after His resurrection that they remembered those words of His, and clearly understood then what He had told the Jews. All of this of course, after Jesus' resurrection, helped the disciples to believe in no uncertain way, all the Scriptures and all the words that Jesus had spoken during His ministry.

Because of the miraculous signs He did in Jerusalem at this Passover celebration, many people were convinced that He was indeed the Messiah. Well, in an outward kind of manner they were convinced. But Jesus didn't trust them. He could see their deep inner heart and He knew what people were really like, who were not truly connected with God through humble repentance (John 2:13-25).

No one for sure, needed to tell Him about human nature, what it could do and think on the outside surface, but not be that way in the depth of heart, especially when people would get offended by what He would say and teach, and the way He would live. And that is exactly what happened to many, even some of His disciples, later on. They got offended in Him, upset, bewildered, and confused, by things He said, and they walked away from Him.

Though many believed on Him at that Passover, they did not continue to believe on and in Him later on, as we shall see.

Nicodemus Comes To Jesus In The Night

There was a man by the name of Nicodemus, one of the leaders in the Jewish Sanhedrin (a court of the Jews that decided certain civil and religious matters, made up of leaders from the Pharisee and Sadducee denominations, and respected Elders among the Jewish people), and of the Pharisee religious party. He came to Jesus secretly, by night, and confessed, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him. "

You will notice, Nicodemus did not say that they, leaders of the Jews and leaders from his religious party, knew and admitted that Jesus was the very Son of God. What he said was that they knew He was a true teacher of the word of the Lord, that God was with Him.

Yes, secretly, many of the Jewish leaders admitted this among themselves, but would not openly declare it, for they feared losing their followers, who would then follow Jesus, who like John the baptist, made it clear to them that He would not become a member of one of their sects. They knew He was very independent, hence a threat and to them a competition for the support of the people.

Nicodemus at this point in his life, would not come openly, in the day time, to admit this to Jesus, no doubt fearing what the other leaders of the Jews would try to do to him, certainly in a spiritual position way, and maybe even in a physical way. So he came at night, but did admit to Jesus that they knew God was with Him.

Jesus got right down to the foundation and goal of why mankind was put on this earth, and what it would involve for Nicodemus to attain it.

"I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God."

Nicodemus was taken a back by what Jesus said, "What do you mean? How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again? "

You will notice that Nicodemus clearly understood that Jesus was talking about a "birth" - thinking Jesus was meaning that to enter and see the Kingdom of God, a grown person somehow had to re-enter the womb of his mother and be literally born once more.

Jesus was not talking about that kind of physical birth, but it was a birth that He was talking about.

He went on to explain with a physical comparison, exactly what you must become like in order to see and be in the Kingdom of God.

"The truth is, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans give birth to that which is physical but the Spirit gives birth to that which is spirit. Do not get all wide eyed and amazed and try to make what I'm telling you into some theological doctrine of the heart.

For being born again is like this: The wind blows and does things, you can see the effect if may have, even hear it at times as it works among physical objects, but you cannot see the wind, it is invisible to the human eye. So then likewise is everyone who is born of the Spirit."



**Nicodemus comes to Jesus
by night**

The words of Jesus are pretty plain and quite simple. Jesus was telling Nicodemus that to enter this world, you have to be born in this physical world as a physical flesh and blood person.

You have to be conceived and grow in a sack of water in your mother's womb, and after being nourished and growing to a certain physical stage, then the water in the sack breaks and you are born into the world of air breathing flesh and blood creatures. That which is flesh is flesh.

Everyone must first be flesh before they can be later born of the Spirit and become like the wind, invisible to the human eye.

Jesus said that which is born of the Spirit IS spirit, and He likened this Spirit to the wind - invisible but having evidence that humans can relate to as indeed having effects on the physical world around us.³

In John 4:24 Jesus said that God IS Spirit. Many passages in the Bible show that God does have form and shape, that He does have a "body." The last chapters of the book of Revelation tell us that one day God's children will actually see His "face." His body is made of Spirit, not physical flesh, blood, and bone. God lives in a different world, a world of a different dimension. He lives in a "spirit" world that is, unless He chooses to reveal it to the human eye, an invisible world to our vision of our physical eyes.

We know the Bible teaches there are good spirit creatures called "angels" and there are bad and evil spirit creatures called "demons." A few of the chief angels are mentioned by name in the pages of God's word, such as Gabriel, whom we have seen came to Mary to tell her she had been chosen to bear God's Son. Then the chief fallen and sinful spirit creature is mentioned by name also. We know him as being mainly called Satan, or the Devil. We cannot see these spirit creatures unless they either manifest themselves to us as if looking like humans, or if God works a miracle with our eye sight, enabling us to see them, which was granted to a few in the Old Testament (read 2 Kings 6 to see this truth).

The book of Daniel is an interesting book in places. It tells us a little about this basically unseen spirit world that lies all around us. It mentions a few specifics as to what is happening among the "good" spirit creatures and the "bad" spirit creatures that oppose each other.

God is composed of Spirit in His invisible glory form. And those who are to be His literal children, born of Him, who will enter the Kingdom of God, will also be spirit, for as the apostle Paul was inspired to write, "...Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God...." (1 Cor. 15:50). A large part of Paul's fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, is devoted to explaining the "change" that is to come, that must come, to those in whom God dwells (His sons and daughters, see 2 Cor. 6:16) in order to IN-herit, see and enter the Kingdom of God, at the resurrection when the last trumpet sounds (see Matthew 24:30-31).

Jesus was saying the same thing to Nicodemus but in a shorter, nut-shell way. Of course being born of God, born of THE Spirit, means He must come and beget you

³ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Jesus makes plain that which is born of the spirit (born again) IS SPIRIT. You are not born again until you are a spirit being at the resurrection, contrary to the Protestant idea that we are born again when we accept Jesus in this life. Note in John 3:8 that it is the PERSON, not the effects of his conversion, that Jesus compares to the invisible wind that makes this point clear.

When we are converted and baptised we are begotten not born again. We are like the baby in its mother's womb awaiting our spirit birth at the resurrection when we will be completely a spirit being. The Greek word that Jesus used "gennao" can be translated either begotten or born. You can only tell which by the context.

first, making you in this lifetime His child through the indwelling of His nature, or Holy Spirit as the New Testament often calls it. All this means you are converted to His mind and way of thinking and wanting to live by His every word, as Jesus said we should (Matt. 4:4). It means you remain His child to the end of your life. It means no matter what the trials, tests, hardships, problems, no matter what difficulties physically, mentally, or emotionally, that life may bring, you endure and remain His child, loving Him and doing His will to the end, until death.

Then just as a child in its mother's womb has endured, been nourished, grown, and is finally born, so it will be for the child of God. He / she will one day be born of God, born of THE God Spirit, and enter His Kingdom.

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that that was the very purpose as to why mankind was created upon this earth, to be born of the Spirit, to become part of the invisible Spirit world. This is far greater than anything that science-fiction movies have ever thought up.

But old Nicodemus was befuddled by what Christ was telling him. He just could not comprehend it and exclaimed in bewilderment, "How can these things be at all possible?"

"Are you a teacher in Israel?" Jesus answered him, "Is it not your job to read the Scriptures of the Lord, and to come to understand what it says, and you know not these things that I speak about?"

Jesus was telling him that by reading and understanding and believing the Scriptures, he should have already known what He was expounding. Furthermore, Jesus told him, "But if you don't even believe me when I tell you about earthly things such as the wind and what I represented by it, then how can you possibly believe the things going on in heaven? For I know what heaven is truly like, as only I, the Son of Man, have come from heaven to earth, and will return to heaven again."

This last part of Jesus' statement here is very revealing if we will but believe it for what it says. The King James translation of the Bible of 1611 puts it this way: "No man has ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man."

Jesus, of all human beings to ever live and walk this earth, is the only one to have been in heaven. The reality that death is a sleep, and that we do not continue to think and act after death, either in a heaven or a hell, is vividly brought out in a later chapter of the Gospel of John, when we see how Jesus raised a man called Lazarus back to life after being dead for four days.

Jesus continued to tell Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake (Num. 21:9) on a pole in the wilderness, so I, the Son of Man, must be lifted up on a pole, so that everyone who believes in me can have eternal life in the Kingdom of God. "

Here Jesus is telling Nicodemus and all who read this, that He, the Son of Man, was the Messiah, the Anointed One from God, the one who would come from God, live a perfect life, never do any wrong, take all sins of mankind upon Himself, die on a cross, thus forgiving the sins of all those who would believe and accept Him as the Saving Messiah. And in so doing they could have eternal life.

Jesus added yet more, to show and to amplify, the one main purpose that God the Father had when He decided to create the physical human kind:

"For God so loved the world (the people in it) that He gave His only Son, so that all who believe in Him do not have to perish but can have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it, to give people a chance for eternal life. There is no condemning those who trust and have faith in Him. But those who do not have trust in Him are condemning themselves for not believing in the only Son of God.

"Their condemnation is based on this fact: That light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness of sin and wrong-doing more than the light of righteousness, for their actions were evil. They do not like the light because they desire to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light because they fear that the light will expose their sins, and then they would have to make a choice to either live in the light or to live in darkness. But, those who want to do what is right come to the light gladly, so all people can see that they are doing the will of God" (John 3:1-21).

Nicodemus, a religious leader of the Jews, came to Jesus by night, secretly, and to be unseen. He admitted to Jesus that he and others like him, knew He was from God, that God was with Him, but stopped short of saying He was the Son of God, and the saving Messiah to come.

Jesus, got right down to business, hit the nail on the head, pulled no punches, and not only told Nicodemus that He was the Son of God, sent to save and give eternal life to those who would believe on Him, but told him that the main purpose of God, because He had so much love, was to save people to eternal life, not to condemn them to death. Jesus said it was the purpose of God to have people born of Him, born of the Spirit, and so be like Himself, to live in a dimension that was mighty and powerful like the wind was at times, and also invisible to the human eye, as also was the wind.

Jesus told Nicodemus that to be born of the Spirit, would mean you were willing to come to the light of truth and righteousness, to be willing to have your wrongs and sins clearly revealed to you by the light, and to walk in the ways of the Lord God. Such people would then acknowledge that He Jesus, the Christ, was the very Son of God, and would gladly come to the light, so the light could lead and guide them into doing the will of God.

Jesus was teaching Nicodemus the purpose for human existence, and the true and only way to salvation or eternal life.

This was also a kind but corrective rebuke to Nicodemus as he had at this point in his life not yet come to acknowledge that Jesus was the very Son of God, and so was still not yet in the mindset of loving all the light.

It is a lesson everyone of us need to take to our heart and mind. To walk in the light as He (God) is light. Then one day we can be born of the Spirit, and see the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 9

JESUS PREACHES IN SAMARIA

John Exalts Jesus

Jesus and His disciples were once more in the land of Judea, and John was near Salim, also baptizing many people who came to him. He had not yet been put in prison, as later he was (John 3:22-24).

John's followers got into a discussion with a Jew about the rites of some of the purification laws. It must have triggered something in their minds, because they came to John saying, "Teacher, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you gave witness, He is not far away, also baptizing, and many are going to Him. We are confused about where you stand with God and what ministry is left for you to do."

John looked at them in patient understanding at the puzzlement showing on their faces, and explained to them: "No one can do anything that is truly of God unless it comes from and is given to him to do from God. You yourselves heard me say openly to all that I am not the Christ, but that I was sent by God to make and prepare a way before Him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, and his friend, who stands besides him to hear him, rejoices greatly to hear him. So it is that I joy in hearing the voice of the Christ. I am full of joy, so I want you also to be. The Christ must increase in popularity and ministry, while I must decrease.

"He who comes from above, who once lived in heaven with God, is above all, much greater than I. For he who is of the earth and not from heaven, as I am, belongs to the earth, speaks as an earthling. He who comes from heaven is then above all earthly persons. He truly bears witness to that which He has both seen and heard, as He once lived in heaven. Yet few will receive His testimony. But for those who do, they will have set the seal to attest to everyone that God is indeed true to His word and promises.

"The very special one that God has sent utters the pure words of that God. For to Him the Spirit is given not my measure, in bits and pieces, but in its entire fullness. The Father God loves the Son, and all things are committed into His hands. So he who believes in the Son will have eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see eternal life, but will face the wrath and punishment of God " (John 3:25-36).

John The Baptist Put Into Prison

John the Baptist had already told his disciples that the time was very near when he, John, must decrease in his work for God, and the one called Jesus, the Messiah, must increase in His work for the Lord. That time had now come.

John was a very outspoken prophet and minister of the Eternal God. He often called a spade a spade, laid it on the line, put the cards on the table as they say. He was this way with other religious leaders as we have seen. He was this way with even some of the secular rulers of the Government of Rome. He was not afraid to call sin what it was, sin. So disturbed did a few Roman governors get that finally they could stand it no longer, and John was thrown into prison.

Jesus, on hearing this news decided to travel north to Galilee (Matt. 4:12). Jesus had also heard via the grape-vine, that the Pharisee religious party had heard that Jesus was baptizing and getting more popular among the people than John. Jesus Himself did not do the literal baptizing, but He had His disciples doing that for Him, yet it was all under His authority. All this was going to cause much problems for Jesus, way sooner than He wanted or wished. So He decided to leave the area of Judea and go back up north to Galilee. Now, to go from Judea to Galilee you had to pass through an area of land called Samaria.

Jesus Teaches The Samaritan Woman At The Well

The Samaria of Jesus' day was only a relatively small area of Palestine compared to the Samaria in the time of the kings of Israel. You may want to look at the maps in the back of many Bible to compare the Samaria of Jesus' day with that of the time of the kings of Israel and Judah under what we call the Old Testament of the Bible. There is a huge difference.

For Jesus to go north and get back to Galilee He had to walk through this small land area called Samaria (John 4:1-4). In Samaria lived a people known as Samaritans who were looked upon by the Jews. Jewish scholar Hayyim Schauss in his book "The Jewish Festivals" has this to say about the Samaritans:

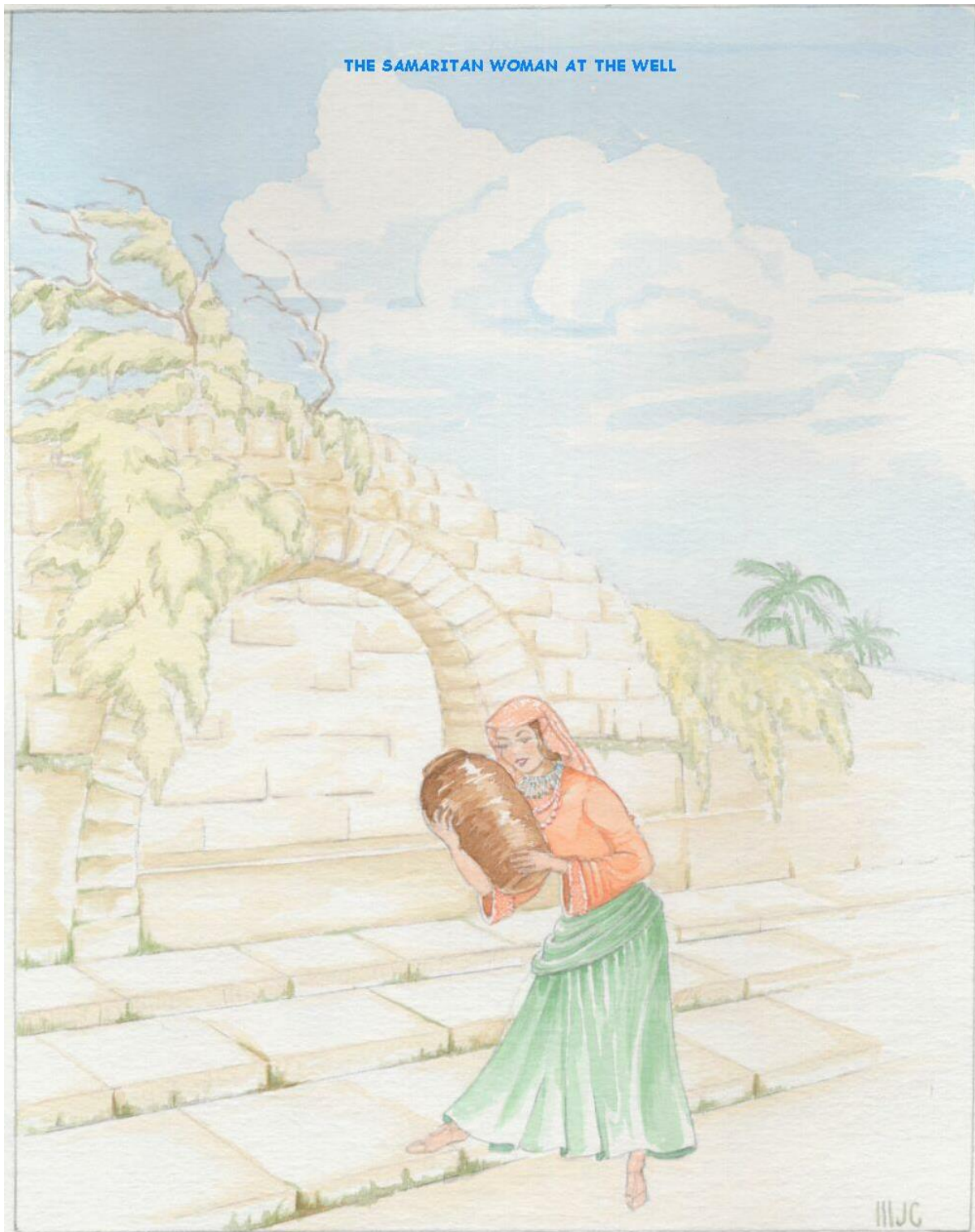
Modern historical research has proved that the Samaritans are not descendants of the heathen colonists settled in the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the conquerors of Samaria, as was once assumed. Nor are they to be identified with Nehemiah's opponents of the Persian period.

Actually, the Samaritans of today are a small and poor remnant of an old and great Jewish sect that appeared in Palestine about the beginning of the Greek period. They form the oldest Jewish sect in existence.

They were always strongly religious Jews who believed in one God and strictly observed the Law of Moses....they never recognized the books beyond Joshua as holy. Moreover, they denied the sanctity of Jerusalem. They believed that Shechem, the present Nablus, was the holy city and that the holy mountain was not Zion, but Mount Gerizim. They built a temple on top of that mountain.....the Samaritans and the Jews became blood-enemies who hated and despised each other, just as in later years the Karaites and the rabbinic Jews hated each other.

They looked for a coming Messiah from God, but some of their basic religious teachings (such as having their own Temple and priesthood) was so far from what the Jews in Judea and Jerusalem taught, that the religious Jews of Judea and the rest of Palestine, hated them with a passion, and would have nothing to do with them.

When you also understand how most Jewish women were treated and looked upon by many of the Jewish religious teachers of the day, as kind of second class citizens, undeserving of much if any attention when it came to religious matters, then what the apostle John relates to us about Jesus meeting with and talking "religion" to this Samaritan woman at a well, is all that more amazing. What He did was certainly amazing to His disciples, as they had grown up in a Jewish religious world that was many times far removed from that which was really of God.



Jesus came to a city of Samaria called Sychar. It was near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph many centuries earlier. There was a water well there called "Jacob's well."

Jesus was getting very tired from walking and sat down to rest beside this well. It was nearing the hottest part of the day, about noon. With the sun blazing down from above, the coolness of the well, the thought of a nice cold drink, was very appealing to Jesus.

At the same time up walks a woman from Samaria to collect water from the well in her container. Jesus' disciples had all gone to the city to buy food. He had no container to drop down into the well and retrieve any water.

"I would like you to give me a drink please," said Jesus to the woman. With utter astonishment the woman replied, "How on earth is it that you being a Jew, talk and ask me for a drink, when you know I'm a Samaritan woman?"

John informs his readers that the Jews had no dealings whatsoever with Samaritans (John 4:5-9).

Jesus now started on what would be a religious conversation that would lead to great results over the next two days.

"If you knew the very gift of God that sits before you, and who it actually is that is talking to you and asking you for a drink of physical water, it would be you who would be asking Him for the living water that He could give you."

The woman again looked at Jesus in amazement and said, "Sir, you speak strangely, for you have no container to draw water from the well which is very deep, so how could you possibly get any what you call living water from it? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his cattle?"

"Oh, everyone who drinks of this water," said Jesus, "shall thirst once more, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give them will never thirst. The water that I give will become like a spring of water welling up and flowing constantly to eternal life."

The woman still not getting that Jesus was speaking about spiritual matters, the Holy Spirit, living spirit water remaining and flowing within the believer, was eager to have some kind of physical miracle, and so replied, "Sir, please give me this water, that will make me never thirst again, and never have to come to this deep well to draw out water. It is hard on my back and arms to have to do this daily physical chore."

Jesus knew she was not getting the insight of the true message He was conveying to her. So He tried another approach.

"Go, call your husband, and come back here," Jesus requested. "But I have no husband, " replied the woman.

"That is very true," responded Jesus, "for you have had five husbands, and the one you are now with is not your husband, so in saying you have no husband you have answered correctly indeed."

"I surely perceive you are a prophet," said the woman, and then continued with, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; and you Jews say that the main city to worship God at is Jerusalem. "

"Well lady," Jesus replied, "I can tell you this. The hour is coming when you will not worship the Father either on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. The hour is coming and even now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth,

for that is the kind of people the Father is looking for to worship Him. God is spirit not flesh and blood, and so those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth."

Jesus was here referring to the time that was to come when the armies of Rome under Titus would invade Palestine in 70 A.D., destroy Jerusalem and other places and scatter the Jews, so no organized worship of God in some central location would take place anywhere in that land. Then also Jesus was making a lesson that certain physical things in the worship of God really meant nothing to the Father unless the heart was right with Him. Outward ceremony even in a place that God could approve of was useless if the inner heart was not acceptable to Him.

"I know the Messiah is coming, he who is called the Christ. When he comes, he will be able to tell us all things, as you seem to be able to do," the Samaritan woman said confidently, but with a questioning mind as she looked at this man she had called a prophet.

"I who speak to you am this Messiah," Jesus said kindly but firmly to her.

It was at this point, before she could answer or say anything about what Jesus had just told her, that the disciples returned from the city and stood there in shock to see Jesus talking to a woman in private, and a Samaritan woman at that. They were shocked but none was willing to question Jesus as to the reason why. The woman knew what was going through the minds of these other men and so quickly ran off back to the town, leaving her water jar behind. She was too excited and amazed by the whole event to worry about a water pot.

The only thing on her mind was to get back to town so she could tell as many people as would listen, about a man who told her all that she had ever done. She asked them if it was possible that this was the Messiah to come. She told them to go and see for themselves, and many of them did head out of the city to see the man she was telling them about (John 4:10-30).

Meanwhile, as all this was happening in the city, Jesus' disciples were asking Him to eat of the food they had brought to Him. "I have food to eat of which you know nothing of," was Jesus' reply to them.

"Who has brought Him food while we were gone?" said some disciples to others.

Jesus then told them exactly what He was meaning. "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing the work He sent me to do. Do you think harvesting will not start until the summer is over, four months from now? Take a look around you! There are vast fields ripening before your eyes, and are ready for harvesting at this present time.

"The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. I'm not talking about fruits from trees and vines. There is great joy for both the planter and the harvester. You know what they say, 'One person's plants and another person harvests.' That saying is very true, for I'm sending you to harvest where you did not plant; others had already done that work, and you will gather the harvest."

For centuries God had sent His servants to teach and preach His word to the people of Israel. Before Jesus came to do the work of God, there was John the baptist and

his disciples preparing the hearts of the people for Jesus' disciples to reap what had already been planted in their hearts. It was a spiritual harvest of food that Jesus talking about, as the main and most important food to eat and to get busy harvesting.

The Spiritual Harvest In Samaria

The apostle John in his Gospel tells us that many Samaritans from the city the woman came from, believed her testimony that the man she had encountered at the well did tell her things in her life that were very true. Many went out to Jesus and asked Him to stay in that town with them and expound more things to them about God and His word. Jesus indeed did do so and stayed with them for two days.

Because their hearts and minds were receptive to be instructed and taught the truths of God, many more believed the words of Jesus.

They privately told the woman who first talked to Jesus at the water well, this: "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard from Him ourselves, and we know that this man is indeed the Savior of the world, the promised Messiah, that God in His word said would one day come to this earth."

After the second day of being with the Samaritans Jesus departed and headed for Galilee. He did not go to His own town or neighborhood for He had said that a true prophet of God is seldom accepted and given honor by those who knew him running around, going to school, and growing up in their community.

When it comes to the true religion of God and someone boldly teaching and preaching it, this is so very true. Many communities will praise and honor a local person who gets fame, makes it big time, in say, the movie industry, or singing or music arts, or professional sports. But teaching the truths of God, that call for personal repentance and a change of life to conform to the will of God, that is a whole new ball game, and most who have known this person from a child, in the local community, will not give much honor to them.

Especially was this true of Jesus' community, for Jesus was also preaching that He was the Messiah, the Son of man, and even the Son of God. Those who had seen Mary and Joseph bring this Jesus child home with them from Jerusalem, and had lived around them for years, just could not accept Him as the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

Jesus was able to harvest a spiritual people into the Kingdom of God from many parts of Palestine, and the area of Samaria, but not so from His own area and town where He grew up as a boy and young man.

An Official's Son Is Healed in Galilee

Arriving once more in Cana of Galilee, where He had made the water into wine at the wedding feast, an official of some sort from Capernaum came and begged Jesus to come and heal his son, who was at the point of death (John 4:46-47).

Jesus a little disconcerted because the man wanted Him to literally go to Capernaum and do a miracle over the sick body of his son, said to him, "Unless you see some physical signs and wonders from my hands, you just will not have faith to simply believe my words."

The man's mind just did not really hear Jesus' words, but he said once again to Him, "Sir, come to my city before my child dies. "

Jesus answered him by saying, "Go back home, your son will live. "These words did get through to the official, and he believed them. So he started on the journey back to his town. Before he arrived, his servants came out to meet him, and told him that his son was alive and well. He inquired of them as to the time when his son recovered from near death.

"Well it was at the seventh hour yesterday when the fever left him, " said his servants. With that information the father knew that that was the exact hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." The official and all his household believed that this man called Jesus was from God and very special.

John tells us that this miracle was the second sign that Jesus did when He had come from Judea to Galilee (John 4:48-54).

Jesus had returned to Galilee with great power from the Spirit. Much report went out concerning Him into all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being well received and praised and glorified by all (Luke 4:14-15).

CHAPTER 10

JESUS RETURNS TO NAZARETH AND IS REJECTED

Jesus was a regular Sabbath synagogue attender, and on returning to His home town Nazareth, where He spent much of His childhood, He naturally went to church on the Sabbath day.

Part of the service was to always have someone read from the Scriptures. Jesus stood and all knew He was willing and wanting to read from God's holy word. He was handed the book of Isaiah, the ancient prophet. Jesus opened the book and deliberately found a certain passage⁴, and He began to read:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and to give sight to the blind, to set at rest and peace those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

He then stopped reading, closed the book and sat down. How He read those words must have caught the attention of every single person in the building, for it is stated that all eyes were fixed on Him. If they thought His presence and voice was dynamic, they certainly were not expecting His next words to them.

"Today this very Scripture has been fulfilled right in your sight and your hearing."

They really did not quite "get it" - they all continued to speak well of Him and wondered at the eloquent words coming from His lips.

Then they began to mutter among themselves, "Isn't this young fellow the son of Joseph. "And by that they were meaning to say that Jesus was just the son of a tradesman, a carpenter, not the son of some prince, or king, or prestigious rich person who could have been given some expensive and honored education in the top Universities within the lands of the Roman Empire.

Jesus knew their thoughts, how they were thinking He could amount to no great acclaim, for to them He was just a "nobody" like themselves.

Christ answered them, "Doubtless you will quote to me the proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did over in Capernaum, well do here also in your own place of upbringing.' "

He went on speaking, "It is a truth that no prophet is acceptable in his own home land. I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up for three years and six months, when there was a great famine in all the land. And Elijah was sent to none of them but only to one widow of Zarephath in the land of Sion. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

⁴ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Other scholars note that there was a scripture roster system and that God may have worked it out that they were up to this exact passage when Jesus was invited to read the scriptures that sabbath.

Oh, they got the message now alright. He was now telling them that many who should have "been with it" and should have had God with them, were out in left field, sat on the grass eating their lunch, when they should have been part of the big ball game, and playing on the winning team, on the team where the only true Holy God was captain, and Jesus as His vice-captain. If they had been spiritually mature and ready to join that team then miracles would have happened to them as it did to that one widow and to Naaman the Syrian. Jesus was telling them they just were not alert and driving in the drivers seat, but were curled up in the back seat, sleeping.

Oh, yes, they got the picture this time, and were they ever white hot with anger. So full of wrath they were that they pushed Him along out of the city, to a brow of the hill that the city was built on. There they were planning to actually throw Him down head-first, with a possible result being death. They were ready to kill Him.

Jesus must have looked at them at this point in such a way, and with the very power of the Spirit of God flowing from Him, they were stunned. Just could not move, could not bring themselves to throw Him down the cliff. Jesus, we are told, simply walked through the middle of the crowd and went His way (Luke 4:16-30).

Jesus Returns to Galilee Again

Jesus then left Nazareth and went to Capernaum by the seaside, which was in the territory of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali when those tribes lived there before they were deported by the Assyrians way back in about 720 B.C.

This was actually a fulfillment of that written about by Isaiah, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, towards the east, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles - the people who lived in darkness have come to see a wonderful light, and for those who sat in the place and in the shadow of death, light has dawned upon them " (Isaiah 9:1-3).

This is another instance that makes prophecy interesting to say the least. For as you read Isaiah 9, not many would gather from it that it would have a fulfillment in this account of Jesus going to stay there as recorded by the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 4:12-16).

It was from that time forth that Christ really began to proclaim, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14,15).

Peter, Andrew, James, John, Are Officially Called To Jesus' Ministry, After A Great Catch Of Fish

Jesus had already been with some of the men who would now be called by Him to follow Him on a constant basis during His ministry. We have seen this in past chapters.

There was a time of overlapping of the ministry of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus. Jesus had been out here and there, getting His feet wet as we might say, easing into the main full time work that was now ahead of Him. He had, on some of those occasions taken along a number of men, all whom we could classify as "His disciples."

Now, it was time for picking ones whom He wanted to follow Him on a daily basis, as a way of life with Him, until the time for His death.

The Gospel writer that covers this account in-depth is Luke. He takes eleven verses to fill us in on the details of these four men (Peter, Andrew, James and John) being called from their normal secular work jobs to full time in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus was by the Lake of Gennesaret (also known as the Sea of Galilee). He was preaching to them the word of God. The crowd grew and grew, until they were pressing all around Him. He saw two boats, empty, for the fishermen were washing their nets on the shore. Jesus climbs into one, which belonged to Peter, and asked him to move it out, away from the shore. Now He could teach the people and not have them pressing too close to Him.

After the teaching session, Jesus asked Peter (and it would seem Andrew his brother was with him, if we look at the other Gospel writers) to pull further out into the water. This they were glad to do as they could cast their nets out to pull in some fish. Not far away was another fishing boat with James and John, also two brothers, and with them was their father Zebedee. They were fishing partners with Peter and Andrew.

Peter was not sure if he really wanted to cast out his net for they had worked all night and had caught not one fish. Jesus said, "Go out into the deep and put down your nets for a catch."

"Well....okay," said Peter, "For you we will do so, but I do not see the point of all this, for we got nothing all night long. "

It was not long before Peter's face turned into a look of astonishment. The catch of fish was so great the nets were breaking. So Peter called on their friends and fellow fishermen, James and John, in the boat nearby, to come and help them. The help was given and both boats were filled so full with fish that they were close to sinking.

Simon Peter was so awe stuck at all this, he knew he was in the presence of God in the flesh, Immanuel, and that hit him like a plank of wood between the eyes, that he, Simon Peter, was a sinner. He cried out for Jesus to leave Him, saying, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man."



Peter, Andrew, James and John are astonished by the catch of fish before Jesus tells them they would become fishers of men.

All the men that were there were just as astonished. But all this was done to teach those men something much more permanent in nature. Something of far more important value than catching mere physical fish. Jesus said to Peter and the others, "Do not be afraid; from this time forth you will be catching men."

Of course Christ was meaning that their new job was to catch or bring people into the spiritual family of God, into the Kingdom of God, by proclaiming the Gospel of salvation.

Jesus now beckoned those four men to put away being fishermen and to be with Him and be one of His full time disciples. They immediately obeyed and went with Him. Zebedee (the father of James and John) and some hired hands were not called to go with Jesus, they stayed and presumably continued the fishing partnership and business, but without Peter, Andrew, James and John (Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20).

Teaching In Capernaum

Back to Capernaum goes Jesus, and on the Sabbath day He immediately goes to the synagogue and teaches. They were, it is written, astonished at His teaching and His words, for they knew He was teaching them as one having authority, being very sure of Himself, and that what He taught was the very truth of God. This was indeed different to them, for the scribes taught in no such way, for they were not at all sure many times as to what the Scriptures taught or said, or how to understand them (Mark 1:21-22).

Jesus Heals A Man With A Demon

As He was teaching in the synagogue there came up to Him a man possessed with a demon. "Ah, why are you having anything to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" the demon cried out in a loud voice through the man. "I know who you are, others may not, but I sure know who you are. You are the Holy One of God," the demon cried out further.

"Be quiet, and come out of him," answered Jesus.

The demon threw the man to the ground, but did not hurt him. Then the demon came out of him as Jesus had commanded.

The people around were all shocked with amazement. "What is this word He speaks? For with authority and with power He commands the evil spirits, and they come out of people." So, the report of the mighty words and powerful acts of Jesus spread into all the surrounding regions (Luke 4:33-37).

Jesus Heals Peter's Mother-In-Law And Others

After the synagogue meeting was over Jesus was invited over to the house of Peter and Andrew. James and John were invited to come also. There in the house was Peter's mother-in-law, who was very sick with a fever.

He came in and took her by the hand, so lifting her up, and the fever immediately left her. She was now able to serve them and provide them with physical food for a good Sabbath meal. Yes, others may have been able to have done all that, but Jesus

wanted this relatively small sickness that this lady had to be gone from her, so she could also enjoy a fine Sabbath meal with them. It was a small kindness miracle that Jesus did, somewhat like when He turned water into wine at the wedding feast we read about earlier.

When evening had come, and the sun was setting, many brought friends and relatives who had various sicknesses, to Him to be healed.

You will notice, this large work of healing was not done on the Sabbath, but after the Sabbath was over, when the sun was setting and the evening had come. Jesus did a few Sabbath healing, but the large numerous healings were not on the Sabbath day. It took much effort and work and strength out of Jesus, after doing healing upon healing. Jesus would often have to go away by Himself into the hills to refresh Himself after spending hours healing people. Such hard continuous work was clearly not what He wanted to do during the Sabbath hours.

At this healing session many demons came out of people crying, "You are the Son of God." Yet, He rebuked them and told them not to speak, because they knew He was the very Christ.

For some reason, known perhaps only to Jesus, He did not want this truth of Him being the Son of God shouted around. At this particular time Jesus had a reason, although we are not told what it was or why He told the demons to be silent with those words.

Preaching In Other Cities

The next day, very early, Jesus was up and away to a lonely spot where He could pray and meditate. But the solitude was not to last long, as the people discovered where He had gone. They would have kept Him there to continue to heal every kind of disease, sickness, pain, and the paralytics, the epileptics and those troubled with demons. His fame was spreading like wild-fire, even into the land of Syria as well as all over Palestine.

Simon Peter and many other of His disciples came to Him and told Him that everyone in that local area was searching for Him. At the hearing of this, Jesus said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach the good news of the Kingdom of God there also; for that is why I am here, that is my job and commission given to me of the Father."

And He went throughout Galilee, teaching and preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons (Matt. 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44).

Cleansing A Leper

Coming from the secluded mountain spot and moving on to the next town, great crowds of people were following Him, and out of the crowd a man suffering from the disease of leprosy (a terrible skin disease that can easily be passed on to others, hence most people kept far away from those with that sickness) fell before Him on his knees and cried out, "If you will, you can make me whole and clean."

Jesus looked upon him with great pity, stretched out His hand and touched him (no one would ever touch a leper as they knew they would likely come down with the

same disease), and answered him said, "I will make you whole. Be indeed clean." And immediately the leprosy disappeared from his skin.

Jesus, in sending him away, charged him to tell no person what had happened to him, and added, ".....but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."

Christ was very respectful of all the word of God and knowing that the Old Covenant had not yet in an official way been replaced by the New Covenant, He expected people to abide by all the laws and commandments, even the physical ceremonial ones that had to do with offerings to be given through the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem, concerning after being made clean from certain diseases.

CHAPTER 11

JESUS AT HOME

Certainly the Gospels show and record that Jesus was a wandering preacher, moving about all over the Holy Land. It is also recorded that at times He really did not know where He was going to rest and sleep for the night, and there were probably many times He and His disciples slept under the stars during the warmer parts of the year..

While all the above is true, there is recorded for us an interesting verse in the Gospel of Mark. We read in chapter two, and verse one, "And when He was come to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was AT HOME. "

Mark does not say He was in the home of a friend, or relative, or in the home of one of His disciples. Mark says He "was at home." A phrase that within the context of words around it, would indicate this home was Jesus' home.

And coming from a background of the carpenter trade, it should not take us by surprise that either with Joseph (His earthly step-father) and/or with His other brothers, they built a house for themselves, or specifically for Jesus, at some point in past time.

Mark puts it in such language that indicates this was Jesus' home at Capernaum. And while "at home" we have the story that follows, which contains certainly one large important truth Jesus was again revealing to the masses and to the religious leaders of the day.

Jesus Heals A Paralytic And Forgives Sin

We shall let Luke tells us the story, found in his fifth chapter. Jesus was teaching (as we have seen, at home in Capernaum), and some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every town of Galilee and Judea, even from the city of Jerusalem itself.

Some men carrying a man on a bed, one who was paralyzed, came to the house hoping to bring the paralytic to Jesus for healing. Yet there was such a large crowd of people in the house and door-ways, it was impossible to get through to where Jesus was. But, they were not about to give up that quickly. One of the men suggested they go up on the roof top (the houses were built with flat roofs in the Holy Land in those days), remove some tiles and let the paralyzed man on his bed down to Jesus from the roof top. The others all thought this was an excellent idea and so proceeded to follow that suggestion.

Imagine the scene. First, a whole appears in the roof, all look up, and secondly, behold down comes a bed with a paralyzed man laying on it. It would seem Jesus (and probably all the other people present) knew exactly what they wanted done. He perceived they had much faith. He looks at the paralytic and says, "Man, your sins are forgiven you. "



Lowering the paralytic man through the roof of Jesus' house

Sometimes in the foolishness of our mind we may do a silly or dare-devil physical act (that God would not have wanted us to do) and it sometimes ends in the physical breaking of our body in some form. Whatever this man had done to bring about his paralyzation, Jesus knew it was a sin (not revealed to us exactly what or when or how), and told him He would forgive that sin. Now, other examples in the Gospels show us that not all bad physical problems that happen to us are the result of some sin we do, but there are times it could be.

This is a case of where Jesus knew the man's physical problem was the result of some foolish physical sin he had done. In the most part God does not inflict us with physical ailments when we sin in mind, thought, or word. If He did then most of us would be crippled a thousand times over. But there are times God allows some of our foolish physical actions to move in dire results.

He may not always step in and prevent the tragic end result of our physical errors. Jesus forgave the sins of this man and was willing to heal his physical body.

Well, at those words by Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees looked at each other in shock and anger, saying among themselves, "Who can forgive sins but God only?"

Jesus knew what they were saying. He could read their hearts and the looks on their faces.

"Why do you question in your hearts," said Jesus to them, "which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But I said it the way I said it so you may know the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. "

Now, the scribes and Pharisees were correct in thinking that only God can forgive sins in the strictest sense, and certainly in any healing where sins are to be forgiven.

Jesus was again showing and proving to them and all the people standing by, that He was God in the flesh, that He was the Immanuel (God with us) that was promised to come by the prophet Isaiah. He was showing them that as God in the flesh, He did have authority to forgive sins. He was teaching them that He was part of the Elohim (a singular God with a plural form) they all knew about in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus once more turned to the paralyzed man and said, "I say to you, pick up your bed (in those times people's beds were often a roll up type mattress) and go home."

Immediately the man rose up and departed, glorifying God as he went his way. Needless to say the crowd was just amazed, filled with awe, and praising God they said, "We have seen strange yet wonderful things today" (Luke 5:17-26).

Levi (Matthew), A Tax Collector, Is Called To Be A Disciple

Jesus left the home and went again besides the sea, where even more of a crowd gathered around him. And He taught them many things about the Kingdom of God. He was walking along a little while later and He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus (this is he that was called Matthew and the one whom we believe wrote the Gospel of Matthew), sitting at the table of the tax gathering office, and He said to him, "I want you to come and follow me."

We are not told any "behinds the scene" details as to whether Levi knew Jesus from some other time before. Whatever the case may have been, Matthew immediately rose up and went with Jesus. The place they were going to was Matthew's very own house. It would seem Jesus had no hesitation at times in inviting Himself over to certain individual's homes, and enjoying a meal with them and others. This we must look upon as not being "forward" or "ill-mannered" but in the context of doing the work of God, teaching people the truths of God, calling disciples to follow Him. It was often the way Jesus did things, and nobody it seems got offended at that way.

Now, some did get offended by the company of persons Jesus did allow to be around Him when in someone's home. This was the case here while in Levi's home enjoying a meal, teaching and relaxing.

Mark, in his Gospel says, many "sinners" and other tax collectors were present (they weren't liked at all by the Jews for they collected taxes for the Roman Government). The word "sinners" is used often in the Gospels to refer to "sexually immoral" people, and especially to women who sold their bodies to men for sexual gratification.

Well, when the Scribes (writers of the books of God as we have in the OT) and the Pharisees (leaders of the popular common religious party bearing that name) saw Jesus keeping company with such people they looked down their nose and got quite indignant about the whole scene. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" they asked of Jesus.

Jesus gave them an answer that they could not but clearly understand what He was meaning. "Those who are well and healthy do not need to go to a doctor, but it is those who are sick who need the help of a doctor," Christ first said to them, and concluded with, "I have come to do a work not among those who are spiritually righteous and healthy, but among those who know they are sinners" (Mark 2:13-17).

Jesus was certainly not intending to mean that He thought the Scribes and Pharisee leaders were righteously healthy, for other parts of the Gospels make it very clear He thought nothing of the kind about them. We will see some pretty plain words later that Jesus used to tell them where He thought they stood when it came to spirituality.

What He said to them here was with tongue in cheek. The scribes and Pharisees could not see their sins and lack of true spirituality, but many others could see their own sins, such as sexually immoral persons and tax collectors (who often cheated the people through power of authority and with fear tactics, and gained more taxes than required by the law, pocketing it and becoming quite wealthy).

Jesus, was telling those self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, He was concerned with, and was there to serve and help, those who could see their sins and wanted spiritual healing. Those who could not, but thought they were spiritually fine and dandy, He could not help.

We must all come to see that no matter how "righteous" we may be in the eyes of the society we live in, and our own standards of life, that we still have sins, that we are sinners in the light of the perfect holiness of God.

Jesus Talks About Fasting

Many people at large knew some who were either disciples of John the Baptist or disciples of the Pharisee sect. They knew that disciples of both often fasted (going without food and water for a day or even many days). For years they had seen and heard of those disciples setting one or more days aside to devote to pray, study, meditation, on the things of God. But, in observing Jesus' disciples for maybe months, they could never see, nor did they hear about, any of His disciples ever fasting for any length of time.

Finally, some were just so bewildered by it all they had to ask Jesus about it, that is, why His disciples did not fast, while other disciples from other religious leaders did fast. Jesus gave His answer as found in the Gospel of Luke.

"Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then after that they will fast. No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it as a patch on an old garment; if he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does the new wine will, as it ferments, burst the skins and it will all spill out, and the skins will be useless. But new wine must be put into new wineskins. Further, no one after drinking old wine desires to drink new wine, for he will usually say, 'The old tastes better' " (Luke 5:33-39).

Fasting is done to draw close to God, to really put aside all physical things like work, play, preparing and eating food, and to devote all the time to getting as spiritually close to God as can be humanly possible. Fasting is to learn from God through His word, through pray, through meditating on His word, and letting the Spirit of the Lord teach and guide you.

With Jesus being God in the flesh, the Immanuel, the perfect teacher, the one to set the perfect example of human holiness through the Spirit, and as He was also there right in their midst, they were as close to Him, to God, as could be expected and

desired for in this physical life. Jesus' disciples had no need to fast to get spiritually close to and in tune with God. He was already close to them, and all the help, all the teaching, all the answers to their questions, was there rubbing shoulders so to speak, with them.

Fasting, under those circumstances was not a correct or needed mixture for spiritual insight. The old way of getting close to God was not needed while the new way and perfect example of spirituality, was living, walking, and talking among His close disciples.

As Jesus had said to them, fasting is also a time for serious mindedness and it has some inner sadness to it, not that that is not a good thing at times, for such can and should produce spiritual growth and joy. But having Jesus with them was like being at a wedding. It was a time to live with physical (and of course mental) happiness and excitement, enjoying the day and hour that belonged to the bridegroom.

For Jesus' disciples it was not a time to wander off by one's self, leaving Him behind, heading for the wilderness to fast in order to get insight and teaching from God, for God was right there with them in the flesh, in the form of Jesus Christ, to teach and bring them insights from the Father in heaven.

Jesus would not always be physically in their midst. One day He would return to heaven. After that day, then fasting for His disciples would be once more important as a method to draw close to God, to learn of Him, to be corrected and taught by Him through the Spirit. Until then, fasting for Jesus' disciples was not needed as the perfect new way was so very close to them, hence the purpose for fasting was quite redundant and unnecessary for those who were Jesus' close disciples.

Jesus Heals A Man On The Sabbath And Encounters Trouble From Religious Leaders

There was in the city of Jerusalem by the sheep gate a famous pool of water, called in the Hebrew language "Bethesda" which means "house of grace." It had a roof with five porches, giving ample protection from the heat of the sun and yet easy access to the pool itself.

This pool was indeed a gracious place, for when the waters moved, miraculously at times, and the invalids, blind, lame, and paralyzed, got into the water, they were healed. God, through this water miracle, was granting physical healings to some of the people.

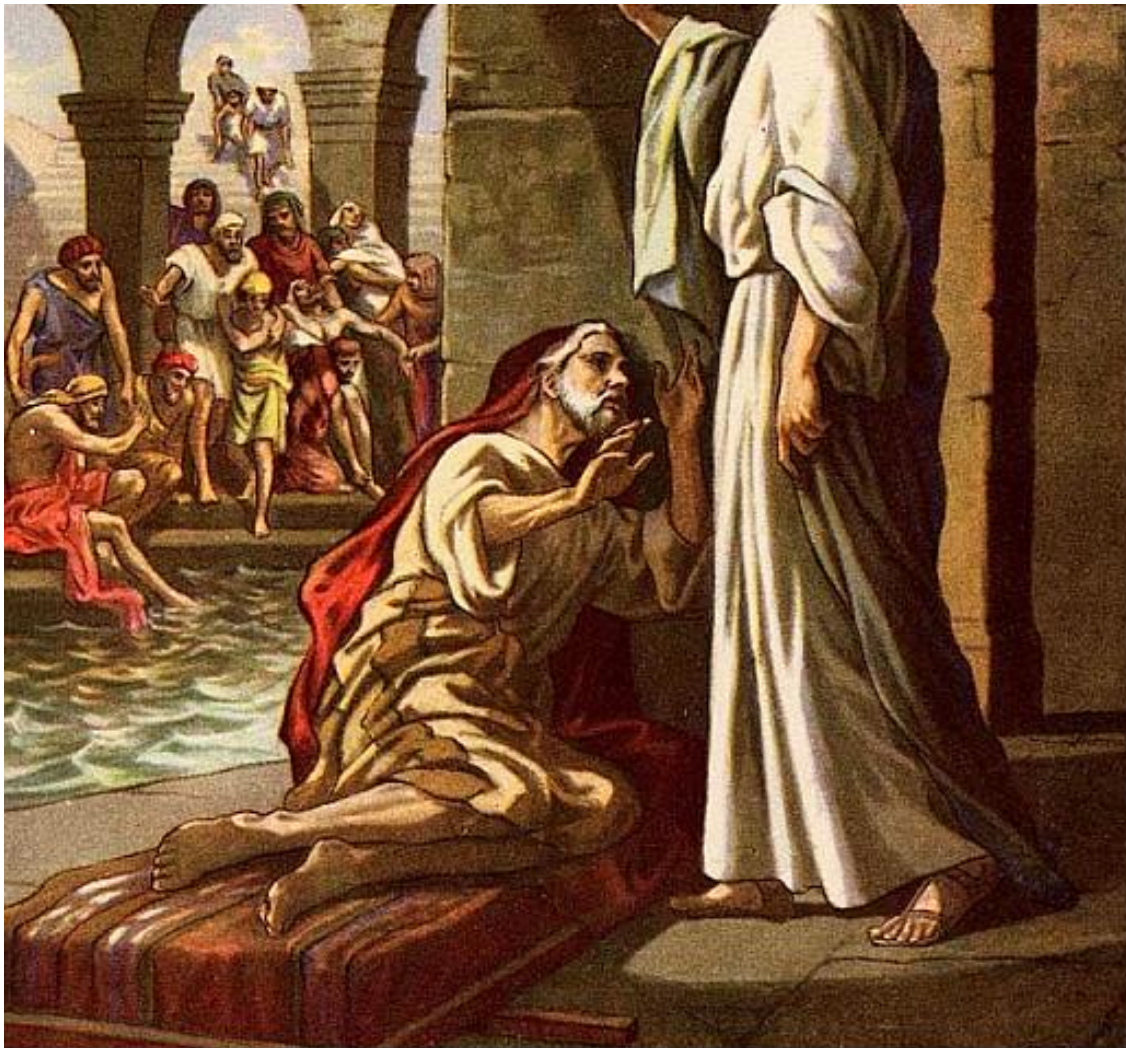
It was one of the Festival times and Jesus went up to Jerusalem and on a Sabbath day He visited this Bethesda pool. There He saw a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. He was lying under one of the porches, hoping to get into the pool when the waters moved.

"Do you want to be healed?" asked Jesus of this man. "Oh, yes sir, but I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is moving. And while I'm trying to get there on my own, someone else always gets there before me," answered the man.

It would seem that the miracle God gave was on a "first come, first served" basis. It only lasted for a very short time.

Jesus looked with sympathy and compassion upon the man and said, "Rise, pick up your bed-roll and walk."

Immediately the Gospel of John records, the man was healed, stood up, picked up his bed-roll and walked away praising God.



Jesus heals a lame man at the pool of Bethesda

It was soon noised abroad what Jesus had done. Some of the religious leaders heard Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day. They sort out the healed man and looking down their nose with a condemning attitude said to him, "Do you not know it is the Sabbath, and therefore it is not lawful for you to be carrying around your bed-roll. "

The religious leaders of the Pharisee sect had about 600 laws for Sabbath observance. Most of them were of their own making. It was all to do mainly with physical do's and don'ts. They had become so materially minded about keeping the Sabbath that doing kindness, showing love, having mercy, and even serving someone in need on the Sabbath, was put to one side in favor of keeping hundreds of physical man-made laws, one of them being that people should not carry their bed-roll on the Sabbath. Doing that to those religious leaders was carrying a "burden" and so working, hence breaking the Sabbath.

The healed man, at this moment in time, could have cared less about any man made rule or law of Sabbath observance. All he knew was that God had healed him and he was walking.

"Well, the man who healed me, told me to take up my bed-roll and walk," replied the happy hearted man to the questioners and condemners.

"So who is this man that told you to do this thing?" asked the religious leaders.

The healed man was now kind of stunned, for he then realized he did not know who this man was. He would have liked to have known, but he now remembered that after the healing the man immediately walked away into the large crowd. At this time the man could not tell them who it was that healed him.

It so happened that a little later in the day, in the Temple, Jesus found the man He had healed and spoke once more to him. "Ah, you are well and healthy again. Be careful to sin no more, lest a worse sickness befall you," Jesus said to him.

We have seen already that some of our physical problems in life can be our own fault, because we have done something against the natural laws of nature. Sometimes breaking those laws, what Jesus clearly called "sin" - sin in the physical, can lead to physical sickness and troubles for us. Sometimes we do foolish things without thinking we may end up hurting ourselves.

We may be walking along going to school, and we see this thin brick wall, about three feet high. We think it would be fun to try and balance walk along the top of it, so without much more thought up we get and with one foot in front of the other away we try to balance walk. But we maybe never did this before and certainly had never practiced on something much lower to develop our skill first, before trying it on a three foot wall.

Well, we slip and fall, smash a knee, twist an ankle, or even break a leg, as we hit the ground. We have done a type of sin, a physical sin against the laws of gravity and our own human body.

It would seem this man had done such a sin in his life (but we are not told exactly what it was he had done) that left him unable to walk. Whatever it was Jesus called it a sin, and told him to be careful and not sin in this manner again, or something worse than not being able to walk, may come upon him.

The New Testament teaches that our physical bodies are the Temple of God. God can dwell in us through His Holy Spirit, and so we then become His spiritual Temple in a manner. He wants us to appreciate and look after and take care of our physical bodies.

We should stop and think before we act or do certain physical things in life, as to whether it is too dangerous, and could possibly injure us if doing such a thing does not go smoothly. Some things can be too "reckless" - too "far out" - too "wild" and we are then taking chances with our bodies and minds that God would not have us take chances with, for as He has written, our bodies are His Temple for Him to dwell in.

After Jesus had found the man and spoken to him again about his healing, the man went and told the religious leaders who the person was that healed him. He told them it was Jesus.

All of this happening on the Sabbath was just another reason for those leaders to seek out Jesus and persecute Him, for breaking one of their made up laws of Sabbath observance.

Jesus looked at them, probably with some anger, as he saw their cold, unkind, unmerciful hearts, and said, "My Father is still working, still doing good things on the Sabbath, and so I will do good works also on the Sabbath."

It's true, God the Father still feeds the birds on the Sabbath day, still brings up the sun, or sends the rain to feed the trees and flowers. Doing good to people that come our way, and that really need a helping hand on the Sabbath is living within the laws and love of God. It is also doing correct good works just as God is still doing on the Sabbath.

Well, with those words from Jesus' lips, that God was His Father, those Jews knew He was making Himself equal with God, a part of the very Godhead, above any angel, putting Himself right up there on the God level of existence, as a part of God. This made them see red hot fire. It was bursting their blood vessels. Now they were so angry with Him for not only in their eyes breaking their Sabbath laws, but now having the affront to say God was His Father.

Those Jews now sought all the more to find a way to kill Him. They knew what making someone your "father" mean. They knew it was putting yourself in that "family" with that father, in as close relationship as literally possible. Jesus had told them before that He was God in the flesh, that He had authority as a part of the God family, to forgive sins on earth. Telling them here that God the Father was His Father, was telling them again what He had told them before, but putting it in a different way.

They clearly got the message, understood fully what He was saying, and to them it was blasphemy, and so were more determined than ever to want to see Him dead (John 5:1-18).

The wonderful truth of the matter is that the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that all true children of God today, have God as their Father, and Jesus Christ as their elder brother, in as literal a way as can be possible.

Spirit filled Christians are now and will be in the future, a part of the very family of God, bearing the nature and name of God. God the Father is enlarging His Family, by having many sons and daughters born of Him (2 Cor. 6:16-18).

All in that family will be equal in the sense that they are equal family members, all bearing the name of that family. But as in the human family, not all will have the same authority or the same gifts. God the Father will always be the head of that family (1 Cor. 11:3).

It is a wonderful, wonderful honor and privilege to call God, "Our Father." Jesus did, and so may we.

CHAPTER 12

CHRIST LAYS IT ON THE LINE

Many were the disputes and the problems Jesus had with the religious leaders of the Pharisee sect, and others also of the Sadducee priestly group and the Scribes. What John records for us in his chapter five (verses 19-47) of the Gospel book that bears his name, are words from Christ that are plain, no punches pulled, that Jesus was very God in the flesh. He had the authority to speak those words with a dogmatic tone of voice.

Jesus said to them, "Truly, with truth, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing; for it is whatever He does that the Son also does likewise.

"The Father loves the Son, and shows Him all that He Himself is doing. And yes even greater works than these He will show Him, that you may be astonished and marvel. As the Father can raise the dead and give them life, so the Son as well will give life to whom He will.

"The Father has decided to judge and condemn no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent the Son.

"It is the truth, that I say unto you, he who hears my words and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life. He will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life eternal.

"Once more it is the truth that the hour is coming, and even now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

Jesus, by saying the hour now was here, did not mean to say there were resurrections taking place, and people coming back to eternal life, as He was speaking those words in His teachings in the towns and country-side. He was meaning that many "spiritually" dead in their sins, were believing His words, repenting, and gaining grace and eternal life.

Then one day all such people will be raised to life in a resurrection, at the trumpet voice of the Son of God when He returns to this earth. That truth is taught in many passages throughout the NT and in the Gospels, as we shall later come to see and read about.

Jesus then went on to further explain what He was meaning:

"As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment and condemnation, because He is the Son of man, and knows what human life is all about, having experienced it.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the graves will hear His voice and shall come forth from death. Those who have done good, to the

resurrection of eternal life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment."

Putting all the passages together in the New Testament that talk about this subject of resurrections, we come to see that there will be at least two great resurrections. The one resurrection is for all the true children of God that have lived in faith from Adam to the coming again in glory and power of the Son of God, when His voice will go forth with a shout.

Those dead in the graves will rise together with the children of God alive in the flesh, at the coming of Christ. They will all be glorified together with eternal life, and meet Jesus in the clouds of this earth, and so be with Him forever more (1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

There will also be another general resurrection for many people who were not called to salvation in this lifetime. The 20th chapter of the book of Revelation mentions this resurrection, where it indicates the book of life will be opened to them. This is after the 1,000 year reign of Jesus and the saints upon this earth, as the first part of the chapter describes.

It is the Father's will that all persons be given a full and clear opportunity to know the only name whereby anyone can be saved, to repent, and find the way to eternal life (Acts 4:12; 2 Peter 3:9).

Jesus said all that are in the graves will one day hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth to live again. But, it will not all happen in just one resurrection at one single event in history.

Christ now really started to get specific and hit the nail on the head with many listening to Him.

"I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is very just, because I seek not my will but the will and way of Him who sent me. If I bear witness to myself, testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. But there is someone else who is testifying about me, and I can assure you that everything He says about me is true.

"In fact you sent people to listen to John the Baptist, and he was preaching the truth. But the best testimony about me is not from a man, though I mention to you John's testimony that you might be saved. For John and his ministry shone brightly for a while and you benefited and rejoiced, well some of you did.

"But I have a much greater witness than John - my teachings and my miracles. They have been assigned to me by the Father, and they testify that the Father has indeed sent me. And again, the Father Himself has also testified about me."

Jesus continued, "You have never heard His voice or seen Him face to face as I have. You also do not have His message in your hearts, because you do not believe me, the one He sent to you.

"You search the Scriptures because you believe they give you eternal life, yet it is those very Scriptures that point to me! But you refuse to come to me so that I may give you eternal life.

"Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me, because I know your hearts that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come to you representing the Father, and you refuse to welcome me, even though you accept others who only represent themselves. It is no wonder you cannot believe me! You can honor each other, pat each other on the back, but you do not really care about the true honor that comes from God alone."

In His final breath on this matter, Jesus told them, "Yet, it is not I who will accuse you first, of this dishonor before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, the one on whom you set your hopes. But if you had fully believed Moses and what he wrote, you would have believed me because he it was that wrote about me. And since you do not then believe what he wrote, how then it is possible for you to believe what I say?"

Wow! Yes indeed, Jesus hit them right between the eyes with all those words. He made it very clear where many of those religious leaders of His day stood in spiritual relationship with the Father. They just simply did not! They had no connection with the Father at all. They were playing at religion, playing among themselves, patting each other on the back, accepting each other on human terms, but their hearts were far from seeking the ways of the true God in heaven and believing His written word.

With proudness they accepted Moses as their great physical ancestor. But in the area of where it really counted, believing what Moses had written, they struck out three times. And so they could not, would not, did not see that this Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the one who had been with the Father from the beginning, and the one whom the Father had sent to earth to teach His truths and perform His miracles.

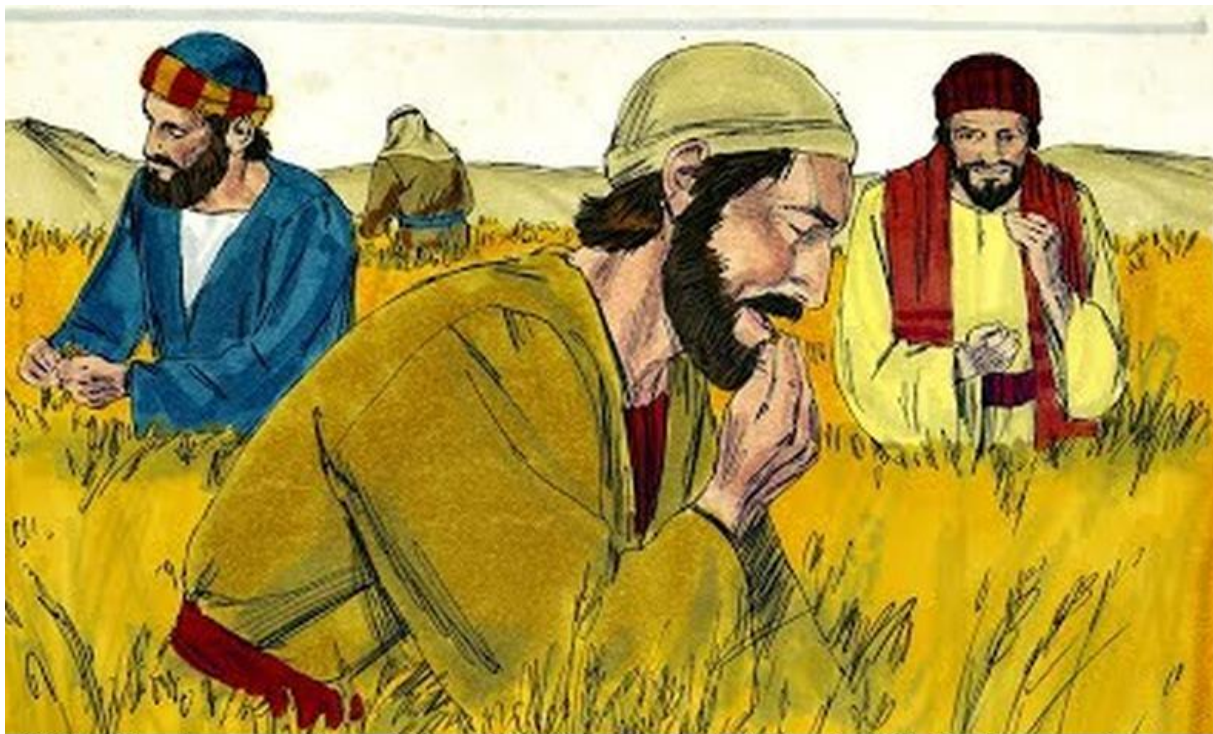
Pharisees Accuse Jesus' Disciples Of Breaking The Sabbath

Matthew in his Gospel tells us that it was about the same time the above took place that Jesus and His disciples were walking through the grain-fields on the Sabbath day. His disciples were getting quite hungry and so began to pluck the ears of grain, rub them between their hands and eat the flour substance then produced by that action.

The Pharisees were tagging along not far behind. They noticed what Jesus' disciples were doing. With indignation they shouted, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

If you read this account as given by the three Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke) you will notice the Pharisees did not quote any verse to back up their dogmatic utterance. Even after Jesus answered them, they did not attempt to support their accusation with any Old Testament law of Sabbath observance. Why not? Very simple, there was not and is not any such law in the written word of God.

What the Pharisees were accusing Jesus' disciples of doing was breaking a point of one of their man-made Sabbath laws, that they, the Pharisees together with the Scribes, had manufactured and invented. Recorded history tells us that the Pharisees had about 600 Sabbath laws. They had the mind-set that their invented laws of Sabbath observance had the stamp of approval on them by God Himself. Such was not the case at all, as Jesus went on to explain.



"At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the sabbath day. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat" (Matthew 12:1)

Jesus reminded them (written in the Scriptures they all read) of the time when David and his men were so hungry that they went to the House of God and asked the priest to give them the holy bread that in the letter of the law was only for the priests to eat, and not for anyone else.

Jesus did not go into all the details of this account when answering the Pharisees. They got the point with the basic answer Jesus gave. We see in 1 Samuel 21 that David asked the priest and the priest then offered the old showbread that had served its purpose in the Temple.

David was very much into the habit of regularly inquiring of the Lord (1 Sam. 22:10). This was the purpose of his visit to the priest, who also regularly sought God's will through the use of the precious stones that were in the priest's breastplate (ephod) known as the Urim and Thummim. Through these precious stones God gave yes and no answers to questions asked. What very likely happened was that David asked the priest, and the priest went to inquire from the Lord if he should grant David his request and the answer came back as yes.

God, as Lord of the Sabbath, the one in charge of Sabbath regulations and observance, was going to set aside a letter of the law command concerning the holy bread of the Temple, and was going to allow David and his men to eat it, as they were very weak in the knees (as we may say) from hunger.

God was looking at a situation that was at hand in the physical lives of some of His people, and was quite willing to set aside a physical law in order to fulfil a greater law, one that entailed showing kindness, mercy, love, compassion. And all such greater laws were quite in line with the observance of the Sabbath.

Then again, as God is the one in charge, as He is the law maker, the governor of all that is good and right and lawful, He has the authority to govern the observance of

the Sabbath, even His Temple, as He chooses under any particular circumstance and situation that may arise in any era of time.

Jesus did not stop with the example of David and his men and the bread of the Temple, but also gave them another example to meditate on.

"Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the Priests in the Temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? "

In a technical letter of the law way, when reading the words of the fourth commandment, and understanding that the Priests in the Temple still continued to do the work of administering the animal sacrifices on the Sabbath, you could say they most certainly did "work" on the seventh day of the week. So, in that technical letter of the law way they broke the Sabbath commandment, of not working on that day at your job.

But, we also read in the law of Moses that God allowed the priests to work on the Sabbath day and He held them guiltless, blameless. He did not look upon them as breaking the Sabbath day. As God is the creator of all things, physical and spiritual, as He is the creator of the Sabbath day and the rules that apply to observing it, He can then set the rules as He chooses in how to observe the Sabbath day. And for the priests in the Temple, doing much physical work on the Sabbath, God said the rule of not working at your job on the Sabbath, did not apply to them.

God was Lord of the Sabbath. He was in charge as to how the rules for observing it would apply in any given situation, and with whomever persons within any situation that arose on the Sabbath day.

What Jesus continued to tell these religious leaders was very meaningful and significant.

"I tell you, something greater than the Temple is here. And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:1-8).

The something greater than the Temple standing there, was Jesus Himself. If they had recognized that He was Immanuel, God in the flesh, the promised Messiah, the very Son of God, they would have realized He had authority over what He allowed His disciples to do on the Sabbath day, and allowing them to then pluck grain and eat it as they strolled through the fields, was not sin, or was not breaking the Sabbath.

Also, if they had understood the mind and love of God, in that God does in many circumstances, put mercy and kindness to serve people in their physical needs of comfort (such as not going hungry) before some letter of the law, then they also would have not condemned Jesus' disciples in their actions as they walked through the grain fields. They would have realized the mercy, love, and kindness of God, was far above any of their self-righteous man-made laws of Sabbath observance.

Then lastly, if they had really known, if they had been willing to admit, that Jesus was the Son of man, God in the flesh, the creator of the Sabbath, the one greater than the Sabbath, the one who was in charge of setting the rules for Sabbath observance in any situation, they would have understood that as Jesus did not stop the disciples

from plucking the grain and eating it, then He had set the rule in that situation that such actions on the part of the disciples, was not in any way breaking the observance of the Sabbath day.

They would have recognized Jesus was lord, governor, of all rules for Sabbath observance under all situations, and that He had the authority to adjust those rules as the circumstance arose for any specific condition on any Sabbath day. What the disciples were doing, in Jesus' mind, was in no manner breaking the law of Sabbath observance.

Jesus Heals On The Sabbath And Angers Many

On another Sabbath day when Jesus was in the synagogue and was teaching the word of the Lord, there was a man there who had a right hand that was withered up in some manner. It may have been a disformed hand from birth, or maybe it had been burnt in a fire, or some other accident had caused it to be withered.

Well, the scribes and Pharisees, knowing what Jesus had done on other Sabbath days, were watching Him out of the corner of their eyes to see what He would do when He noticed this man with the withered hand. They were probably hoping within their minds that He would help this poor man, but not to praise Him and give God the glory, but to accuse Him of breaking their man-made Sabbath laws.

Oh, for sure, Jesus knew their evil thoughts. He said to the man with the twisted and gnarled up hand, "Come over here my friend, and stand by me." The man arose and came and stood by Jesus.



Jesus heals the man with the withered hand on the sabbath

"I ask you," said Jesus, looked at everyone, but especially the scribes and Pharisees, "is it lawful and proper on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or destroy it?"

Looking around again upon them all He went on to say to him with the withered hand, "Stretch out your hand."

The man did as Jesus told him to do and his hand was restored to its normal size and function.

The self-righteous scribes and Pharisees were just boiling over with fury, and with whispers among themselves they discussed with one another what they might be able to do against this Jesus fellow that they considered a great Sabbath breaker (Luke 6:6-11).

Jesus Continues To Heal And Fulfil A Prophecy Of Isaiah

Jesus knew the hearts of those religious leaders were against Him, so with His disciples He withdrew to the sea shore. Yet by this time His fame had spread so far abroad that a huge crowd of people followed Him. They came from Galilee, from Judea and Jerusalem, from beyond the Jordan, even from the region Tyre and Sidon, up on the west coast of Palestine, quite a distance from Jerusalem. They all came to hear Him speak. So many there was that He had to tell His disciples to have a boat ready that He could get into off shore, lest He be crushed by all the people around Him.

Another reason why so many followed Him, and came from so far away, was because of His healing powers. They wanted to touch Him to be healed. Many who had evil demon spirits within them fell down before Him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." Yes, those evil spirits knew exactly who He was and through the mouths of humans confessed it in a public manner. Jesus more often than not ordered them not to make Him known in this public way. It was not yet time for such open publication, in that manner.

All this was to fulfil that which Isaiah the prophet had spoken, in the forty-second chapter.

"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick, till he brings justice to victory; and in his name will the Gentiles hope."

Jesus was not coming with great fan-fare, the blowing of trumpets, a big firework display, to announce His teaching and preaching. He was not coming with large display ads in the local news papers. He did not want publicity campaign managers running all over the land announcing His fame and unique origin.

As for the talk about a bruised reed and smoldering wick, one of the old master Bible commentators, Albert Barnes, gives the meaning of all this. We read these words in his commentary on this passage:

The reed is an emblem of feebleness, as well as change (Matt.11:7). A bruised, broken reed, is an emblem of the poor and oppressed. It means that he would not oppress the feeble and poor, as victorious warriors and conquerors did. It is also an expressive emblem of the soul, broken and contrite on account of sin, weeping and mourning for transgression. He will not break it. That is, he will not be haughty, unforgiving, and cruel. He will heal it, pardon it, and give it strength.

Smoking flax. This refers to the wick of a lamp when the oil is exhausted - the dying, flickering flame and smoke that hang over it. It is an emblem, also, of feebleness and infirmity. He would not further oppress it, and extinguish it. He would not be like the Jews, proud and overbearing, and trampling down the poor.....He will not treat them harshly or unkindly, but will cherish the feeble flame, minister the oil of grace, and kindle it into a flame.

Till he send forth judgment unto victory. Judgment here means truth - the truth of God, the gospel. It shall be victorious. It shall not be vanquished. Though not such a conqueror as the Jews expected, but he shall conquer...

Jesus was to conquer, but not in the way and manner that most of the religious leaders of the day and their followers thought and taught that the Messiah would come. They could only see the prophecies in the Old Testament that talked about a powerful warring Messiah to come to set up His Kingdom on the earth and rule all nations (which prophecies are yet to be fulfilled).

They had overlooked all the prophecies of His coming as a life giving Messiah. A Messiah to bring love, peace, forgiveness, to repentant souls longing to be strengthened and brought back from a smoldering wick ready to die out, into a bright burning flame of joyful salvation (Matt.12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12).

Here again on the sea shore Jesus was living and doing the very words that Isaiah the prophet was inspired to say He would do.

Jesus' Choice Of The Twelve

The time had come for Jesus to call and start a special group of disciples from within His larger body of followers. This was something new and different from what John the baptist had done with his disciples and indeed different from what Jesus had done so far in His ministry. He was about to choose a special 12 disciples, and as they were going to be chosen for some different work and gospel commissions for the then present and into the future, from what the other disciples would do, it was very important that He chose the twelve with much thought and prayer.

Jesus went up into the hills alone to pray as He often did at other times. He continued all night in prayer. This decision of twelve to pick for His inner circle of close disciples called for all night prayer and meditation. Jesus set us an example in all things He did. There could well be times in our life when confronted with serious and large decisions that we must make, that all night prayer and meditation is needed to ensure we make the correct decision. When other Elders in the Church are to commend and ordain other men to the ministry, a very serious undertaking and commission to be given to others, it should be done under prayer and fasting, which could be for more than a day, maybe for a number of days over a period of time (Acts 14:21-23).

Jesus took time to pray about the choosing of these twelve disciples, even praying all night long. When it was daybreak, He called all His disciples to Himself and from them He chose this special twelve. He named them "apostles" which means "ones sent forth." Here was also a new name given to a new formed section within the New Testament Church of God. The function then of apostles was brought into being by Jesus. This newly created position by Jesus shows us that it is not wrong for new functions to be created within the body of Christ, the Church of Christ, when and if certain functions are needed for doing the work of God.

Why did Jesus choose twelve at this time? There was indeed a very important reason for calling twelve. Jesus was not just looking at the present, but way into the future when the Kingdom of God would come to be established on the earth, when it would rule all nations, when all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the literal government of God ruling the entire earth, would come to pass.

Many prophecies in the prophetic books of the Old Testament tell us that when Jesus returns in glory to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, then the literal people of Israel and Judah will be again united as one people, or 12 tribes united

under one banner so to speak. They are to return to the land area we call the Middle East today, where the city of Jerusalem is located (Ezekiel 37; Jeremiah 30, 31, 33; Isa.11).

Jesus promised that the twelve disciples would each sit upon a throne of authority governing a tribe of Israel (Matt. 19:27-28). And so for the plan of God to contain this governing structure for the people of Israel during the 1,000 year reign of God's Kingdom on earth, Jesus knew there needed to be a special twelve called out from among His many disciples who would each be given rule over one of the twelve tribes of Israel, in that coming Kingdom age.

The names of these twelve specially called out disciples were:

- Simon, whom Jesus named Peter.
- Andrew, who was Peter's brother.
- James and John.
- Philip and Bartholomew.
- Matthew and Thomas.
- James the son of Alphaeus.
- Simon who was called the Zealot.
- Judas the son of James.
- Judas Iscariot, who became the traitor (Luke 6:12-19).

After Jesus had chosen the twelve He came with all His disciples down from the hills and stood on a large flat area of land. Soon a huge multitude of people came to Him from all Judea and Jerusalem and even from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear Him speak and to be healed of their diseases. Those who were troubled with evil spirits were also cured. Such was the power that came from Him all the people clambered to get close enough to touch Him and so be healed of their sicknesses and demons.



Jesus' Twelve Disciples

CHAPTER 13

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Many have thought that Jesus gave this famous so-called Sermon on the Mount to all the crowd of people that came to Him from Judea and Jerusalem and the sea coast. But the Gospel writer Matthew shows us that this was not the case at all. After Jesus had spent some time with the crowds that came to Him, He wanted once more to get away, they were pressing in on Him all wanting to touch Him as we have seen. Jesus again retreated into the mountains. He sat down and it was His disciples that came to Him.

“And seeing the multitudes He went up on a mountain and when He was seated His disciples came to Him” (Matthew 5:1). It was His disciples not the vast crowds that He taught. The words of Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7 were given to them, not the general population.

“And Jesus opened His mouth and taught them saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:3-12).

The Beatitudes

Here in a few verses Jesus gives the heart and the core, the foundation of what is a true Christian, a true son and daughter of God the Father.

The poor in spirit are those who have put away pride and human vanity. They have been willing to see themselves in the light of God's word, in the light of the Holiness of God Himself. They have humbled themselves to acknowledge their sins and wrong ways and words and thoughts. They have repented of being a human sinner, repented of breaking in one way or another the holy laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts, of God.

They see they are nothing compared to a Holy God. They have cried out for His mercy, for His grace, for His love. They have put themselves into the spirit of mind that they will love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their life, with all their mind. They are willing to serve Him, to do His will not their own, to love and obey His commandments. They stand in respectful awe of the entire word of God.

It is to this person with this attitude of mind that God will look and take note of and call His child (Isa. 66:2). To such a person Jesus promised that the Kingdom of

heaven would be theirs, that they would be a part of it, that they would live forever in the very Kingdom family of God.

Those who mourn and shall be comforted are those who first of all mourn within themselves as they see the sins and faults and errors they have done in their lives. As they see where they have missed the mark in what the heavenly Father would have them do, think, and speak, they are deeply sorry. This gives them a repentant mindset and places them in the position to receive God's loving forgiveness and so be comforted with His salvation.

Those who mourn are those who also go on after being comforted with personal salvation, to mourn for the evil and sins they see around them in the world from day to day. The child of God at times really gets upset, mourns and sometimes literally cries (Jesus shed tears at times over the sins of Jerusalem and the people around Him) when they see or hear about certain evils that happen in the world or in their local town or city.

Such children of God often cry out for His Kingdom to soon come to earth so that all the pain, sorrow, and evil, the world contains will be a thing of the past. One day, as the heavenly Father has promised, His children who now mourn at times will be everlastingly comforted when His Kingdom is set up on this earth.

The meek are those who do not think of themselves above what they should. They are not full of vain bigheaded thoughts about themselves or their talents or abilities. They realize all they have is from God. They realize all they can be is from God. They are willing to be corrected, to learn, to be shown and led into the ways and truths of the Lord. They are humble enough to want to serve and do the commandments of God.

They know that meekness is not the same as "weakness." They understand that people like Moses was meek, yes, it is even said of him that he was the meekest man of his time but they know that Moses was not "weak." He was strong in and for the Lord. Being meek is really being strong in the ways and life of how God wants you to live.

Meekness is being righteous and Jesus was probably thinking about Psalm 37 when He uttered these words. For in that Psalm it is the righteous (those who do and live in a right way with God) who shall it is said, inherit the earth. Yes, the children of God are to live forever on this earth. They are to inherit the Kingdom of God or heaven, but that Kingdom is to come from heaven to this earth as Revelation 19 through to 22 fully explains and shows us. So to inherit the Kingdom of heaven is indeed to also inherit forever this earth.

Jesus said it was blessed to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Now one Bible definition for righteousness is found in Psalm 119:172. There we see that all of God's commandments are righteousness. Many today want you to believe it is not important to live by God's commandments. Many today want you to believe God has "done away with" His holy law of the ten commandments and just about all of His other commandments also. Many today say if you strive to live by all the commandments of God you are trying to gain salvation by human works.



Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount

Well, many today have many ideas as to why you should not hunger and thirst after the righteous commandments of God. But for Jesus, as far as He was concerned, if you did hunger and thirst after them, you would not only be filled and satisfied, but you would be also very blessed.

Jesus went on to say that it was also a blessing to be a merciful person, to show kindness, a loving and forgiving attitude towards others.

There will be many times in life, many situations will come our way, when people will do us harm, treat us like dirt as they say. People at times will say nasty things about us, talk behind our back, call us names, tell bad stories about us that are not true. They may plot to harm us in different ways. They may get jealous of us for whatever reason and become our enemy. They may try to take revenge on us for something they consider we have done to them.

There will be plenty of opportunity in life to act and to think in a merciful manner towards others, to not pay back in kind as others have done to us. There will be times when some people will come to us and acknowledge they have acted badly towards us and ask us to forgive them. Jesus said it was a blessing to be merciful towards others. For by being merciful you would also obtain mercy. He was no doubt especially thinking of the mercy that the Father in heaven would show towards you, for you showing mercy towards your fellow man.

The pure in heart were also a blessed people, so blessed Jesus said, that they would see God. The clear inference is that those who did not have a pure heart would not see God. All of the children of God will one day see the very face of their heavenly Father (Revelation 21 tells us that). If you do not see God the Father, it means you will not be living. It means you will not have had a pure heart, for it is the pure in heart that shall see God.

The heart of man is a mixture of good and evil. Without the nature and Spirit of the Lord coming into the heart to wash it, to cleanse it, to fill it with the love of God, to purify it from its natural carnal fleshly ways and thoughts, it is then spiritually impure. Such a natural heart without the Spirit of God does not belong to Him. God is Holy. The natural heart without God in it is unholy. Only when the heart is purified by the indwelling of the Spirit of God is it classified by God as pure, and as belonging to Him. Only then can that person be considered by God as His child. All this is what the apostle Paul was telling us in Romans chapter 8.

When the heart is made pure by the presence of God through His spirit dwelling in it, then we are His. And we receive the Spirit of God through repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). Our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ on an ongoing daily basis (John explained it more for us in I John chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2). Hence we are in the sight of God one with a pure and clean heart.

With a pure heart Jesus said people would indeed see God. They would one day inherit eternal life and see God's face as is promised in the book of Revelation (chapter 22).

If you want to be a son (or daughter) of God, Jesus said you would have to be blessed by being a peacemaker. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? Does it mean you are a doormat for people to walk all over? No, surely not, for the people of God in the Bible stood strong and firm for their faith. Many of those who were called to proclaim the truths of God to others and to nations, were bold and courageous, not backing down even in the face of the threat of death.

Does it mean you must be timid and consoling to other religious leaders that oppose the word of God? Hardly! For Jesus and the apostles as we can see from the New Testament did not back down against those who would debate or corner them on theological issues. There are times when the people of God must also act as Jesus acted towards false religious leaders (we will come to Matthew 23 and the strong words Jesus used against false religionists later in the Gospel story).

I think it best to try to understand what being a peacemaker is, by looking at it from the opposite side of the coin. A peacemaker is one who is generally as a way of life, trying to be at peace with everyone, even when and while living a dedicated Christian life, and also when trying to proclaim the good news of the salvation and truths of God's word. He or she is not out looking for trouble, not out to deliberately cause a fight or disturbance (though such may arise when teaching and/or living the way of the Lord the first century apostles certainly encountered less than peaceful persons, out to harm them, as they lived and taught the Gospel). A peaceful person is trying to act and live and speak as Jesus told them to do, "Be you as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves."

A peaceful individual has a basic good natured attitude and disposition about them. They are not nasty in words, not bad tempered, not grouchy, always seeing the

negative side of things, not forever complaining about everyone and everything. They are not out to pick a fight over the least bad thing that others do to them. They often let the evil of others coming their way, pass them by with no thoughts of revenge or how they can get back at them. They want if at all possible to be at peace with people as they live and practice and proclaim the love of God through Jesus Christ.

Peaceable people are basically upbeat, happy, friendly, smiling people. Their conversations are mainly positive and not bitter, sarcastic, negative, filled with put-downs of others. They exhibit a lot of patience in all they do and with all people they meet. Peaceable people are persons that others like to be around and enjoy having as neighbors and working co-workers. Peaceable people find that small children are drawn to them, for small children can sense persons who are peaceable and easy to feel comfortable and happy with. Children had no problem in coming close to Jesus and letting Him pick them up to bless them.

Such is the nature of persons who are peacemakers. For such is the foundation of the nature and character of God, hence those with His nature in them will be peacemakers and so will also be called "sons of God."

To emphasize that the righteousness of God is for all peoples of all ages to seek after, Jesus went on to say that those who were persecuted for the sake of righteousness, because they were practicing righteousness as a way of life, were blessed. The commandments of God which are righteousness are forever (Psalm 111) and though some would encounter words and actions of persecution from those who did not like the laws of God or who thought the New Testament abolished them, Jesus said the ones receiving the persecution for serving righteousness would have the Kingdom of God, they would inherit it and be a part of it.

Then Jesus finished this part of His sermon and teaching by letting His disciples know that in choosing to follow Him, it would not always be an easy road to walk. It would not necessarily be a bed of sweet smelling roses, or sitting in some beautiful park on a warm and sunny day enjoying a large chocolate dipped ice-cream.

Sometimes, to not only accept Jesus as your personal savior, but to believe what He said and to obey Him, to follow His example in all your conduct of life, will anger various people, even ones who call themselves "religious" and claim they are "Christian." These people will often say false things against you, lie about you, and try to bring all manner of harm to you, mentally, emotionally, and even physically.

Jesus has told us beforehand that such may come our way because we follow Him in everything. He said we would eventually be blessed and have a great reward for remaining loyal to Him. He reminds us that it has been no different for other who lived before us. All down through the centuries, yes, even as we read through the Old Testament, we can see that many of the prophets of God were reviled and persecuted for standing firm to the word and truth of the Father in heaven.

In Luke's account we have Jesus as saying, "But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (Luke 6:24-26).

Is it wrong or somehow "not quite Christian" to be rich in a physical way, or to be fully satisfied with food, or to laugh? We should not take Jesus' words here out of context from the whole Bible. As we read the whole of God's word we can see that some of His people were physically blessed with material riches. And many were fully satisfied and provided with food, as well as enjoying themselves with laughter and song. It is clear that God does not think such things per se are wrong or not proper to have if you are His child.

What Jesus here in the Sermon on the Mount is saying is that those who disregard God's way, His truths, and His commandments, those who just simply "live it up" as we say, who want to fill their minds and life with only the material things that can be obtained in this lifetime, who put all their energies into being rich, full of everything physical, and want to "party all the time," while ignoring the way of God, will one day have to answer for this mind-set. They will finally come to the point of realizing that putting the physical things first (and God second, or God never at all) is not the way to eternal life. They will indeed mourn and weep.

Jesus also said, "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

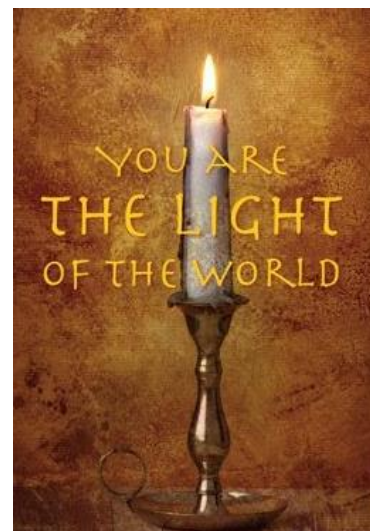
Another fact contained in the Bible, when you read it all from start to finish, is the fact that those who taught and preached the Word and Commandments of God, were never popular with the masses of the people or with most of the leaders of the various nations. And they were not popular with the masses of other religious leaders. Jesus gives here a pretty constant and overall rule of thumb, if you are liked and spoken well about from the large mass of people and world leaders, then you probably are NOT speaking the Word and Truths of the Almighty God, certainly not in the way you should be teaching and preaching them.

Those who are popular as "religious teachers and preachers," who are spoken well about from the large majority of people, are more than likely, according to Jesus, false prophets and false religious teachers. That verse in Luke is well worth remembering when you start to look at all those out there who claim they are the religious ministers of God.

Be Good Examples Of God's Way

Jesus continued: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is then no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under by the foot of men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a cover, but put it on a stand, that it may give light to all that be in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

We should be able to say with the apostle Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation...."



We should not be trying to hide what we believe or stand for. But this does not mean we are to be preaching constantly to all whom we come into contact with.

You will notice the two examples Jesus gave. He did not say we are to be like the blast of a trumpet sounding out a war alarm. He did not say we are to be like a loud radio filling the air waves with its sound, nor like a fog horn sounding the danger to those nearby.

There maybe times when we can do personal evangelism, and teach people the way and salvation of the Lord, but by and large we are to live as a Christian like the shining light set on a stand, in all we say, and do, showing forth the good works that are part and parcel of being a child of God. By so living many will glorify and thank the Father who is in heaven.

The Law Of God Is Not Done Away

Jesus went on to say: "Think not that I am come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one iota, nor a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

The first part of the above has been often twisted all out of proportion and people have tried to make it say that when Jesus ended His life and had fulfilled all that was written about him, then all things were fulfilled and so the law and the commandments were then abolished. But Jesus clearly talked about all being in effect until heaven and earth passed away, not just until the time of His death. Heaven and earth are still here. Hence so is the law and the prophets and the small and great commandments of the Lord.

The last part of what Jesus said makes it crystal clear exactly what He was meaning. Anyone coming along who would relax or diminish even the least commandment would be looked upon as least by the kingdom of heaven, but he who obeyed and taught them would have great favor in the eyes of that kingdom.

Jesus further went on to nail down exactly what He was meaning, so none would or should ever misunderstand. The scribes and Pharisees were ardent law observers. They tried to be super righteous in following all the laws of God contained in the Old Testament. But they often interpreted them incorrectly, misapplied them, blew some of them way out of proportion, sometimes added their own ideas to them (such as the 600 or more laws they invented for Sabbath observance), or worst yet set up their traditions in place of the commandments of God. All of this we shall see expounded by the Gospel writers as we proceed further into the life and ministry of Christ.

Of course the scribes and Pharisees thought they were very righteous. It was a false self-righteousness that they had and not the righteousness that came from God. Jesus said His followers needed to have the true righteousness that is founded upon the truth of God. But that truth most assuredly held that the laws of God were in force

and effect until heaven and earth passed away. And those who obeyed them and taught them would be called great in the kingdom of God.

Jesus Explains The Spirit Of The Law

Now Jesus goes on to amplify and enlarge and make more binding some of the laws of God:

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother without cause, shall be liable to judgment; Whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire."

Jesus here starts to answer some of the Jewish interpretations of the laws of God. Notice, He does not say, "It is written" but "you have heard it said to the men of old." Now, sometimes the interpretation of the literal letter of the law was basically correct, at other times it was not so correct. Jesus was not only going to give the true understanding of what the letter of the law was meaning but He would take it a step further.

He would enlarge it to bring in the heart and intent of the spirit of the law. He had the authority from the Father to do this very thing, and so make the laws of God much fuller and broader under the New Testament. It had been prophesied centuries earlier that one of the acts the Messiah would do when He came was to not only make the law honorable but also to magnify it, enlarge it, to include the spirit of the law as well as the letter of the law (see Isaiah 42:21).

With the help of the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary we can better understand what Jesus was teaching in the passage just quoted.

Intentional killing, with planned forethought, of another person, would indeed bring the one who so killed into judgment. The law of God did teach and state that judgment was to be passed on those who intentionally killed another person. Actually such murderers would be put to death under the letter of the law of the Old Testament (Lev. 24:21; Num. 35:16). The law did not state by whom this judgment should be done, and it was left to the Israelites to organize courts to have authority over such crimes (Deut. 16:18). But Jesus here goes a step further. He says that anyone who is "angry" (a state of heart and mind) with his brother without cause shall be liable to judgment.

The judgment court of the Jews was a court that sat in each city or town and commonly had seven members. It was the lowest court among the Jews and from such a court an appeal might be taken to the Sanhedrin, or the highest court in the land, the supreme court of the Jews which sat in the city of Jerusalem.

We notice Jesus said "without cause" for there is a time to be angry. The Bible teaches there is a righteous and justifiable anger, a holy anger if you will. At times Jesus looked upon the hypocritical Pharisees with anger (Mark 3:5). And Paul was inspired to say, "Be you angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26).

What Jesus addresses here is being angry without cause; that is, unjustly, rashly, hastily, where no offense has been given or intended. In that case Jesus was saying it would be evil anger. It would be an evil hatred that would break the spirit of the 6th commandment. The apostle John was later inspired to write that "he who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). As interpreted later in the Gospels by Jesus, a brother is anyone of the human race.

Jesus went on to say that whoever says to his brother "Raca" (Jesus used this Syriac word originally and it means speaking with great contempt, coming from a verb that means to be "empty" - "vain" - denoting "senseless, stupid, shallow-brains"), shall be in danger of the council. The original word for "council" here is "Sanhedrin" the highest of the Jewish courts, the supreme court of the land, just as most nations today have a supreme court, to which appeals from lower courts can be taken for a final and unalterable decision.

This Sanhedrin court was instituted in the time of the Maccabees (a Jewish family group) about 200 years before the time of Christ. It was composed of 72 judges. The high priest was the president of the court. The 72 members were made up of the chief priests, elders of the people, and the scribes. The chief priests were the ones who had discharged at one time, the office of high priest, and those who were the heads of the 24 classes of priests (as arranged under the reign of king David) and were called in an honorary way "high" or "chief" priests.

The "elders" were the princes of the tribes, or heads of the family associations. Not all (for there would far too many) elders sat in the Sanhedrin but only those chosen or elected. The "scribes" were the learned men (like our lawyers of today) of the laws of Israel, elected to this Sanhedrin court. This court usually sat in Jerusalem in a room near the Temple.

Jesus was saying that those with a "raca" mindset towards their brothers were indeed in danger of coming under the judgment of the highest court, which in spiritual terms would mean the court of heaven itself.

Still, there was another step further into real danger for those who had a wrong attitude towards their brothers and sisters. If you were in the mindset of saying "You fool" to your brother, it stood for the attitude of and expression of the highest guilt, and had been used as an expression for "idolaters" (Deut. 22:21) and also one who was guilty of great crimes (Josh. 7:15; Psalm 14:1).

Such an attitude of mind placed one in the danger of "hell fire." The original language in which Jesus spoke it says, "the Gehenna of fire." The word Gehenna is made up of two Hebrew words that signifies the "Valley of Hinnom." We need to take a little time and understand this Valley of Hinnom for it came to be the example Jesus would often use to picture the fire of the second death for the destruction of the unrepented wicked at the end of the 1,000 year reign as foretold in the 20th chapter of Revelation.

Quoting from the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary:

....This was formerly a pleasant valley, near to Jerusalem, on the south side (or south east). A small brook or torrent usually ran through this valley, and partly encompassed the city. This valley the idolatrous Israelites devoted formerly to the horrid worship of Moloch (2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3). In that worship the ancient Jewish writers inform us that the idol of Moloch was of brass, adorned with a royal crown, having the head of a calf, and his arms extended, as if to embrace anyone. When they offered children to him, they heated the statue within by a great fire; and when it was burning hot, they put the miserable children into his arms, where it was soon consumed by the heat. And in order that the cries of the child might not be heard, they made a great noise with drums and other instruments about the idol. These drums were called "Toph" and hence a common name of the place was "Tophet" (Jer. 7:31, 32).

After the return of the Jews from captivity, this place was held in such abhorrence, that, by the example of Josiah (2 Kings 13:10), it was made the place where to throw all the dead carcasses and filth of the city; and was not infrequently the place of executions. It became, therefore, extremely offensive; the sight was terrific; the air was polluted and pestilential; and to preserve it in any manner pure, it was necessary to keep fires continually burning there. The extreme loathsomeness of the place; the filth and the putrefaction; the corruption of the atmosphere, and the lurid fires blazing by day and night, made it one of the most appalling and terrific objects with which a Jew was acquainted.....

We can conclude from all this that what Jesus was saying was that he who has the ultimate in hateful murderous attitude towards a fellow human being, an evil and unrepentant mindset of contempt and disdain for another person, has already in the spirit and intent of the law against murder, broken that commandment (though they may not have literally in the letter of the law physically killed that person). With that murderous spirit of mind they stand in judgment of the heavenly court, which may pass judgment on them unless they repent, to be burnt up in the final fire of the second death, represented by the fires of the Valley of Hinnom.

Because of all this, Jesus further went on to say:

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly I say unto you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

The whole sense here is that Jesus was teaching His followers that they needed to have an attitude of reconciliation, of wanting to be at peace and reconciled with all people. Not to be harbouring malice, resentment, hostility, revenge towards our fellow man. We must make the effort to be reconciled. It is not good enough to wait for the other to come to us, we need to go and meet with those whom we have difficulties with, and as much as we can do, as much as it is within our power, to try and be at peace with our fellow man.

The altar was the place where under the Old Testament they offered their sacrifice to God. It was then the outward expression of a religious service towards God, showing you were devoted to the way and service of the Lord, that you wanted to worship Him. Jesus was saying then, that to worship God, and for God to accept you in worship towards Him, it would be useless to partake in worship with God unless you had first made the effort to be at peace with those who were not at peace with you for whatever reason, be it your fault or their fault.

It should be the Christian's attitude of mind that they also do not want to go to court with anyone, and if they do find themselves in a "court" situation (because the accuser has brought about court action) they should try to what we today call "settle out of court" and so reconcile some peace with their accuser.

It may mean you bite the bullet, take some heat or not get all the justice that you think you should get, but the follower of Christ does not want to battle with people, they are not vindictive, hard nosed people, who must always have their pound of flesh and win the fights they sometimes get into (be it their fault or the other persons

fault). God's people are basically not trouble makers, who want peace not war and will go the extra mile to make peace.

Then, Jesus also gave some practical wisdom to the Christian. You maybe in the "court situation" because you have been unwise or careless or just in plain error in what you have done. You may be fully to blame! So, better acknowledge it, seek reconciliation and peace with the accuser who may have the right to accuse you, and settle the matter before getting to court. If you do not, then you may find yourself in deeper trouble from the punishment the court imposes on you.

The main point is. God wants and expects you to be a peace loving and peace seeking person that holds no animosity towards another person. God wants you to do your part in being at peace with all mankind. This, Jesus was saying is the heart and core of the 6th commandment, not just the letter of the law of not murdering another person. And if you do not seek after the whole meaning of that law to live it in mind as well as action, then the judgment of the court of heaven will come upon you and there will be no way out once it has been enacted in the fires of the second death.

Jesus went on to expound on another commandment:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into Gehenna fire. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into Gehenna fire."

Oh yes it was taught by the religious leaders of Israel that people were not to commit adultery, for that was one of the ten commandments of God, but they probably never taught the "spirit of the law" which would mean people could "lust" after the opposite sex all they liked, and indeed there was no punishment in the courts of Israel for so lusting. But Jesus here magnifies this law to include the thoughts and desires of the mind, if they are dwelt upon.

The dwelling upon the thoughts bring sin, to see and acknowledge the good form of the outward appearance of a man or woman is not wrong, but if you continue with a lustful dwelling upon their outward form, then sin is born. This is what God inspired James to tell us in the book that bears his name, chapter one and verses 14 and 15.

King David of ancient Israel saw the woman Bathsheba bathing herself. He looked and dwelt upon her beauty, desire and lust flared up in his heart, and he went on to commit adultery with her. The whole story of the sins of David with Bathsheba and the punishment God delivered to him is recorded in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12.

Cut Off Your Right Hand Or Eye If It Causes You To Sin?

Concerning the words about Jesus saying to cast away your right eye and right hand if they cause you to sin, must not be taken literally. First, God designed the human body. The apostle Paul said the human body was holy if God dwelt in it, that it was His holy temple, and we should not defile it. He even said that God would not be pleased if we defile it (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Then secondly, is it really the eye or the

hand that sins? It is not the mind where sin is conceived and formed. If sin was conceived in the eye or hand and Jesus literally meant us to cut them off, then all of us would soon have no eyes, no hands, probably no arms and no other bodily parts as well, including our head, for sin can be in the mind.

The Hebrews, like others, were accustomed to represent the affections of the mind by the members or parts of the body (Rom. 7:23; 6:13). Thus, the 'bowels' denoted compassion; the 'heart,' affection or feeling; the 'reins,' understanding, secret purpose. An 'evil eye' denoted sometimes envy (Matt. 20:15), sometimes an evil passion, or sin in general. We read in Mark 7:21, 22, 'Out of the heart proceedeth an evil eye.' In this place, as in 2 Peter 2:14, it is used to denote strong adulterous passion, unlawful desire and inclination.

The right eye and hand are mentioned, because they are of most use to us, and denote that, however strong the passion may be or difficult to part with, yet that we should do it. 'Shall offend thee.' The noun from which the verb 'offend,' in the original, is derived, commonly means a 'stumbling-block, or a 'stone' placed in the way, over which one might fall. It also means a 'net,' or a certain part of a net, against which, if a bird strikes, it springs the net, and is taken. It comes to signify, therefore, anything by which we fall, or are ensnared; and applied to 'morals,' means anything by which we fall into sin, or by which we are ensnared" (Albert Barnes Bible Commentary).

Sometimes in life we find we cannot partake in a certain job employments (that may pay us very good wages, or that we are especially skilled in) because the job would violate a commandment of God or violates the observance of the 4th commandment, the keeping of the Sabbath.

To follow Christ we may at times have to give up keeping company with some people we were very close to, because we have changed the way we live and their way of life and attitude would only pull us down from the high calling we now have in Christ Jesus. Later in the ministry of Jesus we shall see where He told people that to follow Him would sometimes mean giving up a close friend, a brother or sister, a child, or even a wife or husband.

Some hobbies we once had we may have to part with because they are too reckless and dangerous, putting our physical body in the path of major destruction or even death. For the Christian, God teaches that our bodies are the temple of His Holy Spirit and we are not to defile them in unnecessary dangerous games or thrills that may give us a momentary rush or pleasurable adrenalin surge up the spine.

It could mean that certain types of "movies" or "music" that we were wildly into before becoming a Christian, we may have to "cut off" and cast away, because we now realize they are far from what a Christian should expose themselves to.

Many things that we once held dear and close to us, that were a part of our daily life, our very being, that we thought we could not live without, will have to be "put away" when we become a child of the heavenly Father. Yes, sometimes we must cast to one side things once held precious to us, we must do it, if they are things not pleasing to God. If we do not then we cannot have eternal life in His Kingdom, but we shall be cast one day into the Gehenna of fire and be forever no more.

God's View On Divorce

Jesus went on with commenting on another of the laws of old: "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say unto you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulterous; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Deuteronomy 23:1-2 allowed for a man to divorce his wife. There were two main theological schools of the Pharisees (the most popular religious group among the Jews of that time). The most famous and the most popular of these schools taught that the law in Deuteronomy allowed for divorce for any trivial reason. Hence, most believed and practiced this understanding of divorce, and the reasons some men divorced their wives were over such matters as not liking her looks any more, or burning the toast for breakfast one time too many (the first example was the case, the second I give as a kind of the trivial reasons Jewish men divorced their wives).

It was probably true that divorce under the Old Testament was given and allowed on a broad and wide range, from serious issues to much less than serious ones. Later, Jesus told the Pharisees that divorce under Moses was allowed, but only because of the "hardness of the heart." Most people were so out of tune with God, so fleshly minded, so wanting to do their pleasures as the whim of time and mind took them, God allowed divorce on a pretty loose scale (Matt. 19). But now it was the New Testament time, and Jesus had come to make the law of God honorable and to magnify it, as we have seen.

The original intent of God from the beginning was to not have divorce on anywhere near the loose and large scale He allowed it under the age of Moses. Jesus would now restore the original intent, divorce would be tightened up, not allowed for anywhere near the trivial reasons as before. Jesus did say divorce would be allowed for "unchastity." A study of the Greek word used here for "unchastity" as it is used throughout the New Testament, shows it is a word that covers any sexual immorality. For married couples it would cover the act of adultery, a husband or wife going to bed and sleeping with another man or woman.

Swearing And Oaths

Another law, the law of "swearing", Jesus would now change and bring under the enlarged "spirit of the law" for New Testament times:

"Again, you have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths.' But I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne; nor by earth; for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your words be, Yes, yes, No, no, for what is more than this comes from evil."

The law respecting "oaths" is found in Lev. 19:12 and Deut. 23:23. An oath is a solemn affirmation, or declaration, made with an appeal to God for the truth of what is affirmed, and implies you ask for His vengeance, renouncing His favor, if what is affirmed is false. A false oath is called "perjury" in our courts of law today.

The Jews it would seem had gone beyond declaring oaths before God, swearing using the name of Jehovah. They now had introduced oath swearing by all manner

of other names. And probably did not think thus swearing by these other names that important (compared to swearing by the name of God) if they observed the oaths or if they broke them.

Their swearing also took on a flippant, mundane, conversation language, much like many today in our society do. "I swear by all the tea in China it happened that way" some may exclaim today when wanting people to really believe what they are saying is the truth. It may not be the truth, or it may be part of the truth, or way over exaggerated, but they want you to really believe it was exactly as they told it, and swearing by the tea in China, is supposed to somehow make it so.

Remembering again that most of the people under the Old Testament age were carnal, then "oath" swearing probably had its place. Indeed, it was probably needed for God gave it as laws to govern certain parts of the life of the Israelites. But for the New Testament Christian Jesus magnified this law in abolishing it outright. No swearing, no oath swearing of any kind, by the name of God or by the name of anything else, was needed for those who were the children of God from now on out.

The Christian should be telling the truth at all times, and needed not to call upon God to establish what they had to say (so God could punish them if they spoke falsely) as being true, for they would have a mindset of always telling the truth.

Some will say Jesus was only speaking about mundane conversational swearing, and not about "legal court" oath swearing (i.e. "Place your hand on the Bible and swear after me" as done for witnesses in courts of law).

God made it abundantly clear through the apostle James that oath swearing period was out for the true Christian. James wrote, "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by ANY OTHER OATH: but let your yes be yes and your no, be no; lest you fall into condemnation (Greek is 'hypocrisy')" (James 5:12)



"But I say to you, 'Do not swear at all!'" (Matthew 5:34)

The courts of law in our land allow for Christians to NOT put their hand on the Bible and to "affirm" that what they say will be the truth, instead of oath swearing on the Bible.

Also, a Christian can only tell as to what their memory will allow them to remember for any specific recall of an event. Sometimes the mind forgets things, or misplaces the order of things. Hence they try to say what they think or remember to the best of their present ability. They do not want to convey the idea that God is speaking, and hence be found to be a hypocrite or play actor, if they should be proved to be inaccurate over some point.

An Eye For An Eye?

Jesus continued: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say unto you, that you resist not evil; but whoever smites you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you by taking you to the law courts, and takes away your coat, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go a mile, go with him for two miles. Give to him that asks of you, and from him that would borrow from you, do not turn away."

The command for "an eye for an eye" is found in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; and Deuteronomy 19:21. In these places it was given as a rule to regulate the decisions of judges. It is one of those parts of the Old Testament that has been greatly misunderstood. Many have thought that because of such laws all kinds of people in ancient Israel were walking about with only one hand, one eye, one leg, a huge black eye (till it healed), broken legs, bloody noses or broken noses, with this or that broken bone etc. The literal application of this law would indeed over time produce a nation with countless deformed and crippled people.

What should have been done when trying to understand this section of the laws of Moses, would have been to have gone to the Jews themselves, their scholars and their ancient writings. If this is done you will soon find that throughout the whole history of Israel, this law of "an eye for an eye" was never taken as something that should be done in a literal manner. It was never a practice in Israel to cripple people. Can you imagine a court that had a room wherein people were taken and had their eye plucked out, or hand chopped off, or a leg smashed and broken with some kind of baseball bat type instrument. The thought is quite horribly gruesome to think about such ever taking place in any country let alone Israel.

The truth of the matter is that the Jews have always known this section of the laws of Moses were for the court "magistrates or judges" only, and that it was a figure or manner of speech that told them they had to meter out "just" and "fair" compensation (usually in monetary or physical goods) to those who had been disfigured in some way by the intent or the accident of others. Ancient Israel was never a wholesale chopping block for human dismemberment of the body.

By the time of Christ the Jews had extended it from the magistrate or judge to the "private person" and private conduct, and made it the rule by which to take "revenge." They considered themselves justified, by this rule, to inflict the same injury on others that they had received.

Jesus was against any such idea. He declared that the law had no reference to private revenge; that it was given to only regulate the magistrate; and that their private conduct was to be regulated by different principles than a personal vendetta of physical punishment upon those who had done them or their loved ones physical harm and pain.

But we need to keep all this in balance with all the rest of the Bible, and with everything that God taught and allowed and gave in other laws He prescribed. Jesus was not intending to teach that we should sit by passively and see our families murdered, or to be casually murdered ourselves, by thugs or robbers, or the crazy "drugie" from the streets, or by people hired to murder us. Jesus was not teaching that we should coldly and without feeling sit by and watch our wife or daughters raped, or our children beaten up, and not try to stop such brutality.

Natural instinct, the law of nature, the law of right and wrong and all human decency, under such situations of violent surprise, as well as the very law of God, allows for self-defence in such circumstances. God actually gave laws to ancient Israel that allowed for self-defence in some situations of life.

Jesus is not dealing with large life and death, huge traumatic cases like that of rape, but with much smaller situations like that of someone slapping us across the face with their hand. With such He wanted His disciples to be willing to take the wrong instead of entering into strife and law suits. This does not mean we cannot remonstrate firmly, yet mildly, on the injustice being done to us, and insist proper justice we should have. Jesus Himself gave us an example of this in His own life (John 18:23).

Have another look at the verse about if someone smites you on the cheek turn to him the right cheek also. Have you ever stopped to analyze the above verse? If I walk up to you and hit you in the face, how is it possible for me (being right handed) to hit you on the right cheek? Most people in the world are (and have always been) right handed.

The only way to smite someone across the right cheek that makes any sense is to back hand them with your left hand which, in the Middle East, and the western world for that matter, is an insulting gesture.

After the example of turning the cheek that Jesus gives, the second example of Jesus' is that of being sued in courts of law. Again, one can plead for justice to be done, but if the man is so full of hate, animosity, and determined to take all advantage that the law can give him, going to the expense of costly law suits etc. Then Jesus taught we should not imitate him - rather than to contend with a revengeful spirit in courts of justice, and to perpetuate the broil, we should take a trifling injury, and yield, even if our cloak is also taken.

Jesus, I think, used this example to show He was talking about smaller issues of life. Our coat and even our cloak, may be somewhat important to us (especially on cold, hot, or rainy day) but they are relatively easy to replace. He did not give the example of someone trying to take our house or our business away from us (which could be very important to us and our families who are under our care). Paul, at one time in his life, when being taken to the Jewish law courts (and smaller Roman courts) by some who were against him, appealed to the high court of Rome, for justice.

As a Roman citizen Paul had every right to so appeal to the high court of Rome. In this case it was sufficiently a large matter (his life in certain ways being at stake) to warrant his stand for justice. This was not a small matter of some Jews wanting to have his coat because they liked the silk it was made from (see Acts 23:12 through to the end of chapter 28).

It may be of interest to the reader here, that we talk about the "coat" and the "cloak" that Jewish men wore in those days.

The Jews wore two principle garments. An interior garment, and an exterior garment. The "interior" here called the "coat," was made commonly of linen, and encircled the whole body, extending down to the knees. Sometimes beneath this garment, as in the case of the priests, there was another garment, corresponding to our undergarments. The "coat" was extended to the neck, and had long or short sleeves.

OVER this garment, was commonly worn an upper or outer garment called the "cloak" or mantle. It was commonly nearly square, five or six cubits (a cubit being about 16 to 18 inches in length) in length and just as wide. It was wrapped around the body and thrown off when doing heavy labor work.

The next New Testament instruction of Jesus' - about going a mile with those compelling you, has also not been understood very well by many. We shall quote from the Albert Barnes Bible Commentary once more, and so see what Jesus was explaining as what should be an attitude for Christians.

The word translated 'shall compel' is of PERSIAN origin. Post offices were then unknown. In order that the royal commands might be delivered with safety and despatch in different parts of the empire, Cyrus (the great king of Persia) stationed horsemen at proper intervals on all the great public highways. One of those delivering the message to another, and intelligence was thus rapidly and safely communicated. These heralds were permitted to COMPEL any person, or to press any horse, boat, ship, or other vehicle that they might need, for the quick transmission of the king's commands. It was to THIS CUSTOM that our savior refers. Rather, says He, than RESIST a public authority, requiring your attention and aid for a certain distance, go peaceably twice the distance.....

Ah, we see here then that Jesus was referring to certain authorities in public office who had authority from governments to ask you to co-operate with them, and that New Testament Christians should be more than willing to co-operate, even going beyond the letter of the law. Jesus was teaching that His followers should have respect for other government authorities and their duties, even if they were not a part of the Church of God and did not believe in God's word the Bible. It really has nothing to do with any "Joe Blow" demanding you help them. Giving help to such, and going beyond the call of duty, would for them come under a whole set of other considerations, such as time, money expended (if it was going to involve money), family responsibilities, regular work responsibilities, danger involvement etc. etc.

No common man has the right or authority to demand you be their slave for whatever task their whim takes them into, and makes them think they must compel you to work with them in their undertaking.

The last part of this section of Jesus' teaching can also be misunderstood if you do not take into account the whole teachings of the New Testament.

Albert Barnes says it very correctly I think in his commentary:

.....It is good to give something to an undeserving person, than to turn away one who really needs it. It is good to be in the HABIT of giving. At the same time, the rule must be interpreted as to be consistent with our duty to our families (1 Tim. 5:8) and with other objects of justice and charity. It is seldom, perhaps never, good to give to a man that is able to work (2 Thes. 3:10). To give to such is to encourage laziness, and to support the idle at the expense of the industrious. If such a man is indeed hungry, feed him; if he wants anything further, give him employment. If a widow, an orphan, a man of misfortune, or a man infirm, lame, or sick, is at your door, never send them away empty. See Heb. 13:2; Matt. 25:35-45.

So of a poor and needy friend who wishes to borrow we are not to turn away or deny him. This deserves, however, some limitation. It must be done in consistency with other duties. To lend to every worthless man, would be to throw away our property, encourage

laziness and crime, and ruin our families. It should be done consistently, and of this every man is to be the judge. Perhaps our savior meant to teach that where there was a DESERVING friend or brother in want, we should LEND to him, without usury, and standing much about the security.

Here Albert Barnes says correctly that we must follow this instruction of Christ's by taking into account the rest of the Bible and our families well being, as well as discerning the worthiness of the individual asking for the lending hand, and not just giving to perpetuate their laziness or predetermined mindset to "live off other people."

Some of Albert Barnes' last words are old English. He was saying that to lend to a worthy friend or brother should be done without charging money, or demanding some security such as telling them to leave with you something like their "CD player" till they returned to you what you are lending them.

Love Your Enemies

Jesus further comments on a popular teaching of His day: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say unto you, Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the corrupt tax collectors do the same? And if you are kind to only your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to become perfect, fully mature, even as your Father in heaven is perfect and fully mature."

Here we find a classic example of Jewish teachers misunderstanding, misapplying, and reading into verses of the Old Testament things that God never intended at all. It is an example as well of picking out certain verses, misapplying them, while at the same time overlooking verses that would teach the exact opposite from the theology you have invented from the misapplied verses.

The command to love your neighbor was indeed a law of God (Lev. 19:18). God never said that you were to hate your enemy. The Jewish teachers had "assumed" that with God saying to love your "neighbor" He was meaning love your Israelite neighbor only, and hence you could dislike your enemy (anyone outside of Israel). Then to further complicate and mess up their minds on this point, the Jewish religious leaders had seen where God in His word as given through Moses, stated that the Israelites should not marry their sons and daughters to those outside of the nation of Israel (Deut. 7:1-3).

They stopped reading it would seem with verse three. And as God was going to deliver them into their hand and utterly cast them out and give Israel the holy promised land, then surely God hated everyone outside of His chosen people Israel and so they too should hate, despise, and esteem as nothing, all people but their Israelite neighbor.

What they failed to see and do was to read Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verse 4. God did not want the Israelites to marry those from outside of Israel because of one very basic and important reason - they were unconverted, their minds were not in tune with the Eternal God and His way of life. By marrying such people it would

mainly be the Israelites who would be drawn away from the pathway of the true God, and not the other way around (the heathen coming to serve the God of Israel). Such is the way of the human heart, much easier to leave off serving God than to accept Him and follow His ways.

The instruction of the Lord had nothing to do with "hating" all who were not your Israelite neighbor, and had nothing to do with not being kind and helpful to those outside your "church" or "nation." Many verses were overlooked that taught kindness to all peoples (see Exodus 22:21; 12:49; Numbers 15:15-16).

Then adding to all this false idea of hating your enemies was the well known passage of Deuteronomy 23:3-6. Here God forbade the Ammonite or Moabite to enter the congregation of the Lord for ten generations (that part was probably overlooked - ten generations) because they did evil towards Israel (verses 4 and 5). Israel was to not seek their peace nor their prosperity (verse 6). This was all for some specific reasons as stated, and it was a punishment from God towards these people, for a certain time period.

The Jewish leaders had misapplied this and the one in Numbers (concerning marrying outside Israel) to believe God "hated" the enemies of Israel, and to them anyone outside of the nation of Israel was an enemy. They thought God wanted them to never seek the peace with anyone who was not of Israel, hence this false teaching of "love your neighbor but hate your enemy" was a common sentence to pronounce and to live by for the Jewish community of Jesus' day.

Here are some fine comments on this passage by Albert Barnes:

.....LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. There are two kinds of love, involving the same general meaning, or springing from the same fountain of goodwill to all mankind.....The one is that feeling by which we APPROVE OF THE CONDUCT of another, commonly called THE LOVE OF COMPLACENCY; the other, by which we wish well to the PERSON of another, though we cannot approve HIS CONDUCT. This is THE LOVE OF BENEVOLENCE; and this love we are to bear towards our enemies. It is impossible to love the CONDUCT of a man that curses and reviles us, and injures our person or property, or that violates all the laws of God; but though we may hate his conduct, and feel deeply that we are affected by it, yet we may still wish well to the PERSON; we may pity his madness and folly; we may speak kindly OF him, and TO him; we may not return evil for evil; we may aid him in the time of trial; and seek to do him good here, and to promote his eternal welfare hereafter, Rom.12: 17-20.....

BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU. The word BLESS here means to SPEAK WELL OF or TO. Not to curse again, or to slander, but to speak of those things which we can COMMEND in an enemy; or if there is nothing that we can commend, to say nothing about him.....

DESPITEFULLY USE YOU. The word thus translated means, first, to injure by prosecution in law; then, wantonly and unjustly to accuse, and to injure in any way.....

THAT YOU MAY BE THE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER.....In this passage, the word is used because, in doing good to enemies, they RESEMBLE God. HE makes his sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends rain, without distinction, on the just and unjust. So his people should show that they IMITATE or resemble him, or possess his spirit of doing good in a similar way.

WHAT REWARD HAVE YOU?.....If you only love those that love you, you are selfish.....it is not genuine love for the CHARACTER, but love for the BENEFIT; and you deserve no commendation. The very PUBLICANS would do the same.

THE PUBLICANS. The publicans were tax gatherers. Judea was a province of the Roman empire. The Jews bore this foreign yoke with great impatience, and paid their taxes with great reluctance. It happened therefore, that those who were appointed to collect taxes were objects of great detestation. They were, besides, men who would be supposed to execute their office at all hazards; men who were willing to engage in an odious and hated employment; men often of abandoned character, oppressive in their exactions, and dissolute in their lives. By the Jews they were associated in character with thieves, and adulterers, and those who were profane and dissolute. Christ says that even these wretched men would love their benefactors.

AND IF YOU SALUTE YOUR BRETHREN, etc. The word SALUTE here means to show the customary tokens of civility, or to treat with the common marks of friendship.....He says that the WORST men, the very publicans, would do this. Christians should do more; they should show that they had a different spirit; they should treat their ENEMIES as well as wicked men did THEIR FRIENDS. This should be done, (1) because it is RIGHT; it is the only really amiable spirit; and, (2) we should show that religion is not SELFISH, and is superior to all other principles of action.

BE YOU THEREFORE PERFECT. He concludes this part of the discourse by commanding his disciples to be PERFECT. This word commonly means finished, complete, pure, holy. Originally it is applied to a piece of mechanism, as a machine that is complete in its parts. Applied to men, it refers to completeness of parts, or PERFECTION, where no part is defective or wanting. Thus Job (1: 1) is said to be perfect; that is, not holy as God, or SINLESS - for fault is afterwards found with him (Job 9: 20; 42: 6), but his piety was PROPORTIONATE - had a completeness of parts - was consistent and regular. He exhibited his religion as a prince, a father, an individual, a benefactor of the poor. He was not merely a pious man in one place, but uniformly. He was consistent everywhere. This is the meaning in Matthew. Be not religious merely in loving your friends and neighbors, but let your piety be shown in loving your enemies; be perfect; imitate God; let the piety be COMPLETE, and PROPORTIONAL, and REGULAR. This every Christian MAY BE; this every Christian MUST BE" (Albert Barnes' Bible Commentary. Capitalization for emphasis was ours whereas Albert Barnes used italics for emphasis).

Luke, in his Gospel, chapter 6:27-36, gives us further words and teaching on this overall matter of loving your enemy and doing good to those who may not be your friends, or who may be taking advantage of your Christian charity.

Jesus was setting here a new standard in verses 30 to 36. Under the New Covenant age it was no longer good enough to help and serve your friends, those who would serve and help you when you needed help.

We must take the whole context of these verses if we are to understand the foundational truth Jesus was teaching. He was not looking at or talking about people who would use your kindness and wipe their feet on it, walk all over you, take advantage of your charity. He was not trying to say that His disciples should be a "soft touch" - an easy target for what people could get from them, or that His followers should be a "push over" for selfish people, tricksters, and con-artists.

Other teachings of Jesus show that it is correct and proper for Christians to be "worldly wise" and to be good stewards of all that God gives them. A number of parables Jesus taught show this truth of what I've just stated.

But there is another side to being a true Christian in all of this material world and how you handle what God has given you to handle. And this is the side Jesus wanted to give emphasis to at this point among His teachings to His disciples.

A Christian should have a basic attitude of doing good to those who are not your friends, who may even dislike you, and who want to be your enemies. There is not much credit, no gold stars on your report card, if you only do good to those who you know will do good back to you. As Jesus said, even the gravest sinners can do that to each other. And if you lend anything or give anything to only those who you know will give and lend back to you, what credit or honor is that to you, even the wildest sinners can do that to each other.

The attitude Jesus wanted from His disciples was the attitude that the Most High God has.....being kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. There are times when you should serve, give, lend, do good, to those who cannot or will not return the kindness you have shown to them.

Jesus said that in doing and living that kind of life, the Father would reward His child, in fact their reward "will be great." The reward may not always come in this lifetime, but it will come. There are many times in our Christian walk that we are to be merciful, even as our Father in heaven is merciful.

So, we come to the end of Matthew chapter five. We shall continue reading and expounding Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, in the next chapter of the New Testament Bible Story.

CHAPTER 14

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (CONTINUED)

Don't Go Good Deeds To Be Noticed By Others

And Jesus went on to say: "Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly; to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give gifts to someone in need, don't shout about it as the hypocrites do - blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I assure you, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone, don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in secret, and your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you."



When you do your good deeds do not blow a trumpet like the hypocrites (Greek word for actors) do. In Greek plays a trumpet would be blown to announce the entrance of a leading actor.

We also need to be careful in understanding what Jesus was MAINLY getting at here. In a great many cases it is just not possible to give to someone, especially if it is a large gift, without someone knowing, and then the possibility they tell others about your kindness. If you are famous in the public eye, it will be even harder to give to others in a secret way. And if you are famous and give huge amounts to charity then it is harder still to "do it in secret."

The founder of Microsoft and the famous "Windows" nearly everyone in the world uses on their computers, Bill Gates, is one of the wealthiest men in the whole world. It has been said that he "gives away" more money in any single year than the total revenue of some "countries" of the world. You do not hear about his charity giving very much at all, so Bill Gates, for being a famous man, has done a pretty good job of keeping his "good deeds" to himself, without any loud publicity about it. He lives in a large and relatively expensive home, but when you see him on TV he is dressed very modestly, even casually, and you would never think to look at him that he is one of the wealthiest persons in the world.

The main thing Jesus was getting at here is that we be humble, quiet, laid-back so to speak, in our good deeds giving. That we have an attitude of doing it yes, helping others when and where we can, and how we can, but doing it all in relative

quietness, with no big blaring sounds of announcements to the neighborhood, town, or world, that you are "giving to others."

Many in Jesus' day were doing just that. They were literally hiring people to blow trumpets in the churches and on the street corners to get the attention of people, and then having it shouted out they were doing such and such good deeds.

Most of these people Jesus knew (because He knew the hearts of people, could see into their heart and know their motives) were hypocrites, play-actors, pretending to be someone they really were not. Their religion was all about "acting" a part, pretending, putting on an outward show to make people think they were so righteously in tune with and walking in the ways of the Lord. The truth was they were anything but true God fearing and humble children of the Father.

Jesus taught that we should do good deeds to others, but in doing them, to be humble and try to do them all as much as possible without anyone knowing about it.

Jesus then turned His attention to the subject of prayer, another religious deed that had been greatly abused by certain ones, to again make people think they were "very religious."

"And now about prayer. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on the street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go off by yourself, shut the door behind you in your room, and pray to the Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you openly.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words over and over again. Don't you be like them, because your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask Him!

"Pray after this manner: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored and praised. May your Kingdom soon come. May your will be done on earth as it is being done in heaven. Give us our daily requirements. Forgive us our sins, just as we forgive those who have sinned and done evil against us. Lead us not into trials and temptations, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen "

Jesus' instructions on some points of prayer are pretty simple and straightforward. You are to pray basically in private. Now that does not mean a husband and wife cannot pray together. In marriage two become one as ordained by God way back in Genesis chapter two. It does not mean congregations cannot get together and pray. We have examples in the book of Acts (that we shall see in detail much later) where the Church of God did meet and have times of prayer together (usually under some severe trial that was upon them or some of their members).

What Jesus is addressing here is our regular basic everyday prayer life. It was to be a private matter, not something that was done on the street corners and with the attitude of "look everyone, I'm so godly I'm praying, you can all see then I'm so religious." Some were performing their prayer life exactly like that, making it a big public production. Again, Jesus knew their hearts and they were in the main religious hypocrites so He said.

Our prayer life is mainly to be a personal thing, done in privacy, and the Father who then sees in private, will reward us "openly" as it is in the KJV translation. We are also not to use vain repetitions. Our prayers are to be from the heart, not something like reciting a poem and maybe doing it over and over. As Jesus said there are some religions that teach only through a set repeating of certain words can their prayers be answered. That was not the case with the Father, Jesus explained, for He knows our thoughts and needs and requests even before we begin to pray.

Of course that does not mean we should not pray. It is a lot like an earthly father (or mother also) knowing the needs and desires of his or her children (what they would like for their birthday, and that sort of thing), but still wanting their children to talk about it to them.

Jesus Gives A Model Prayer Outline

Jesus then went on to give a basic outline of prayer. There maybe many other things we can pray for and talk to our heavenly Father about, but here we find some of the very basics that should be a pretty regular part of our prayers.

The supreme God in heaven is "our Father." It is clear from reading all the Gospels that Jesus taught a "family" relationship between the Himself and the Father and us. That we were all part of one large heavenly family, with the Father God being the supreme head in authority, but still our Father, with all that a "father" is within a family unit. Wonderful and glorious it is that God is our "father" and we are His sons and daughters.

We need to honor and praise our Father in heaven and honor His name, just as we should try to honor the name of our own earthly family. We need to be always full of praise, thanking God for all the wonderful blessing we have, both spiritually and physically. Stop for a moment now, put this book to one side for a little while and think of some of the many good things you have. Then praise the Father for them. Make this meditation and praise a part of your regular prayer life.

Praying for the soon coming Kingdom of God should be a constant priority. If you have read about that Kingdom and how it will govern the entire earth one day, as related by all the Old Testament prophets. If you understand what that age will be like, and you reflect on the evil, sorrows, pain, hardships, wars, sicknesses, of today's age, then you will want to cry out for God' s Kingdom to soon come, to deliver this world from Satan and all his wrong ways, and to see the knowledge of the Lord filling this earth as the waters cover the sea beds.

You will want to see God's will done on earth as it is being done in heaven. You will want to pray that the Lord's children will stay faithful, and be a light of doing God's will to all around them. You will want to ask for help from God via His Holy Spirit to love and obey His word, His will, His commandments.

Yes, it is okay and fine to ask our heavenly Father for our daily needs. He knows we are physical human being that need physical things each and every day in order to live our life. It is "daily" needs we need to ask for, not to amass stock-piles of "goodies" for a time far into the future. It is not wrong to have a nest-egg or two (the book of Proverbs teaches us that) but praying that the Lord will grant us what we need (and that could be spiritual, emotional, as well as physical) for each day, as the day comes, is the focus in this basic outline of prayer from Christ.

We are to remember we are sinners, and to ask for forgiveness, as we forgive others for sinning against us. Notice, it is being forgiven, asking to be forgiven, AS, in like manner as, we forgive others who do wrong to us. Just a few verses down below this prayer outline, Jesus said, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Kind of plain would you not say? We must be willing to forgive others, if we expect our Father in heaven to forgive us. Sometimes others come to us asking for us to forgive them, when they acknowledge they have done us wrong. Sometimes, they have done us wrong and cannot see that they have or will not admit they have. We still must have forgiveness towards them, at least within ourselves, a kind of "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do" attitude, as Jesus did when surrounded by those who nailed Him to the cross and wanted to see Him dead.

Letting go and forgiving someone does not mean you are a sitting duck for them to trample all over you again and again. But it does mean you "let go" and are not having sleepless nights over the matter, or figuring out how you can "get back at them."

Having this kind of forgiving attitude towards human beings means that you will sure obtain forgiveness from the Father in heaven when He needs to forgive you for your wrong doing towards Him.

We need also to pray that God will not lead us into temptation. Hummm, a little hard to understand for James was inspired to write that God does not tempt any man (James 1:13). God does not try to break us down by He Himself putting a snare or trap into sin, in front of us. But He does allow sin to be around us. He does allow Satan and the demons to do their evil work. He does allow various trials, test, and troubles to come our way.

The best way to understand what Jesus was saying, is I think, to ask God that He will lead us "out of" trials and tests that could lead us to sin. To ask God for wisdom (James chapter one again) in dealing with life situations, for the ability to be corrected and to learn from life the lessons we need to learn, and then after learning them to not fall into the same errors again. We ask God for all this, and so in granting it to us, He is leading us out of the sore trials that can come our way, and throw us into a real mess.

We ask Him for help from the ways and influence of the evil one. For the evil one is always there like a roaring lion sneaking about searching for whom he can devour (1 Peter 5:8). One of the great ways to stand up against the devil and not be slain by him is to do as the apostle Paul said, put on the whole armor of God. We can pray for help to do just that (see Eph. 6:10-18).

We finally once more give our heavenly Father praise and honor and glory, for He indeed has the power and the glory for all things, and certainly to answer our petitions. His is the Kingdom that is in heaven and that will one day come to this earth, which we can be a very part of for all eternity.

Fasting

Another tool that has always been used by the people of God to obtain victory, spiritual strength, and closeness to the Lord, is that of physical "fasting" - going without food and water for a period of time. Jesus now instructs on this matter.

"And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad face: for they change their faces in different ways that they may appear to people to be fasting. Truly, they have all the reward they shall get. But you, when you fast, put on hair cream, and wash your face, be in your physical appearance so people will not know you are fasting. But your Father which is invisible to you, but sees all secret things, He will reward you openly."



When you fast do not disfigure your face like the actors (Greek: hypocrites) do.

Moses fasted for 40 days (Deut. 9:18); Elijah also did the same (1 Kings 19:8); Esther fasted (Esther 4:16); David fasted (Psalm 35:13); and Jesus fasted for 40 days (Matt. 4:2). Fasting had always been apart of the life of God's people. Jesus here did not say "if" you fast, but "when" you fast, taking it for granted that His followers would fast.

It was to be done again without public notice, in fact in such a none noticeable way that people would not know they were fasting. This was quite opposite from the way many in His day practiced fasting. They wanted people to know, and went far out of their way to make sure they knew they were doing it. All to put on the false face that they were super religious. They had their reward of acclaim from the public, but their practice of religion got no higher than the ceiling with God.

But the Father knows the heart, and He can see when His children serve Him, even if the world does not, and He will reward them, sometimes even in an open way in this lifetime. If not in this life then surely in the age to come, in His Kingdom.

For most people today to fast more than three days without food or drink will be beyond them. Then you can fast for half a day, missing one or two meals. Our time should be spent in prayer, Bible reading, and meditation, when we fast. The whole purpose behind it is to get close to God.

Don't Worry About Your Physical Needs

Naturally, as we live in a physical world and must have certain physical things to sustain us, Jesus had to speak on this subject also.

"Store not for yourself physical treasures on this earth, where moths and bugs and rust can eat them up and destroy them, or where thieves can break in and steal them from you. Store your treasures in heaven, where it really counts, and where they will never become moth eaten or crumble away with rust, and where they will also be safe from thieves. Where your true treasure is there will be your heart also.

Your eye of the heart and mind is the lamp of your body. A pure eye lets in the sunshine into your life. But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness. If the light you think you have is really darkness, oh, how deep indeed is that darkness you have!

No person can two serve masters. For you will hate and despise the one while you love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and disregard the other. So in like manner you cannot serve and be slave to God and at the same time to physical money and goods.

So I am telling you, don't be overly anxious and worried about everyday life - whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Does not life consist of more than food and drink and clothing? Take a look at the birds. They do not need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to Him than the birds. Can all your over anxious and fretful worries add a single moment to your life, or food to your stomach?

And why be fretful about your clothes and what you shall put on from day to day? Take a look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't sit and fret about their clothing. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as the lilies are. And if God cares so wonderfully about flowers that are here for only a short season and then they are gone, do you not think He will care for you even the more? Oh, you that have so little faith!

So do not fret and be overly concerned about having enough food or drink or clothes. Why be like those without God who indeed are concerned about such things? Your heavenly Father already knows all the physical things you will need in order to live, and He will provide these needs for you from day to day if you will first of all seek His righteousness and make being a part of His kingdom your primary concern in this life.

Look at the BIRDS of the air;
they neither SOW nor REAP
... your heavenly FATHER
feeds them. Are YOU not of
more value than they?



Matthew 6:26, NRSV

So do not be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring enough of its own problems and troubles. Today's troubles are enough to be concerned about without adding what may or may not come tomorrow" (Remember I am paraphrasing Jesus' words).

The Bible is a complete book and we must read it all and take into discernment all parts of what God teaches us on any particular subject. The book of Proverbs, as well as elsewhere in the Gospels and other parts of the New Testament, show us that it is not wrong to be wise in this physical life, to have some put away for a rainy day as they say.

Jesus, we shall see, also taught us to be good stewards of all the physical things we have. God does not want us to be spendthrifts, lazy, living with a "oh, I couldn't care less" attitude, and sponging off other people as if everyone owns us a living. There are so many passages in the Bible that show that a Christian is to work (if he/she at all can), not to be a "lazy bum" to put it bluntly. A Christian is to take care of his own (as the apostle Paul once said), to be a responsible person and be one who uses and actually increases what God has given him to use.

What Jesus was saying then, in the light of all the totality of the word of God, is that our life, mind, heart, thoughts, should not be wrapped up in the physical things of this life; how we can get more and more, how we can stockpile more and more material goods. We are not to be consumed, anxiously concerned and fretting over making sure we have huge amounts of more than enough to live on.

This is true what I'm about to tell you. I once met a man who had been away for a four day week-end, and he had not slept at all, for he was on some course that went through the nights even, teaching, teaching, and still more teaching. I was amazed when he told me this and he could see it in my facial expression. "Oh, that is nothing!" he exclaimed, "I was once in California on a 7 day course and we never slept for 7 days, the teaching continued day and night." Then in a matter of fact manner and with absolute sincerity and meaning every word, he said looking me straight in the eye with a cold serious face, "Hum, I want to be a millionaire."

Jesus on the other hand said your heart, your mind, your life, should first of all be seeking God's righteousness and His Kingdom. That, He said, should be the most important mission in life for you. As we have seen, Jesus taught that to serve Him, sometimes we would have to part with certain physical things, maybe a job, or a person once close and dear to us, and there may come times we would wonder how we were going to have the physical things we need in this life just to continue living. When we read through the letters of the great apostle Paul we find that sometimes he was in great need of the physical things in life, but God always saw him through and provided for him, not always as much as he may have personally wanted, but enough.

Jesus was saying and telling us that we need faith, we need to trust our heavenly Father. He knows what we need for each day, so trust Him to provide it for you, seek first His righteousness and His Kingdom, and be assured God will give you your needs for the day.

Be Careful How You Judge

Jesus said, "Do not judge unfairly, that you be not judge unfairly. For others will judge you as you judge them. Whatever measure you use in judging others, it will be used to measure how you are judged. And why worry about a speck in the eye of your brother or sister or friend, when you have a log in your eye? How can you even think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get the speck out of your eye,' when you cannot see past the large log in your own eye? Hypocrites! First get rid of the log in your eye; then perhaps you can see clearly to get rid of the speck in your friend's eye."



We know from the rest of the New Testament, that to discern right from wrong, to judge the righteousness or sin of an act or way of life that someone may have done or may be living, is not wrong. We can see from 1 Corinthians chapter 5, that Paul said he had judged the matter of an unrepentant sinner in the congregation at Corinth, and told the people of the church there that they also needed to judge the matter.

Jesus on another occasion, said of Peter, "You have rightly judged" (Luke 7:43). And at another time said, "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgement" (John 7:24).

So, it is evident, Jesus was here in Matthew chapter 7 telling us that we need to be very judicious, circumspect, guard, mindful, attentive, on how we judge others and their actions. We need to be careful not to jump to wrong conclusions. We need to have all the facts on the situation. And we also need to be able to look into ourselves and see our faults, weakness, errors, before we start to bring down the hammer on the faults of others.

It is very important that we always remember and apply the words of Paul as found in Galatians 6:1-3. "Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's command. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop to this, he is fooling himself. He is really a nobody."

The Gospel writer Luke gives us a few more words that Jesus said in this context of judging righteously and correctly (Luke 6:39, 40).

To be able to judge righteously means you must become like the one who is the holy righteous judge of all people's hearts and minds. The disciple is never above their teacher, and everyone who acquires the full teaching of their teacher, will be like their teacher. In this instant Jesus was talking about the children of God becoming like God in righteous judgment. If they did not then they were still as blind men, and would be leading and teaching others to follow that blindness, and hence blind men

would be leading blind men. Such blinded ones would both fall into the ditch as they tried to lead each other in the wrong ways of judging and condemning sin and sinners.

Then another key that is required to unlock the door of righteous judging is what Jesus went on to add in verses 41, 42 in Luke chapter 6 (also in Matthew). It is the key of first being able to examine yourself, look at yourself honestly, admit to yourself your errors, sins, and where you miss the mark at times. You must first be able to see the log of sins in your life, if you are going to be a true effective and helpful judge of errors and sins in other people. By doing this in your life, you will be humble in how you try to help another with their problems of sin, and weaknesses of the human flesh. It is not wrong to convert a man from the error of his way (see James 5:19, 20), but it must always be done in the context of what the apostle Paul was inspired to tell us must be the context of such righteous judging (see Gal. 6:1-3).

Be Careful How You Hand Out Your Treasures

This may shock some people, but Jesus taught that sometimes it is not prudent to give out the holy and fine pearls that God gives us, to other people.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the pigs, for they may simple trample what you give them under their feet, and even turn and beat you up" (Matthew 7:6).

Sad to say, but some out there are so against and so hate the holy and fine pearls of God, that they will only laugh at them, disregard and immediately trample them under their feet, and some may get so violently upset at what you are trying to give them, they will literally try punching you out.

We need wisdom in ascertaining the heart and mindset of people towards what we know as the holy things of God. Wisdom to know when and where and with whom, to share such holy things.

Effective Prayer And Requests

Jesus also knew that praying or requesting something from the Father in heaven, was not always answered the first time, but it would be answered and you would receive that which is best and good for you.

"Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find it. Keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you." The original language of the New Testament shows that Jesus said it this way, KEEP ON asking.... looking.....knocking....

Jesus continued, "For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks finds. And the door is opened to all who knock. You parents, if you have children and they ask you for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they should ask you for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Of course not! If you being sinful people know how to give good things to your children, how much more then will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him."

God the Father loves His children. He wants the very best for them. He will give us that which He knows is good for us. Sometimes, as James told us, we may ask

amiss (James 4:3), so of course we will not receive. The apostle John was inspired to give us two other conditions in order to receive from the Father.

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). "And this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

So we see that the "whatsoever we ask" must be according to His will. We may not receive the good gift from above (James 1:17) immediately. So as Jesus said, we must keep on asking. Later we shall see where Jesus gave a parable especially to teach that God's people must not faint, but continue in prayer, supplication, and request, and the Father will, in His time, answer and give.

Doing Good To All People

How should we live our basic day to day lives as we mingle and converse with other people? Jesus told us how. "Therefore whatever things you would like other people to do to you, do also to them, for this is the summary of all that is written in the law and the prophets."

Most of us like to be treated by others in a nice respectful, even kind and helpful manner. So, said Jesus, we must like to treat others in the very same kind and respectful manner, for this is what God has taught from the beginning, this is what in the overall way, the Old Testament was teaching through its many laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts.

The Narrow Gate - Another Shocking Statement

Oh, some of the teaching and statements that Christ made are truly shocking and in many respects quite the opposite of what a lot of theologians of the Christians religion today tell you. A lot of them preach that it is as easy as falling of a log to get as they may say "to heaven." Jesus taught exactly the opposite!

Listen to this! "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the NARROW gate. The highway to destruction is BROAD, and its gate is WIDE for the many who choose the EASY WAY. But the gateway to eternal life is SMALL, and the road is very NARROW, and ONLY A FEW EVER FIND IT."

Coming to Christ in repentance (knowing and acknowledging you have sinned, that you are a sinner) may be relatively easy (but many today who accept Christ as their Savior don't even know what sin and repentance is), but that is just the beginning of the road to salvation, we must continue to walk its path, to "grow in grace and knowledge" as Peter wrote (2 Peter 3:18) and we must make our calling and election sure by doing the things Peter listed in 2 Peter 1:3-11. We must "endure to the end" as Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, and then we shall be saved into the Kingdom of God.

Yes, Jesus knew there was much more to "being saved" than just "giving your heart to the Lord" as many preach today. The fact is, you can think and argue with all the arguments in the world, but the words Jesus spoke here are CLEAR and SIMPLE - the road to eternal life is NARROW, the doorway to enter is SMALL, most in this life will not walk that narrow way, and only the FEW in this age will enter the Kingdom.

False Prophets And Fruits

Jesus warned us that many would come along telling you they were Christians, telling you they knew Christ, accepted Him as Savior, telling you they were speaking in His name (Mat. 24:4-5), but they would be deceivers.

Here He says, "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are really wolves that will tear you apart and eat you up. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You do not pick grapes from a thornbush, or figs from a thistle bush. A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. So, every tree that does not produce good fruit is eventually chopped down and thrown into the fire. Yes, the way to know and identify a tree or a person is indeed by the kind of fruit that is produced."

Jesus is speaking in a very personal way here, of personal fruits, the way of life, that people live. He is not speaking about people who have large numbers of other people following them, as fruit. There have been some very evil men down through the centuries, such as Hitler, in the 1930's and 40's who had hundreds of thousands devoted to him and his cause and desire to rule the world. Having people follow you is not what Jesus was talking about at all. It was the personal fruit of the person in their day to day lives, how they lived according to the way of the Lord, and how they lived in relation to others, as taught by the Word of God.

Jesus continued, "Not all people who sound religious are godly. They may refer to me as 'Lord, Lord,' but they still will not enter the Kingdom of heaven. The decisive and pivotal issue is whether they OBEY my Father in heaven. On judgment day many will tell me 'Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name, and even cast out demons and evil spirits in your name, and performed many miracles in your name.' But I will reply to them, 'I never knew you. Go away; you that continued to work lawlessness.' "

There it is again, from the very lips of Jesus Christ Himself, from the one that many claim to know and follow and believe in as Savior of the world. Many want to have Jesus as Savior but will NOT BELIEVE what He said and taught. He clearly said you can have His name, call yourself a Christian, do all kinds of seemingly "good" things in His very name, yet on judgment day He, Jesus, will not know many of these people. He will tell them He never walked with them, never lived in them. He will tell them to depart from the Kingdom, and the main reason He gives is that they were LAWLESS!

They did not do what He had just said above, OBEY the Father in heaven. They were not within the laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts, of the Father. They did not live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). They did not do what Jesus had already expounded previously in this Sermon on the Mount as we covered in Matthew chapter 5:17-20.

To ensure a place in the Kingdom Jesus went on to say, "Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is like a wise person who builds a house on a good solid rock. Though the rains and storms come in mighty torrents and the floodwater rise and the winds beat against that house, it will stand and not fall because it is built on rock as a foundation. But anyone who hears my teachings and ignores them is like a foolish person who builds his house upon the weak and shifting sand. When the

rains and floods come and the wind blows hard against that house, it falls with a mighty crash."



The house built on the rock will withstand the storm unlike the one built on the sand

Believing and obeying what Jesus taught is just as important as believing in Him as personal Savior. The two go hand in hand, like a horse and buggy, like a car must have a steering wheel and tires as well as a motor, to correctly move along the correct road, so too, the whole life of a Christian must consist of believing ON Jesus and believing IN Jesus, believing and obeying what He taught. As one famous hymn says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Matthew then records: "After Jesus finished speaking the people were amazed at His teaching, for He taught as one who had real powerful authority - quite unlike the lawyers of the law called scribes."

Jesus had finished His Sermon on the Mount.

CHAPTER 15

THE GREAT FAITH OF THE CENTURION

The Gospel of Luke tells us that after Jesus had ended teaching the people (which we have seen were not the great multitudes but His closest disciples, the twelve plus a number of others), He moved on to the town of Capernaum. In this town there was a centurion. What was a centurion? Well, the Roman army was made up of "legions" of soldiers, a legion being about six thousand men. There were ten divisions of about six hundred men to a legion. Each division was divided into three units (two hundred men to a division) and each was divided into two centuries of men, each under the command of a centurion. So a centurion was an army man in charge of 100 men of war. The centurions were always chosen from among Romans who were stable and reliable and who had demonstrated their courage and maturity. The army in Judea consisted of Italian and Syrian troops. Generally no Jews served in the Roman army, hence the Roman troops and centurions were not Israelites.

Now, this centurion in the town of Capernaum had a slave who was very dear to him. But the slave got sick and was close to dying, so he asked elders from among the Jews to go to Jesus and ask Him to come and heal his slave. The elders said to Jesus, "This centurion loves our people and even built us a synagogue. He is very worthy to receive your help and for you to come and heal his slave, please we implore you to come and heal this man's slave."

Jesus was somewhat impressed by their words and decided to go to Capernaum. When He was not far from the centurion's house, the army officer sent some of his friends to Jesus with these words, "Lord, please do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to receive you into my house, that's why I did not come myself to you. But I know that if you just say the word my servant will be healed. For I know what having authority is like, as I am a man set under authority, yet I have authority over soldiers under me. I say to one, 'go,' and he goes; and to another 'come,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'do this,' and he does it."

Jesus was humanly stunned at these words, waited for a moment and then said, "I tell you all, not even in Israel have I found such faith."



The centurion with great faith

When those who had been sent by the centurion returned to the house, they found the slave healthy and healed from his near death sickness (Luke 7:1-10).

Jesus Raises A Dead Man

It was not long after this event that Jesus went with His disciples and a great crowd following Him, to the town of Nain. As He got close to the city gates He saw a man being carried out who had died, the only son of his mother, a widow. A very large crowd from the city of Nain was with this widow. It was obvious to Jesus and all, that the widow was in great grief, she was crying.

"Do not weep," said Jesus to the mother. And He came and touched the open coffin and the bearers stood still. Looking at the dead man He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." At these words the young man sat up and began talking. And Jesus turned him over to his mother.

The people stood there with dumbfounded amazement and even fear, some saying, "Oh, indeed a mighty and great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has surely visited His people!"

After this miracle the report concerning Jesus spread like wildfire throughout all Judea and the surrounding country (Luke 7:11-17).

John The Baptist And His Question

John the Baptist had baptized Jesus, had seen the heavens open and the Spirit like as a dove descend on Jesus. At that time he really knew who the Messiah was, but with time passing and the human heart can leading to "human doubts." Maybe John thought Jesus would have done things differently than what He did, well no matter what the reasoning was in the mind of John, he was now not so sure that this Jesus man was the promised Messiah.

By the time we reach this point in the ministry of Jesus, John had been put in prison, and from prison he sent two of his former disciples to the Lord Jesus with this question, "John the Baptist has sent us to you with this question, 'Are you the one who was to come, or shall we look for another yet to come?' "

Luke in his Gospel records that in that very hour of this question being asked, Jesus cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and to many that were blind He restored to them their sight. Then after all that, Jesus answered them saying, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk again, lepers are cleansed, the deaf do hear once more, and even the dead are raised to life again, the poor in material wealth have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed indeed is he who is not offended in me."

The messengers of John went there way back to tell all these things to him. After they had gone, Jesus thought it was the appropriate time to tell the crowds about John and who he really was or where he fit into the prophetic Scriptures of old.

"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind, weak and unstable? What did you really want to see? A man clothed in soft and fine raiment? Ah, those who are dressed in gorgeous apparel and live in luxury are those in kings' courts. What did you go out to see? A prophet? Oh yes, I tell you he was more than a prophet. For this was he of whom it was written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who shall prepare your way before you come on the

scene (Malachi 3:1). 'I tell you, among all those born of women none has been and is greater than John; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he.'

When many heard this, including some tax collectors, they knew it had been right for them in the sight of God to have been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the lawyer scribes had rejected God's purpose and design and refused to accept John as from God and thus would not be baptized by him (Luke 7:18-30).

Matthew in his Gospel account adds more insight into this occasion which is well worth noting. He records Jesus as clearly stating that, "And if you will accept it, he (talking of John the Baptist) is the Elijah who was to come. He that has ears to hear with, should make sure he hears" (Matt. 11:14).

Yes, Malachi the prophet of old had it revealed to him by God that someone in the power and the spirit of the old famous Elijah the prophet, would come, to prepare the hearts of the people, so they would be really to note who the Messiah was and to accept His teachings (Malachi chapter 3).

The old original Elijah had died centuries earlier. He was still dead. It was not going to literally be the original Elijah that somehow would be resurrected to life, that would come back to earth, but someone of like godliness and boldness (see Matthew 17:9-13). In this account in Matthew 17, of Elijah and Moses appearing with Jesus you will note it was a VISION, something seen with the mind's eye, not an actual physical reality. And there again Jesus makes it clear that John the Baptist was the promised Elijah to come, and the disciples then understood it all.

The other addition Matthew records are these somewhat strange words that Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt. 17:12).

There have been various thoughts of interpretation as to what Jesus meant by these words. Some think He was referring to the violent death of John (having his head taken off) and the violent death of Jesus (to come later), by the hands of basically hurtful and violent in nature, persons. This could possibly be understood that way, but I feel the context, somewhat before, but certainly afterwards, in Matthew's Gospel, lends itself to understand Jesus' words here as explained by Albert Barnes in his Bible Commentary.

From the days that John began to preach.....He says that there was a great RUSH, or a CROWD pressing to hear John. Multitudes went out to hear him, as if they were about to take the kingdom of heaven by force. See Matt. 3:5. So, says He, it has continued. Since the KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, or the GOSPEL, has been preached, there has been a RUSH to it. Men have been EARNEST about it.; they have come PRESSING to obtain the blessing, as if they would take it by violence. There is an allusion here to the manner in which cities were taken. Besiegers PRESSED upon them with violence, and demolished the walls. With such EARNESTNESS and VIOLENCE, He says, men had pressed around Him and John, since they began to preach.....multitudes had thronged around Him and John to hear the gospel" (emphasis was by Albert Barnes, who used italics in his commentary, where I used capitals).

Jesus also said that "violent men take it (the Kingdom of heaven) by force." This corresponds to Luke 16:16.

Men must have a forceful mindset of really wanting to enter the Kingdom. They must "hunger and thirst after righteousness" - obey God, live by His every word (we have seen already Jesus' teaching on all this in the Sermon on the Mount), be more truly righteous than the scribes and the Pharisees. They must be forcefully determined to enter the Kingdom by the small gate, the narrow pathway. They must add to their faith in earnest desire all the things Peter admonished us to add to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:3-11).

To Jesus entering the Kingdom, inheriting the Kingdom, was not as easy as falling off a log. It would mean a person had to have a forceful, pressing, eager desire, to believe IN Jesus and also to believe ON Jesus.....to trust and obey!

What Jesus Thought Of His Generation

Jesus had now been preaching for some time. He had been to many towns and cities, proclaiming the good news of salvation and the Kingdom of God. He had done many a miracle and even raised to life a few that had died. Yet, despite all this a lot of the people and certainly a lot of the religious leaders were not "happy" with Jesus. So, He finally looked around and said to all within hearing distance, "To what shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like in attitude of mind? They are like children sitting in the market square or at the shopping mall, calling to one another, 'We have piped and played our musical instruments, but you did not dance to our tunes; we wailed out our songs of depression, but you did not weep with us.' "

Jesus went on with these words: "For John the Baptist has come to you eating no fine bread and food and drinking no wine; and you have said of him, 'He has a demon.' The Son of man has come eating fine food and drinking wine; and you say of Him, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by all her children" (Luke 7:31-35).

Jesus was telling them here that most of them had little wisdom. They had certain facts, oh yes, they knew about and had seen both John and Jesus in action, certain facts they had, but they could not put them together to make good godly wisdom of it all. They had preconceived theological ideas of what a prophet of God should be like and act and live like in their outward physical life style. They couldn't accept John because he lived in the wilderness and did not partake of the normal food of the city dwellers, and didn't even dress like most people, then add to all that he didn't drink wine. To them he was an outsider, a man from the "backwoods" as we might say today, someone from the hills of Kentucky, a "hill-billy" man. And with their view of "religion" such a man could not possibly be sent from God, so he must have an unclean spirit within him, possessed with a demon.

Then, they looked at Jesus. Here was this fellow saying He was from God, His disciples claiming He was the Messiah to come. Now, He ate very well, even having meals with "rich folk" at times in their homes. He also drank wine quite often it seemed. And He would befriend and keep company with the despised tax collectors and with the sexual sinners (such as prostitutes) down on "skid-row" - the ones "across the tracks" from the so-called "good normal people." To them this fellow called Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard or an alcoholic, maybe all three together.

They were wrong of course on every count. They failed to see that many of the prophets in the Old Testament were not from the "normal" city dwellers, but from the

country-side, from farms and from the wide open spaces. They failed to see that many of the old prophets lived out in the country much of the time. They failed to see that God does not require everyone to look, dress, eat, and live in the city, as clones of each other. They failed to see that such outward signs and differences in people, do not automatically make them from God or from the Devil.

They failed to see that God does not demand or teach that you should never enjoy a fine meal with lots of fine food and wine. They failed to see how at times their great godly kings such as David lived from time to time, and certainly Solomon (who was blessed by God, in a physical way, while he walked with God, more than anyone).

They had a totally wrong theological mindset as to what on the outward physical life style, a man of God should be like. And if it did not fit their preconceived ideas they were ready to call those who taught and lived differently than their theology, either from Satan himself or a wild drunken party type fellow.

They certainly lacked Biblical knowledge, or they were so set in their ways, with their man made standards of the physical, that indeed they had no wisdom.

Sadly, there are some Christian religions today that have "set physical rules" as to what makes a "Christian." Some teach card playing is wrong, some teach going to a movie theatre (even a fine wholesome movie) is wrong, some say dancing (even between husband and wife) is sin. Some teach drinking wine or any alcoholic drink is sin. Some teach wearing colored clothes is wrong and wear all black. Others will not have a TV or radio because to them such things are from the Devil. And on and on it goes.

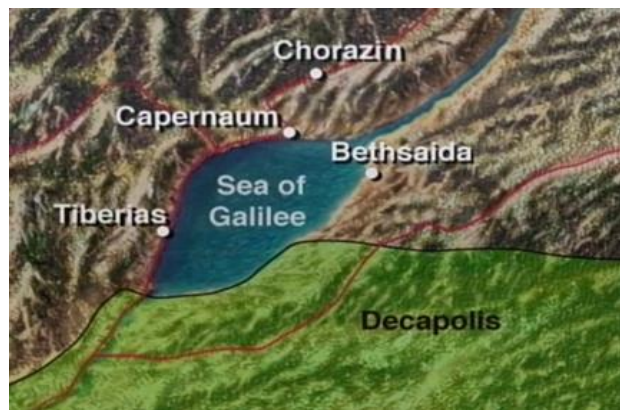
It was no different in Jesus' day. It seemed with many that no matter what you did, how you lived your life in the physical (that nowhere was forbidden by God), you could not please them. If you didn't fit in with their physical theology of what was right and wrong, you could not possibly be sent and inspired of God.

Many in so thinking, lost out on the Kingdom of God, their lack of wisdom kept them from the one true door to the sheep fold. We need to be very careful we do not make the same mistake.

Jesus Bemoans Three Cities But Gives Hope To Others

Still thinking along the same thoughts of how deceived and deluded most of the people were, Jesus zeros in on three cities He had openly taught in and done mighty miracles in, yet they had still not repented.

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? Oh, no, you shall be brought down to hades (the grave).



"For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained to this very day. But I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you" (Matthew 11:20-24).

This section of Scripture is very important in noting the plan of salvation that God has for the world and for all peoples who have ever lived in all nations on the earth. Most people read right over this section and do not comprehend the importance of the words Jesus spoke.

He is speaking of a day called "THE judgment" or "THE day of judgment." You will notice Jesus said it would be more TOLERABLE for some than others. This word "tolerable" means, to be tolerate towards, to be acceptable towards, to be allowable to people, to be fair, to be gracious towards. You will also note that some cities never saw the works of God, never really had a chance to repent, to come to know what sin was, what the laws of God were, what they were doing wrong, and to turn and repent of those sins. The cities Jesus bemoaned were cities that had been given and seen the might miracles of God and also had the truths of God proclaimed to them.

When we understand the plan of salvation that God has for all mankind, when we understand the meaning of the great Feasts of the Lord as recorded in Leviticus 23. When we understand that as Jesus later said, no one can come to the Father UNLESS the Spirit of God draws them, opens up their mind to the truths and the word of the Lord.

When we understand all people are blinded, as Paul would explain to the church at Rome in Romans chapters 9 through 11, that people cannot come under grace and salvation unless God removes that blindness through His Spirit, usually by the means of teaching and preaching from the human people God sends forth with His word (Romans 10:17-21). When we understand all these things, and that God will have mercy upon all that are in unbelief and blindness, but in His time frame (Romans 11:32), then we can understand what Jesus was saying here in Matthew chapter eleven.

The book of Revelation, in the 20th chapter, tells us there will one day, after the 1,000 year reign of Christ on this earth, come a time of a great general resurrection of all peoples. The books (Greek is "biblios" - where we get the word Bible from) will be opened, and the tree of life, will be available to them. They will see the word of the Lord, they will have salvation offered to them, when in their first physical life they were blinded and had not seen the works of the Lord or heard the preaching of God's truths to them. It will be "tolerable" for them, mercy and a tolerate heart will be shown them. God will accept that they lived and died without knowing or even being given a chance to repent of their sins.

And Jesus says that at that time, in that judgment, when they do see the miracles and works and the words of the Lord, those blinded and yes sinful cities of old, will fast repent. Jesus knew their hearts and minds and attitudes deep within. He knew they were of such a mind, that when given in the future the works and words of God, they will readily repent. But, the mind and heart of some of the cities where Jesus did do the mighty works of God, and did preach the wonderful ways to salvation, were such, were so hardened, so stiff-necked (see again Romans 10:17-21), that they would be put to shame by the quick repentance of old sinful city people like that of Sodom, when they would come up in a resurrection on that judgment day, to be given the words of God and have the book of life opened to them.

Jesus Remembers Those Who Did Believe And Repent

Then again, it was not all unsuccessful what Jesus had done and taught. Some did indeed listen, hear, and did repent. They did come to the knowledge of the truths Jesus was telling them, and did decide to not only believe IN Him but to also believe ON Him. Jesus was now about to remember such people, yet He also knew that it was the Father who had called, removed the blindness, and given grace to them.

"I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from those who are wise and understanding in their own minds and have revealed them to babes of humility and repentance. Yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and on one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:25-27).

We need to note here that it is both the Son of God and God Himself who act as one unit to reveal and open up the mind of people to see and accept their salvation (see also John 6:44).

Jesus continued: "Come to me, all you who are heavy laden with burdens of all kinds, and I will give you rest and peace of heart. Come and take my chains upon you, and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest and peace for your lives. For my chain is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Jesus did not say that coming to Him would free you of troubles, burdens, trials, a chain or two that life often lays upon us, but He did promise that with Him, and whatever life throws at us, the burdens would be bearable. You would be able to go through them with a gentle peace of heart, and not be boiling mad (ready to burst a blood vessel), or worried so silly you are paralyzed with fear, or so depressed you cannot get off the floor. He promised that with Him life would be easier to live and burdens lighter to bear.

You may be asking yourself, "What is the difference between believing IN and ON Jesus, or the other way around, believing ON Jesus and believing IN Jesus?"

The Greek word "en" is often translated and often means, "INTO." We can think of it this way ... ON is "surface" while IN is "within" or "inside of." Many can believe on the surface of Jesus, they can believe God exists, believe Jesus once lived on earth, believe that He was a great man, with great powers, even a prophet from God. They can believe all this, and James was inspired to tell us that the demons believe God is, believe on, but they still tremble (James 2:19). Their believing ON the facts that a person exists, and can do miracles, is only SURFACE belief, a surface belief in the polish, but is not DEEP, WITHIN, INSIDE belief of the very nature of the wood.

Many people I have known over the years have told me they believed there is a God, but that belief on God did nothing to their inner character of thoughts, reasoning, speaking, and actions of life and they still went their own way doing their own things, without any thought of whether God approved of their thoughts, words, and actions. Their surface believing on God, did not effect their life.

Those people who also with the belief on the existence and power and glory and holiness of God, have a belief that is IN, inside, within, into, the God of heaven and Jesus Christ His Son, within an analogy, they eat the flesh and drink the blood of

Jesus and the Father. They will make them both, and what they are, their nature and character of mind, a PART of themselves. They will go INSIDE of God the Father and Jesus, find what makes them "tick" as we say, and want to "tick" with them and as them, in their lives (words, mind, thoughts, actions). They will then be partakers of not only the surface skin of Jesus, but partakers of His very inner being.

Jesus once put it this way to His followers, as we read in John chapter 4, starting with verse 53. Jesus said that unless His disciples ate His flesh and drank His blood they were no part of Him, and those who did eat His flesh and drank His blood DWELT in Him and He in them.

Some of His followers could not understand this analogy of Jesus' and thought He was meaning something of a literal sense and many walked away from Jesus at this point in His ministry, and as He Himself said, He knew from the beginning who they were that believed NOT, believed not into the innermost being of Himself.

They only had a surface belief, just ON the surface, not IN, or into His very being of character and mind.

Jesus was not teaching a literal eating of Himself, for He went on to explain in verse 63 that it was a "spiritual" inner matter that He was talking about, and making His WORDS (hence the Bible) a part of your inner being. Jesus was God's WORD personified – taking God's word and putting it into a flesh and blood body so to speak.

Believing IN Jesus is living His word - God's Word - the Bible, living by every word of God as Jesus said in Matthew 4:4. It will INCLUDE believing ON Jesus automatically, but you could believe ON the surface and yet never believe INSIDE of Jesus.

Believing IN Jesus includes the "on" part but believing only ON does not automatically include the "in" part.

We as true children of the Father need to believe IN Jesus, and then our whole life will revolve around being fully INSIDE of their nature and character. Then we shall DWELL IN Jesus and He will DWELL IN us (see also John 14:23).

The Parable Of A Creditor Forgiving Two Debtors

One of the more friendly Pharisees one day asked Jesus to eat with him in his house. Jesus accepted. While they were eating, a woman of the city, one of the prostitutes, learned that Jesus was eating a meal in the house of this Pharisee. She came to the house with an alabaster container of ointment, and stood weeping behind Jesus, at His feet. She realized she was a sinner of great magnitude. She began to wet Jesus' feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and also kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment she had brought with her.

At seeing all this the Pharisee indignantly thought within himself, "Why, if this man was truly a prophet from God, he would surely have known what sort of a woman was touching him, a woman who is a great sinner."



A woman anoints Jesus' feet

Jesus knowing what the man was thinking to himself answered him saying:

"Simon, I have something to say to you. A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed him a hundred dollars, and the other owed him 10,000 dollars. When they could not pay him back, he forgave them both of their debts. Now Simon, which of the two will love him the most?"

Simon answered without much hesitation, "Why, I suppose the one whom he forgave the most, the one who owed him 10,000 dollars." Jesus replied, "Oh, yes you have answered and judged rightly." Then turning and looking at the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house and you gave me no water to wash my feet as is the custom and polite thing to do, but she has wet them with her tears and dries them with her hair. You gave me no kiss as is the custom, but she has kissed my feet continually over and over again. You did not anoint my head with oil as is often done, but she has anointed my feet with ointment she brought herself. So I tell you, her sins, which indeed are many, are forgiven for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little. "

Then looking at her with kindness and mercy He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

At these words those sitting with Him at the table looked at each other and among each other began to say, "Who is this person, who forgives the sins of people?"

But Jesus looked again at the woman and told her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (Luke 7:36-50).

When God opens the mind and starts to reveal His word and truths to people, it is often the largest sinners (as we humans look upon certain sins, like sexual sins) who can clearly see they are sinners and in need of forgiveness, that are first to cry out (even literally like this woman above) and come to God in humble repentance. Those of us who grow up in nice "respectable" families, with "good" parents, maybe going to "church" once a week, and just live middle of the road, average lives in "acceptable" communities as decent law abiding citizens, often find it difficult to see ourselves in the light of God's Holiness, often find it difficult to acknowledge we also are sinners, and in comparison to God, all our human righteousness is but filthy rags.

Jesus could and did have the authority to "forgive sins" because He was God in the flesh. He was as we have seen in previous chapters, Immanuel, which means "God with us." Later in the Gospels we shall again see how some people thought Jesus was blaspheming and even sinning by saying He could forgive sins; for they knew only God could forgive sins, and they just would not accept that Jesus was a member of the Godhead, that He was a part of what we call "God" - a God member come to earth as a flesh and blood human.

Jesus Had Women Disciples

Many mistakenly think that all the disciples that followed Jesus around Palestine were all men. The truth of the matter is that some of those disciples were women. Here is what Luke wrote:

"Soon afterwards He went through cities and villages, preaching and bringing the good news of the Kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, AND ALSO SOME WOMEN who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and MANY OTHERS, who provided for them out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3).

Wow, Jesus even had a wife of Herod's steward as part of His overall companions and disciples. Some in pretty high places of the elite of the world came to understand the truths of God, so much so that they became part of the whole of those who followed Jesus around the country. Luke says there were many other women also. And why not indeed. God is no respecter of persons. He created both man and woman. All can be His children. God is going to have not only sons but DAUGHTERS in His family (see what Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 6:17,18).

These women provided that womanly touch, provided what women as so good at, making sure you have your clothes washed and mended, good cooked meals (even if it was over the camp fire many times), and all the hundred and ones things that they do in making a family happy and a pleasure to belong to. We must remember that with all the disciples following Jesus around all the time from city to city, village to village, it was indeed like one large family. It was important that women be a part of this family. And they most certainly were as Luke tells us.

Jesus At Home And Heals A Blind And Dumb Demoniac

Jesus thought it was time to return home. We suppose when Mark put it this way in his Gospel, he was referring to the town of Nazareth. Such a large crowd surrounded Him that it was even impossible to even sit and eat a meal. In fact Jesus' friends, when they heard about the situation went out to pull Him away from the crowd, for they thought "He is beside Himself" with knowing how to cope with so many people all around Him that He could not even eat a meal (Mark 3:19-21).

Then, before His friends could catch Him away, someone in the crowd brought forth a man who was not only possessed of a demon but could not speak and was blind. Jesus healed the man so he could both speak and see. All the people round about were amazed, and began to say among themselves, "Can this be the son of David?" The people were saying this because it was becoming clear to them that no mere human man could do these things that they were seeing, but only someone from God, with the power of God in him.

Then the Pharisees heard what the people were saying to each other, and they then said, "It is only by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

Jesus, knowing full well what they were thinking, said to them, "Every kingdom or government divided against itself will fall, and no city or house divided against itself can stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then can his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But on the other hand if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then truly the Kingdom of God has come to you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house, unless he first binds up the strong man? Then he indeed can plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me just scatters abroad" (Matt.12:22-30).

Jesus was from God, He was doing everything by the power of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit. Satan does evil and harm, that is what he is all about, Jesus was doing good, helping and restoring lives, giving health, delivering people from the power of demons. It was ridiculous to think Jesus was doing all this through the working of Satan.

And then we have the clear basic fact that if you are not on Jesus side, on His team, you are working against Him. You may not be doing so with a deliberate set mind, but those who are not with Jesus are living and often thinking and reasoning contrary to all that He and the Father stand for. Hence if you are not on Jesus' team you are on the opposing team. The Pharisees in the main were on the opposite side to Jesus. Let's make sure we are with Jesus and not against Him.

The Unpardonable Sin

Jesus had not finished telling the Pharisees some very important up front information. Continuing from where Jesus left off, He said:

"Therefore I tell you, every sin or evil speaking can be forgiven - except evil speaking against the Holy Spirit, which can never be forgiven. Anyone who evil speaks against me, the Son of man, can be forgiven, but evil speaking against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come. A tree is identified by its fruit. Make a tree good, and its fruit will also be good. Make a tree bad and its fruit will also be bad. You bunch of snakes! How could it be possible that evil men like you could speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what comes out of your mouth in the words you say. A good person brings forth good words from a good heart, and an evil person brings forth evil words from an evil heart. And I tell you this, that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle and evil word you have spoken. The words you now say reflect your fate then, either you will be justified, be in right standing with God, or you will be condemned to die (Matt.12:31-37).

Speaking evil against the Holy Spirit has really bothered some. As Jesus said, doing such can never be forgiven. Some have been concerned they have literally spoken the "wrong words" at some point in their life and so they are doomed to never be forgiven and hence will be condemned on judgment day to die in the lake of fire (Revelation 20).

We notice Jesus did say that EVERY SIN and "evil speaking" (even against Himself as a person, as the Son of man, while He was walking the earth at that time) CAN be forgiven. The whole Bible says the same thing. There is not a SINGLE SIN that cannot be forgiven. But what does the Bible teach as a fundamental prerequisite to be "forgiven"? The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, teaches that REPENTANCE is an absolute requirement to be forgiven of sins. Upon acknowledging we have missed the mark, done wrong, done or said evil or sin, we can REPENT, and God has promised upon heart-felt repentance there is NO sin that cannot be forgiven.

Jesus, we will notice, said of those Pharisees that they were "evil" and being evil they spoke "evil things" against the Holy Spirit. Those Pharisees would NOT REPENT! They would not acknowledge their evil ways and evil words. Here was the Holy Spirit of God working mightily in Jesus, speaking the truths of God, doing the magnificent works of God, calling people to REPENT of their sins, but those Pharisees just would NOT repent, and in their un-repentant attitude of mind they were even saying that the "working power" of the Holy Spirit of God, was EVIL and from Satan the Devil.

Anyone who will NOT repent when the Holy Spirit is working to give them the truths and ways of the Father in heaven, anyone who will not repent when God through His Holy Spirit is calling them to repentance, just CANNOT then be FORGIVEN! It is only the humble repentant person that God can look to, that God can FORGIVE (see Isa. 66:2; Ps. 103:8-18; Ps. 1; Ps.119).

Psalm 119 is full of the way of salvation. Grace and mercy and forgiveness, is given to those who love and serve and meditate on the laws, commandments, statutes, and precepts of God - who love the truth of the word of God. And all of that will lead one to see their errors and sins, and to REPENT! The New Testament is full of the truth that we must come to live in an attitude of mind that is "humble repentance" as a way of life, a way of the daily heart. If we live the way of life that the apostle John tells us about in 1 John 1:6-10 and 2:1-6, then we can have full confidence that we have not and never will commit the "unpardonable sin."

If, we continue to be of an evil heart and mind, un-repentant when God's Spirit reveals to us His workings and truths, we shall bring forth evil fruit, be it in words or deeds or both, just as the Pharisees were doing. And they were supposedly "religious."

When we stand before Jesus on judgment day, it will then indeed be our words (which is really our heart and mind speaking, Jesus did say above, "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks") that will make us right before God or make us wrong. If we are in the wrong it will be because we have been like the Pharisees, evil and unrepentant, turning our back upon the working power of the Holy Spirit that reveals light and righteousness and truth to us, and so in essence saying we want nothing to do with the Holy Spirit, and that this Holy Spirit is not from God but from Satan.

Surely, and indeed it is so, as Jesus said, such an attitude of un-repentance, can never be forgiven, for God can only forgive and have mercy upon and show grace to, those who acknowledge that working power of the Holy Spirit is from Him, and REPENT of their sins!

A willingness to let the Holy Spirit work in our lives, to lead us to truth, to teach us, to correct us, to show us our errors and sins, and for us to be of a REPENTANT mindset, is the key. The Pharisees were not of this attitude of mind and were in danger of being condemned on judgment day. If we are never like the Pharisees in heart of mind, we shall never be remotely close to ever committing the unpardonable sin.

The Sign Of Jonah - Three Days And Three Nights

After all this that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees they put their tongue in their cheek and probably with sarcasm, said, "Okay teacher, we wish that you prove who you say you are with a sign." They wanted a sign like no other, other people had done miracles similar to Jesus' but they wanted something like moving the sun back to just above the horizon when it was high in the sky at noon. They wanted something truly physically spectacular.

Jesus, probably with some righteous anger for their unbelief, replied to them, "It is an evil and adulterous generation of people that seeks for a stupendous sign; but no such sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Here's the sign I give. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the grave" (Matt.12:38-40). What a sign, the only stupendous miracle sign Jesus would give to prove He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. It was the sign of His resurrection, that after three days and three nights being dead in the grave, He would come back to life.



The sign that Jesus gave that He was the Messiah was that He would be in the grave for 3 days and 3 nights just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights. You simply CAN'T FIT 3 days and 3 nights between the commonly-believed idea of a Friday afternoon crucifixion and a Sunday morning resurrection!!!

People have no trouble believing that Jonah was literally in the belly of the great fish for a literal three days and three nights. They have no trouble believing Jesus literally fasted for a literal forty days and forty nights as recorded in the Gospels. But when it comes to believing He was literally dead in the grave for literally three days and three

nights, for 72 hours, they just cannot believe that. Most of Christianity believes Jesus died on a Friday afternoon, put in the grave later that day and was resurrected early Sunday morning. The time most believe Jesus was in the heart of the earth is much less than three days and three nights.

The truth is when we put together all the verses on this subject of the length of time Jesus was in the tomb, we see that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon, buried later, what we call Wednesday evening, and was resurrected on what we call Saturday evening, making His rest in death in the tomb just exactly as He said, three days and three nights, a literal 72 hours. As the Gospel writer John tells us in John chapter 20, when the ladies came to the tomb it was yet DARK that Sunday morning, and they found the tomb EMPTY, they found that Jesus was already NOT THERE. Of course He was not there for He had been resurrected as He said. He had been resurrected late Saturday evening, three days and three nights after being put in the heart of the earth the previous Wednesday evening.

Jesus continued to berate, castigate, take to task, the generation of people He was living among, with similar words that He had used earlier:

"The men of Nineveh will rise in THE judgment WITH THIS generation and shall condemn it; for they REPENTED at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, someone GREATER than Jonah is here among you. The Queen of the South will rise in THE judgment WITH THIS generation and shall condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone GREATER than Solomon is here among you" (Matt.12:41-42).

Salvation per se was not given to the people of Nineveh, but when told by Jonah they had better mend their ways in this lifetime or their city, with them in it, was doomed for destruction, they DID REPENT of their wrong ways and mindset. Yet, the people in the main, and the religious leaders, would not repent of their errors and sins, when Jesus, God in the flesh, much greater than Jonah, was among them telling them to repent. The Queen of the South, was not given salvation per se, yet she came all the way from afar to hear what God was doing through Solomon. But those right next door to Jesus would not come to Him for salvation and repentance that He was offering. And He was much greater than Solomon.

When all these people of old come up in THE judgment resurrection (mentioned at the end of Revelation chapter 20) along with most of that generation of people Jesus was living among, the ones of old, because of their "human attitude" (something that is often just human and not even God led through the Holy Spirit) it will be easier to entreat and work with them and lead them to salvation, relatively speaking, than the ones of Jesus' time, who saw and heard Him in the flesh. They will be ashamed and condemned. They will still find it hard to repent, compared to the ones Jesus gave in His two examples.

Still thinking of THAT generation that He lived with and among, Jesus went on to say:

"When the unclean evil spirit has gone out of a person, that evil spirit passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from where I came.' And when he does return he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then that evil spirit goes and finds seven more spirits more evil than

himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that person becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation" (Matt.12:43-45).

Jesus looked beyond His ministry, beyond His death and resurrection, beyond the first years of the apostles going forth with power spreading the Gospel, and saw and foretold, that most would not repent, and accept Him as Messiah and Savior, especially the scribes and Pharisees.

Although many were made whole, had unclean evil spirits cast out from among them, were cleansed at least on the physical side of things, but because they did not PUT the right clean Holy Spirit within them, moving on from where they were to salvation, they were just empty, easy targets for not only the original evil spirit to come back and influence them, but many other evil spirits also. Hence they would end up worse off than at the beginning.

So it was for that generation of Jesus' time. By A.D. 70 Titus the great Roman military leader had descended on Judea and Jerusalem and laid waste the city and killed thousands of Jews. It is written that all true Christians had a warning before Titus and his army arrived, and all fled and escaped with their lives, but the main populace suffered great slaughter.

Jesus' True Mother And Brothers

Matthew tells us that while Jesus was still speaking to the people inside where they were gathered, his mother and His brothers came and stood outside wanting to speak to Him. "Your mother and your brothers are outside wanting to talk to you," someone said to Him. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus replied. "I tell you," looking around at those who were around Him, "my real mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do His will. They are my mother, my brother, and my sister" (Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21).

Yes, Jesus did of course have a physical mother, her name was Mary as we saw in earlier chapters. Jesus also had physical brothers, or to be more technically correct, half brothers. Mary and Joseph her husband, had a marriage just like most marriages, they had more children after Jesus was born.

We saw in earlier chapters that it is recorded that Joseph did not "know" Mary (a Bible way of saying that he did not have sexual relations with her) until AFTER Jesus was born. But after that event, he did sleep with Mary his wife and have sexual relations with her, and they did produce more children themselves, as most married couples do. Remember it was God the Father not Joseph that was the "father" of Jesus via the miracle power of the Holy Spirit.

Mary did NOT remain a virgin all her life as some teach. Jesus did have literal brothers. They, with their and Jesus' mother Mary, came to where He was teaching and wanted to speak to Him. He used this opportunity of "mother and brothers" to emphasize how and who His real mother and brothers and sisters were - it was they who heard the word of God and obeyed it, they who did the Father's will.

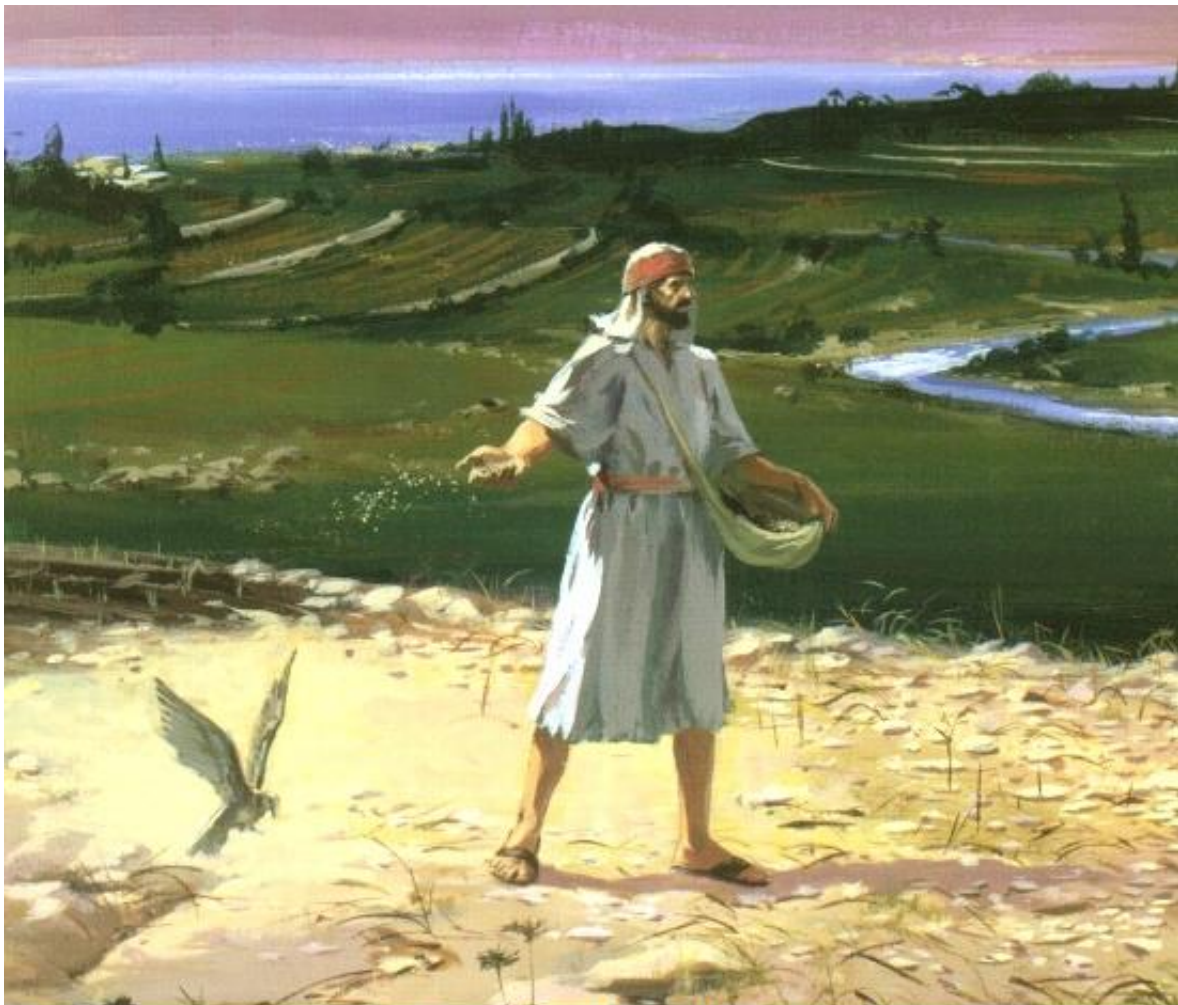
CHAPTER 16

PARABLES AND MIRACLES

Farmer Scattering Seeds

Later that same day Jesus left the house and went down and sat by the sea. But the people followed and soon there was an immense crowd all gathered about Him. It was too large a crowd for comfort as they say, so He got into a small fishing boat and taught them as they listened on the shore. He told them many stories such as this one.

"A farmer went out to plant some seed, by hand as usual. As he scattered it across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on thin soil with underlying rock. The plants sprang up quickly enough but they soon withered under the hot sun and died because the roots had no depth in the shallow soil and had no nourishment. Some other seeds fell among the thorn bushes that engulfed the tender shoots and choked them, so they died also. But some seeds fell on fertile ground, with good top soil, and they flourished and produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted. Anyone who has ears to hear with should take note and listen and understand what this means" (Matt.13:1-9).



The Parable of the Sower

Story after story, Jesus related to the people. His disciples finally came to Him and said, "Why do you always tell stories when you talk to the crowds of people?" (Matt.12:10).

Jesus answered: "It is you my disciples that have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven, but others have not been permitted. To those who are of a ready mind to receive my teachings, more understanding will be given them, and they will have an abundance of knowledge on spiritual matters. But to those whose heart is not really acceptable of my teachings, even what they have will be taken away from them. That is why I tell stories to the crowds, because people see what I DO, but they do not really see what they should. They hear what I SAY, but they do not really hear what they should, and do not understand the depth of true meaning I have for them. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says, 'You will hear my words, but you will not understand them: you will see what I do, but you will not perceive its meaning. For, the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes, so they do not see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them' (Isa.6:9-10)" (Matt.13:11-15).

Here is how Mark worded the last phrase, "...lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark 4:12, KJV).

It is quite a shock to many if they slowly read these words of Jesus and just believe them for what they say and tell us. Jesus here clearly proves to us that some in this physical lifetime are NOT called by God, they are not given the spiritual eyes to see with, to comprehend, to understand the truths of the Father. They are blinded by the way of their society they live in, they are blinded by their own heart and mind that does not want to really see God and all of His word and ways and truths. And as shocking as it seems to many, God and Christ are leaving them in their blindness. They are not being called to be converted and to have their sins forgiven in this age they live in.

We have already seen that God has a plan of salvation, and that such individuals will be resurrected in a large general resurrection, with those of Sodom, Nineveh, the Queen of the South, and millions of others, who also lived and died without being offered salvation. Their day of salvation will come at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth, in the period called in Revelation 20, the GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT, and Jesus we saw earlier called it "THE judgment" when people from the past would rise with people of His generation.

We see here that many of Jesus' generation were left in their blindness of hard-heartedness. Jesus was not trying to convert them and hence forgive their sins. This is very difficult for some to understand and to believe, but it is nevertheless a very true teaching of Jesus' and the New Testament (see also how Paul wrote about it in Romans chapter 9 through 11).

Explanation Of The Scattered Seeds

Jesus then looks at His disciples and says, "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. I tell you for sure, many prophets and godly people have longed to see and hear what you are seeing and hearing, but they could not, it was not to take place in their lifetime.

"Now, here is the explanation of the story I told about the farmer scattering seeds of grain. The seed that fell on the hard pathway represents those who hear the good news about the Kingdom and just don't understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches the seed away from their hearts, as quick as the birds come to eat it off the pathway. The seed that fell on the thin rocky soil represents those who hear the message of the Kingdom and receive it with joy. But like young plants in rocky soil, their roots do not go down very deep. At first they grow some, but then they wilt away when problems, trials, tests, or persecution comes upon them. The seeds in the thorn bushes represent those who hear and accept the word of the Kingdom, but all too quickly the message and truths they have are crowded out by the cares and concerns of this life and the lure of physical wealth, so they produce no lasting crop.

"Ah, but the good soil represents the hearts and minds of those who truly accept God's message of the Kingdom and salvation and produce a huge harvest - thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted" (Matt.13:16-23).

Once more Jesus teaches us that it is not just good enough to start on the narrow road to the Kingdom and salvation, one must stick with it, never give up, "endure to the end" as Jesus said later in Matthew 24. Then we shall produce a crop that can be harvested, we shall be saved, harvested into the Kingdom of God.

Story Of The Wheat And Weeds

Another parable Jesus puts before them, saying: "The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and produced grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seeds in your field? How then are there these weeds?' He answered them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and pluck them out?' But he said to them, 'No; because in gathering the weeds you may root up the wheat also with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest time, and at the harvest I will tell the reapers to gather the weeds first and bind them up in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn' " (Matt.13:24-30).

Explanation Of The Wheat And Weeds

Jesus left the crowd and returned to the house. His disciples were very puzzled about what the parable of the wheat and weeds meant. "Master, please explain to us the meaning of the parable you gave about the wheat and the weeds in the field," they said to Him. Jesus answered:

"He who sows the good seed in the field is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons or children of the Kingdom; and the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the Devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send His angels, and they will gather out of His Kingdom all causes of sin and evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear with should make sure he hears" (Matt.13:36-43).

Jesus talks about His angels gathering the elect, the saints, the children of God, together when He comes in Matthew 24:29-31. Paul talks about this same event in 1 Corinthians 15. It will be at the end of the age, at the "last trumpet" sound (Revelation 11:15-19). We find from passages such as Revelation 19; Zechariah 14; and others that many of the wicked at that same time will be cast into a lake of fire (Rev.19:20; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). This harvest will continue through the 1,000 year reign of Jesus on earth (see Isa. 66:15-24). At the end of the thousand years more harvesting of the righteous from the wicked will take place as we have seen in the "White Throne Judgment" period (see Rev. 20:7-13). Finally all the wicked will be burnt up in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15; Malachi 4:1-3 with 2 Peter 3:8-13), and then will come the new heaven and the new earth wherein dwells only holy perfect righteousness (Rev. 21; 22).

The harvesting of the righteous wheat and the evil weeds will start at the end of this age when the angels are sent forth, at the coming of Jesus again to earth, but the harvesting of the wicked and the righteous will continue until the final earth-wide lake of fire and the new earth and heavens come into being.

Good Seed And Fertile Earth Parable

And He said to them, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:26-29).

The Kingdom of God will take time to develop and finally be harvested. God's seed, His word, will go forth into all the world. Often people will not even know where and how it is developing, and bringing forth mature grain ready for the harvest, but it will be so. God's word will go forth and it shall not return unto Him void of fruit. When it has accomplished what God desires for His harvest, then as we have seen the sickle or the angels will go forth and the harvest will be gathered in.

The Mustard Seed And The Leaven

And he said, "With what can we compare the Kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown in the soil, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is planted it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade" (Mark 4:30-32).

He told them yet another parable, "The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven which a woman took and hid in a large pan of bread flour, till it was all leavened or risen up" (Matt.13:33).

The Kingdom of God and all within it may start out few in number, just a small seed, or a small bit of leaven, but it will grow and grow until the whole world is finally under its shade and filled with it. This will not all come about until Jesus returns to reign on earth for a thousand years. But as the prophets have written, there is coming an age when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea beds.

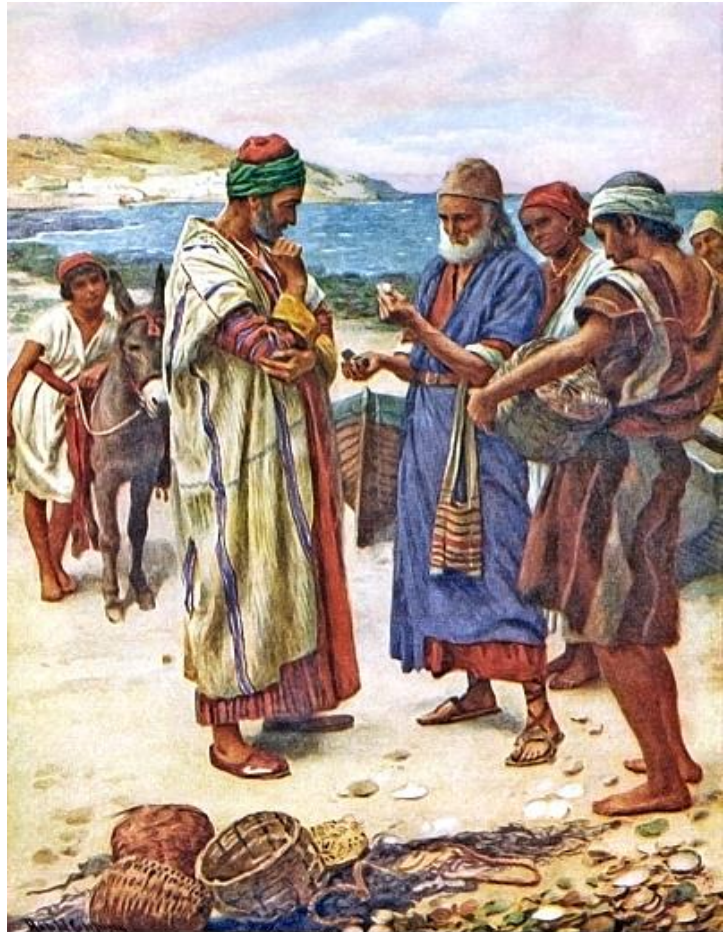
Jesus Only Used Parables To The Crowds

Matthew and Mark once more make it abundantly clear to us that Jesus only spoke to the crowds of people in parables, but in private He explained what He was meaning in the parables, concisely and clearly to His disciples. Matthew tells us that He did this to fulfil what the prophet Isaiah had spoken, "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world" (Matt.13:34-35; Mark 4:33, 34).

The Hidden Treasure; The Pearl; The Net; Treasures Old And New

"The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy goes and sells all that he has so he can buy that field. Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of a fine pearls, who, on finding even just one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had to buy that pearl. And again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind, when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into baskets but threw the bad away. So it will be at the close of this age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into a furnace of fire; and men will indeed weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt.13:44-50).

The Kingdom of God and being a part of it, should be the most valued treasure we have.



The Merchant Finds The Pearl Of Great Price

We should be willing to give up everything, or count everything we have in this physical life as sellable, in order to be in the Kingdom of God. It should be in our eyes as the hidden treasure in a field or the pearl of great price. We should be doing as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, seeking God's Kingdom first and then knowing that all the physical things we are in need of for this lifetime will be given to us from the Father.

And yes, the Kingdom of God will be offered to all people eventually in God's time frame. The ones who accept it and live within its framework will be the righteous who are brought into the Kingdom, starting at the time when the angels are sent forth to gather in the righteous, then the harvest will begin and will continue for one thousand years plus the white throne judgment period (Rev. 20). Then all the bad, the wicked who would not accept the Kingdom and repent and live within its precepts, will be

gathered and put into the lake or furnace of fire and will suffer the punishment of the second death (Rev. 20 last few verses).

Jesus looked at His disciples and said to them, "Have you understood all this?" "Oh, yes," answered the disciples. "Then," He replied to them, "every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his treasure things that are new and things that are old" (Matt.13:51-52).

The Kingdom of heaven and all it stands for is the whole Word of the Lord, from Genesis to Revelation, the Old and the New Testaments. Those instructed in the Kingdom, who accept it, are to do as Jesus said, live by EVERY WORD of God (Matt. 4:4), live by the Old Testament and live by the New Testament.

More Great Miracles - The Storm Is Calmed

Jesus had worked hard all that day. It was now evening time, and exhausted and weary, He said to His disciples, "Come, pull out and let's go across to the other side of the sea." Other boats of people went with Him for they did not want Him to disappear from their sight.



Jesus rests in the back of the boat as a great storm picks up and threatens their boat

The wind began to pick up its pace. The waves were splashing pretty hard against the sides of the boat. The wind blew stronger still. Smash, thud, smash, thud, came the sea waves against the boat, with every increasing speed and power. Then the full force of the storm came upon them, waves now higher than the sides of the boat, throwing it around like a rag doll. Now, each time a wave came it not only smashed into the boat with a great thunderous roar but quite a lot of the wave cascaded into the boat itself, and within minutes the boat was filling with water.

The disciples looked around to see where Jesus was, and found Him sleeping contently on a pillow in the back of the boat. He seemed to not have a care in the world as to what was going on all around Him. The boat was now dangerously close

to sinking. "Master, master," cried out the disciples into Jesus' ear, "do you not care that we may perish in this storm?"

Jesus awoke from His deep sleep, and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And immediately the wind ceased its violent blow and the sea became quietly very calm.

Looking around at His disciples Jesus said to them, "Why is it you are afraid? Have you not any faith?"

The disciples were awe struck, for a few moments they were speechless with wonder and amazement, and then finally began to say among themselves, "Who then indeed is this man, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?" (Mark 4:35-41).

Jesus Casts Out Demons And Sends Them Into Pigs

Arriving on the other side of the sea in the country of the Gadarenes, and coming out of the boat, there met Him a wild demonic man from among the tombs (Matthew records that there were two men not just one, but even he goes on to speak in the "singular" not the plural. Mark and Luke speak only in the singular from start to finish. The answer probably is that of the two men one was the leader and maybe the most demon possessed, while the other, though also demon possessed stayed in the background).

Luke tells us that for a long time now he had worn no clothes. Mark tells us that no one could bind him. Some had tried to put chains on him but he just snapped them apart, and not even a number of men could subdue him, he was too strong for them all. He would constantly cry out and bruise himself with stones as he lived among the tombs.

This demoniac sees Jesus coming, even a long way off as yet, but he sees Him and runs to be near Him and begins to worship Him.

"Oh, what have you to do with me, Jesus, you Son of the Most High God," the demoniac cries out with a loud wailing voice. "I implore you by God, do not torment me before the time appointed," the wild man beseeched Jesus, who had commanded the unclean spirit to depart from him.

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is legion," replied the demoniac, "for we are many."

The demons through the man's voice begged Jesus not to send them out of the country into thin air so to speak. Such demons as these were, love to possess live flesh and blood creatures of some kind.

Now there happened to be on the hillside nearby a great herd of swine or pigs. The demons begged Jesus to send them to the pigs so they could at least enter into them. And Jesus complied with their wishes and told them to go to the swine. Many indeed were the demons in this man. The swine numbered about two thousand. They entered the herd, and immediately the herd rushed down into the sea and all of them drowned.

The herdsmen, when they saw what had happened to all the swine they were taking care of, fled as fast as their legs would move. They ran into the city nearby and told the people all they had seen. And the people came out of the city to see what all the fuss was about. When they arrived they saw the demonic man sitting there, clothed, and in his right mind. People who had been there all the time through all the events, told the ones coming later from the city what had happened to the demonic man and to the herd of pigs.



The herd of demon-possessed pigs rush off the nearby cliff

Such fear fell upon the people of that region that they just wanted Jesus to leave and get away from them and from their land. Jesus obliged them and was getting back into the boat when the man who had the legion of demons cast out of him, came and begged Jesus that he might follow Him, but Jesus refused saying to him, "You go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord God has done for you, and how He has had mercy upon you."

The man went his way and began to do what Jesus said, and in that area called Decapolis the people marvelled greatly at what they saw and heard (Matt. 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39).

The question may be asked about a herd of swine, two thousand, being allowed by Jesus to rush down into the sea and drown. This was obviously a cultivated herd of swine because it had herdsmen tending it.

Swine were created by God to be the wandering garbage cleaners of the land. Pigs are "unclean" as classified in the "clean and unclean" food laws of the Old Testament (Lev. 11 and Deut. 14). They were never intended by the Lord to be cultivated and used for food or animal sacrifices in the Temple. Obviously this herd of swine was for one or both purposes. One or the other or both purposes would have been against the laws and commandments of God. Jesus, hence had no trouble in allowing this herd of pigs to perish in the sea, and so not be used for human food or animal sacrifice.

Did the demons who entered the pigs also drown in the sea? The angel world (and demons are fallen sinful angels) is not subject to physical laws as we are or physical substances such as water. They did not drown in the sea with the swine. The Gospel writers do not tell us what happened to them after the pigs were dead. They probably went hurrying away to find another warm flesh and blood body or bodies to dwell in.

Jairus' Daughter And The Woman With Hemorrhage

Jesus again crossed to the other side in the boat and a crowd welcomed Him, for they were there waiting for Him as they hoped He would return. Then came one of the rulers of the local synagogue, Jairus by name, and he knelt before Jesus at the same time he besought Him saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Please come and lay your hands on her, so that she will be made well and live."

Jesus said He would come and heal his daughter. The huge crowd continued to follow Him, thronging about and sometimes pushing and shoving so that Jesus was often being touched as He walked along.

There was a woman in the crowd who had a flow of blood for twelve years. She had been to many doctors who tried many of their medicines to heal her. She had spent all of her money on these doctors, but they had not been able to help her, and the problem was just getting worse all the time. She had heard the reports about Jesus and His healing powers from many in the crowd, so she just came up from behind and touched Jesus' garment, for she had said to herself that if she just touched His garment she would be made well and healthy once more. And so it was. Immediately her hemorrhage or blood flow stopped, and she felt in her body that she was indeed healed.

Jesus knew that power had gone from Him and straightaway turned around and asked who had touched Him.

"Master, you see the crowd pressing in on you from all sides, evening pushing you at times, and you ask who was it that touched you," said His disciples with wonderment as to why He would ask such a question. Jesus, said nothing more, but looked here and there in the crowd.

The woman was shocked that He knew someone had touched Him for a special reason. She was fearful and trembling, but she came forward and told Him the whole truth of why and what she did. Jesus looked at her with great love and compassion and said, "Daughter, your mighty faith has made you whole and well. Go in peace, fear and tremble not, and be healed of your disease."

Even while He was still speaking to the lady and telling her to be at peace, there came someone from Jairus' house who said, "I'm sorry to tell you but your daughter is dead. No need to bother the Teacher any more." Jesus, ignoring what was said, simply looked at the ruler of the synagogue and said, "Do not fear, only believe, have faith."

Jesus then instructed that only certain ones were to follow Him. They were Peter and James and John the brother of James. As they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue there was great weeping and wailing, very loud indeed was the moaning of those present there.



Jesus raises a girl from the dead

"Why do you make such a sorrowful tumult, the child is not dead, but merely sleeping," said Jesus in a calm and reassuring voice. "Oh, what you say is crazy, we know enough about death to know she is indeed very dead," said the people in the house, and they just all started to laugh at Jesus. He told them to all go outside, and with the child's mother and father and those disciples He had brought along to the house, He went in where the child was laying. He took her by the hand and said, "Talitha cuni"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and started to walk around, as she was twelve years old.

All five people present (the parents of the girl and the three disciples) were overcome with utter amazement, as they stood there speechless. Jesus told them in a no nonsense and serious tone of voice to make sure they told no one about what they had just seen and witnessed. And then He told the girls parents to give her something to eat (Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56; Matt. 9:18-26).

Two Blind Men And A Mute Demoniac

As Jesus passed on from there, two blind men started to follow Him, and began to cry aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David." Jesus continued to walk on and finally entered a house. The blind men came up to him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe I am able to do this thing, and give you your sight?" They quickly answered back, "Oh yes Lord, we believe you can." He then touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith be it done to you." And their eyes were opened and they who were blind could see. Jesus sternly told them to tell no one about the miracle. But they could not contain themselves with such a healing that had been bestowed on them, and they spread His fame all over that district.

As they were going away, a mute demoniac (some demons make a person mute, unable to speak) was brought to Him. And Jesus cast out the demon and the man

began to speak. The crowd marvelled at what they had seen saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel." But the Pharisees, always tagging along and watching, once more exclaimed, "Oh, he casts out demons by the prince of demons" (Mark 9:27-34). Yes, some people it seems, just never learn, never learn the truth. Paul, years later wrote about some people that "they are always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7).

Jesus Returns To Nazareth But Is Not Honored

Jesus went from there, after doing all those great miracles, and after the people gave Him such honor and glorified God, and He returned to His home town of Nazareth.

The Sabbath day came and He went to the synagogue and began to teach the words of the Lord to all present. The people were astonished, but not in the way you might think. They said among themselves, "Where did this man get all this from? What University did He go to? Which theologians have instructed Him in this wisdom of theology? What mighty works are wrought by His hands, we do not see them. Is this not just the carpenter's son, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not His sisters also here with us? This fellow is just one of us, really a no body to speak of." They were greatly offended in Him, and could not imagine He was someone special.

Jesus knowing their thoughts and attitude towards Him, said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kindred, and in his own household." And He could do no mighty work there, except lay hands on a very few sick people and heal them. He marvelled greatly because of their unbelief (Matt.13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6).

Sad to say but it is often today the same. People can be honored in their own town for being a great "sportsman" or "musician" or "artist" or "filmstar" etc. but if they come speaking the truth and words of the Lord God, with power and conviction, calling people to repent of their sins, showing what sin is, and what the true ways of God are, people who knew them as a child, or as a neighbor friend, will just not honor them, or take much notice of them. They often cannot bring themselves to realize and accept that God can be working through that individual in a great and mighty way. It is often true as the old proverbs says, "familiarity breeds contempt." Even Jesus found it coming His way, and had it flung in His face. We need to be careful that we never allow familiarity to come into our mind to where we may make the biggest mistake of our lives.

CHAPTER 17

JESUS INSTRUCTS AND SENDS FORTH THE TWELVE

Jesus continued to teach and preach about the Kingdom of God in all the cities and villages, instructing on the word of the Lord in their synagogues. He also continued to heal every disease and every sickness and infirmity that people had.

The crowds grew larger and larger wherever He went. His sorrow and compassion for them also grew larger, because He saw they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He called His disciples and said to them, "Look around you and see how large the harvest is, but the laborers are very few. You need to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest."

He then told the twelve He was going to send them out among the harvest of the people. He would give them authority over evil spirits, to cast them out of individuals, and to heal every disease and sickness that people had (Matt. 9:35 to 10:1). Jesus gave the twelve certain instructions for that specific preaching and healing ministry that He was about to send them upon. He told them:

"Go not to the Gentiles or to the sect of the Samaritans, but go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, your countrymen. As you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' I want you to heal the sick, even raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying for it, so give freely. You are to take no gold, nor silver, nor money in your wallets. Take no bag for your journey, nor two outer coats, nor two pair of sandals. Do not take a staff or walking stick. The laborer deserves his food.

"When you enter a town or village, inquire who is worthy there, and stay with them until you depart. As you enter the house, honor it. And if the household is indeed worthy, let your peace of blessing you bring come upon them. But if that household is not worthy, keep your blessing you bring to yourself. If anyone will not receive you or will not listen to your words, then shake off the very dust there from your feet as you leave that household or that town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable and merciful on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, than for that town or household" (Matt. 10:5-15).

The words Jesus just spoke were specifically for the twelve disciples at that time and for the commission they were about to undertake. It does not mean all AFTER that particular evangelistic task the twelve were to undertake, must follow exactly the outline Jesus gave them for their journey of teaching the Kingdom of God. This we can clearly see from other parts of the Gospels and especially from the book of Acts and the life and journeys of the great apostle Paul.

The words that Jesus spoke next, from the very context of the words themselves, we can see that Jesus was giving "overall" knowledge and instructions to some who would go forth in any age to preach the truths and word of the Kingdom of God.

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so you need to be as wise as serpents but as harmless as doves. Beware of people; for some will deliver you up to their theological councils, and may even flog you with the whip in their synagogues and meeting places. You may be dragged before governors and kings

for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the nations for God's word. When they deliver you up, do not be worried how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour of need; for it is not you who speaks but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver up brother even to be put to death, and the father his child, and children will rise up and be in conflict with their parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly I say unto you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes" (Matt.10:16-23).

It is obvious from the above words of Jesus, and Him saying that His disciples will not have covered all the cities of Israel before He returns in glory, that this section of Jesus' discourse is for ALL of this age, from that time then, when He uttered those words, to the time of His second coming to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. It is also interesting to note that the cities and towns of Israel must be way more than the towns that are now within the land area we call the "State of Israel" - the land of Palestine in the Middle East. So numerous would be the towns and cities of Israel that Jesus said they all would not have been covered with the Gospel message before He returned to earth again. The truth of who ALL of Israel is, must be for another time and place to study and discuss.

Continuing with Jesus' words:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they malign and call evil those of his household.

"So, have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not finally be revealed, or hidden that will not be finally known. What I tell you in the dark and private, you utter in the blazing light; and what you hear whispered by me in your ears, you proclaim loudly upon the house tops. And do not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the inner life you have in me; rather fear Him who can destroy both your inner life and body in the fires of the second death - hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father taking note of it. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered by God. Fear not therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

"Do NOT THINK that I have come to bring peace on earth at this time; I have not come this first time to bring peace on earth, but indeed a sword. For I have come to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be they even from his own household.

"He who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who is not willing to lay his life down for my sake, who does not take his cross and is not willing to follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me, receives the one who sent me, the Father. He who receives a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives to one of these little ones of mine even a cup of cold water because he is my disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (Matt. 10:24-42).

Matthew then says that when Jesus had so instructed His twelve disciples, He left and went out to teach and preach in the cities (Matt. 11:1).

What a message Jesus gave to His twelve and to all disciples who would follow afterwards down through the age to His coming again. It might be worth reading over those words again, before continuing with this Bible Story.

There has been many times in the last 2,000 years when those words of Jesus have come to pass. Many have been handed over to authorities to be killed for the sake of the truths and words and ways of Jesus Christ. In some parts of the world even today, being killed for being a true Christian is still a very real threat. It is happening, but seldom does it get the news coverage it should, especially in the Western world.

Men can kill the body, but they cannot kill the inner spiritual life that you have for being a child of the Father. Upon your death that inner life is kept safe by God (Ecc. 12:7) and He is able to restore life immortal to you on that resurrection day, when the last trumpet will sound and the dead in Christ shall rise to meet Jesus in the air, in the clouds, and be with Him for ever more (1 Thes. 4:13-18).

God loves us more than we can imagine. He has a glorious day waiting for us if we endure to the end as Jesus said. We are to spread His word, His Gospel message, knowing it may make enemies even from and within our own flesh and blood family members. But those that receive it, receive you for doing and living God's will, shall be rewarded.

The word of the Lord is to go forth, we can, if we will but accept, be a part of sending forth His word. It will go forth and it will not return to Him void. So the Lord has written and so it shall be.

How John The Baptist Was Killed

It is the Gospel of Mark that informs us with the most detail on why and how John the Baptist was killed by Herod.

Jesus was so busy preaching and healing in the towns and cities that His fame had reached the notice of King Herod. Some were saying John the Baptist had been raised from the dead, and had wonder working powers. Others said it was Elijah come back to life. Still others declared Jesus was a prophet like the prophets of old. But when Herod heard about this miracle working man he, with somewhat of a trembling voice, said, "Oh, oh, this must be John whom I had beheaded, come back to life."

Herod was deeply troubled in thinking this was John the Baptist, for Herod had sent and seized John, had him bound with chains and cast into prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. John had boldly faced Herod and told him that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. And

so Herodias had a bitter grudge against John and wanted to see him killed, but her desire could not be fulfilled because Herod feared John as he knew John was a righteous and holy man, and Herod made sure John was safe, at least from death. Herod would gladly listen to John but was always troubled, anxious, and worried by his words.

Herodias saw an opportunity one day to have her wish come true. It was Herod's birthday and he gave a large banquet for his court officials and officers and the leading men of Galilee.

Herodias' daughter danced so well and enticing for Herod and all present, that the king said to the girl, "Young lady, you are so beautiful and you are such a fine dancer, you have danced so well, and everyone here is in agreement that you have, making this day and banquet so special, I will give you whatever you ask for, even to half of my kingdom." Herod vowed to her, so showing he meant what he said.



John the Baptist is beheaded and his head brought out on a plate.

The young lady was surprised and really did not know what to ask for, so she went to her mother. "Mother, this is a shock to me," the daughter said. "King Herod has said he will give me anything I desire, up to half of his kingdom. I haven't a clue what I should ask for."

"I know," replied her mother with a smirk on her face, "you can ask for the head of John the baptist."

The young lady went back to Herod and unashamedly said, "I have decided what I want you to give me. I want the head of John on a plate."

Obviously this young lady was either every much in tune with her mother about certain things where John was making trouble for her mother, or she was one of those young daughters that would do anything a parent said, even to murder and kill someone the parent did not like for whatever reason.

Herod was exceedingly sorry and upset. He realized he had done a silly thing in giving a vow or oath to her in front of his guests, but fearing even more to break his vow, he sent a soldier to John with orders to cut off his head and bring it to him. And indeed that is what happened. John was beheaded while in Herod's prison. His head was brought on a plate, given to the young lady who in turn gave it to her mother.

When John's disciples heard about it they came and recovered his body and laid it in a tomb (Mark 6:14-29).

The Miracle Of Feeding Five Thousand

The twelve apostles went on their journey while Jesus was preaching in the towns, and they then came back telling Him all that they had done and the words they had spoken.

"It has been a busy time for you all and for me, so come with me to a quiet place, and we shall rest a while," said Jesus to the twelve. So busy had it been for all of them that they hardly had any time to eat, for people were coming and going all the time it seemed, from sun up to sun set. They took a boat and went to a town called Bethsaida, on the other side of the sea of Galilee, which was called the sea of Tiberias.

It was not easy to get away from the crowds of people. They saw that Jesus was heading out with the twelve, and they just followed, because they knew He could heal people from all their diseases. Jesus arrived on the other side of Galilee and went with the twelve up into the hills to rest a while. Now it was close to the time of the Passover feast the Gospel of John tells us. Jesus could not get away from the crowds for very long. Soon there was another very large crowd around Him, which Jesus did not mind, He actually welcomed them for it was an opportunity once more to teach them about the Kingdom of God and to heal those who were sick.

It was now getting late on this day, even into the evening, and it was a lonely wilderness type place where they were. The disciples suggested to Jesus that He send the people away into the villages so they could buy food to eat.

"No, I do not think I will send them away. I want you to give them food," said Jesus to the twelve.

Looking at Philip, Jesus said to test him, "How can we buy bread to feed all this mass of people here?"

"Master," Philip replied with astonishment at the very thought of the twelve trying to buy food to feed the people, "Why, even 500 dollars would not be enough money to buy food for all these people," Philip said.

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Jesus, "There is a lad here who does have five barley loaves and two fish, but that is insignificant among such a huge crowd of people."

"Ah, okay, make the people sit down," Jesus said. There was much soft lush grass where they were. The number of people was about five thousand, and they all sat down in orderly groups of hundreds and fifties, at the disciples' instruction.



Jesus feeds the 5000 starting with 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, and looking up to heaven He blessed and gave thanks, and then told the disciples to distribute them among the people. All ate well and enough until they were satisfied. Then Jesus told the disciples to gather up what was left. There was enough food left over to fill 12 baskets.

When the people saw the miracle of 5 loaves and 2 fish feeding 5,000 men (we are not told the number of women and children who were also there), they said among themselves, "This is indeed THE prophet who was to come into the world!" (Matt.14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14).

Jesus Walks On Water

The crowd, after seeing this miracle, on top of all the other miracles He had done, got more and more excited, like a tidal wave of water the excitement grew until they had determined to come and take Him by force if necessary, and make him King. Jesus quickly withdrew Himself and went up into the hills by Himself alone to pray and meditate.

When evening time had come and it was now dark, the disciples went down to the sea shore and boarded the boat once more to cross the sea and go back to Capernaum. Jesus had not yet come back to them so they were without Him as they started to cross the sea.

The wind was blowing hard and right into them, a head wind as they say. It was a rowing boat they had, not a sail boat, hence it was very hard work to row into such a heavy wind. The "fourth watch" came, which meant it was sometime between 3 am and 6 am. Looking up, what did they see but Jesus coming towards them and getting closer, but not in another boat. They were amazed, had to blink twice, but it was true, Jesus was coming towards them WALKING ON TOP OF THE WATER!



Jesus calls Peter to walk on the water with Him.

When the reality of what they saw sank in, they became very frightened, thinking they were seeing a ghost, not really the literal flesh and blood body of Jesus. They of course had never seen such a sight before or ever heard of such a thing being done by a human being, as literally walking on top of a sea of water. Such frightful panic gripped them that they cried out in fear. Jesus heard their fearful cries and said, "Take heart, it is really I, be not afraid."

But Peter still not quite sure if this was the real Jesus, shouted out, "Well Lord, if it is really you, bid me that I may come to you walking on the water also."

"Come on then, " said Jesus.

So Peter jumped out of the boat and started towards Jesus also WALKING ON the water! The wind was still howling away and blowing very strongly. Peter realizing the situation of being in a wind storm, started to be afraid once more and with that fear he began to sink into the water. Seeing he was possibly going to drown he cried out, "Please Lord, save me."

Jesus immediately reached out and took him by the hand saying to him at the same time, "O man of little faith, why did you start to doubt?"

Both Jesus and Peter got into the boat and instantly the wind ceased to blow. The disciples had already forgotten about the miracle of the loaves and fish, their hearts were still somewhat hardened even after all the signs and wonders they had seen Jesus perform, so the Gospel of Mark tells us. But once more after this miracle they fell to their knees and worshipped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Another part of this miraculous event is that after Jesus entered the boat out on the sea, the boat was immediately, in an instant, at the land where they were headed.

The next day, the huge crowd of people that was left behind came to understand that the disciples had departed in a boat but not with Jesus, and that the boat they left in was the only one around in that area. They knew Jesus was not still there. They knew another miracle had been done by Jesus.

It happened that some boats from Tiberias came along to the place where Jesus had fed the five thousand. The people quickly jumped into the boats and set out for Capernaum to seek Jesus. They somehow thought He would be at that city. But Jesus and the disciples landed at Gennesaret, a town to the south of Capernaum.

Soon it was head around that Jesus was in their region. People of course recognized Him and soon they began bringing all the sick to Him for healing. Whatever town or village He was at they came bringing the sick, even laying them down in the market places. The sick pleaded with Him that they might simply touch His garment to be healed, and it was so, as many as touched His clothes were made healthy and well (Matt.14:22-36; Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-24).

CHAPTER 18

THE REAL BREAD OF LIFE AND FALSE TRADITIONS

Jesus Speaks About Himself And Many Fall Away

The people who had come across the sea of Galilee, mostly the ones from the five thousand whom had been miraculously fed, finally did locate Jesus and said to Him, "Teacher, when did you arrive here, we've been searching for you."

"Truly, it is indeed so very true, you do not come here to me because of the signs and miracles and teaching that I do, but because you ate your fill of the food I provided for you from the loaves. You should not be working so hard for the food that is physical and soon is gone, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which I the Son of man can give you, for on Him, that is me, God the Father has set His seal of approval."

At hearing this the people answered, "Well alright then, what must we specifically do to be doing the work of God?"

"This is the work of God, that you BELIEVE IN Him whom He has sent," replied Jesus to them.

"Well, what sign can you give us that we can see and believe in you?" they quickly answered Jesus, and continued, "What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' "



**Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life.
He who comes to Me shall never hunger" (John 6:35)**

In answer to this Jesus said, "Of a truth, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives to you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world."

"Great," the crowd said, "then Lord, give us this bread for all times."

Jesus looked at them, knowing they hadn't understood what He was meaning, and said, "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE; he who will come to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I've told you already, you have seen me and yet you still do not believe in me."

These people were indeed pretty dumb, as "dumb as a fence post" as the saying goes. They had been witness to miracle after miracle, and had been witness to the five loaves and two fish that Jesus had blessed and how it had fed five thousand men, till they were all full and satisfied. They were still looking for some "sign" or something from Jesus to back up what He was saying. They just did not see the light. And part of why they did not Jesus goes on to tell us.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me; and he that comes to me I will certainly not turn them away. For I have come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him who has sent me. And this is the will of Him who has sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but will resurrect them all at the last day. For this is also the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise them up to life eternal at the last day."

Yes, it is the Father that must call people, take away their blindness as we have seen, draw them to Himself through and by the means of His Holy Spirit. All that the Father calls to Christ Jesus, the Father wants to see in the resurrection, wants to give eternal life to in the resurrection at the last day of this age, when Jesus returns at the sound of the last trumpet, to establish the literal Kingdom of God upon earth for a 1,000 years and then for all eternity as Revelation chapters 19 through 22 show us.

The Jews now began to snicker, then they murmured at Jesus because He had said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." They went even further and said among themselves, "Why is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? Is not this man, just a man like all others born of a father and mother, how does He know and declare to us that He has come down from heaven?"

Jesus knew what they were saying and told them, "Do not talk and discuss among yourselves these things that you cannot understand. For no one can come to me UNLESS the Father DRAWS him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' So, every one who had heard and learned from the Father does come to me. I do not mean that people have seen the Father who have learned from Him. Only those who have come from where God is have seen the Father. But it is truth, very real truth, that he who believes has eternal life. I AM the BREAD of LIFE!"

We have seen in the previous recent chapters, and we shall see again in coming chapters, and we do see here in clear words, that the Father has a PLAN of SALVATION. It is His plan to teach every human who has ever been created to know about Himself and Christ Jesus. All people will sooner or later be taught of God, but for some it is not in this first physical lifetime. ONLY those who are drawn and called by the Father can come to Christ. The rest are left in spiritual blindness, for another time, another day of salvation, when they will be raised to physical life and the prophecy of the last verses of Revelation chapter 20 will be a reality.

Back to the words of Jesus:

"Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, that a person may eat it and not die. I am the LIVING bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

On hearing these last words the Jews disputed among themselves saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" They were confused and bewildered at what Jesus was saying, so Jesus went on to confuse and puzzle them even more with these words, "Of truth I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you. He who eat my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the person who eats me will live because of me. This is the true bread that comes down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died. He who eats this true bread will live forever."

Now, Jesus said all these words to the general public that was in the synagogue, as He taught at the city of Capernaum.

These words even puzzled some of Jesus' disciples like as never before. Some said among themselves, "These are words hard to understand, who can listen to them?"

Jesus knew that even some of His disciples murmured at the words He had spoken. He knew what was going on in their minds, so He spoke to them saying, "Are you offended by the words I've just spoken? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where He was before? Here is the meaning of my words. It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is not important, it will not help; the WORDS that I have spoken to you in all my teachings, they are spirit and they are life. But some of you I know, do not believe."

Jesus knew all along who really did not believe and who would betray and go against Him. So He said to them, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me UNLESS it is GRANTED to them by the Father."

In one sense Jesus may have had in mind His followers partaking in the NT Passover by "eating His flesh" (the bread) and "drinking His blood" (the fruit of the vine), but only in symbol form, not in any literal sense as the bread and wine becoming His literal body when eaten, as the largest "Christian" church on earth teaches. Here we again see (covered in chapter 15) the ones who believed only ON the surface with Jesus, and ones who believed in a deeper IN or INTO Jesus. The only "on" Jesus believers, thought He was fine and good as long as He performed to their wishes and desires, as long as He spoke words that were not too far out in left field, to their minds.

Believing ON Jesus is just a surface thing, it doesn't go down very deep. Many can believe that Jesus did live as a human being, that He was a mighty instrument in preaching words about God...why most of Islam teaches that Jesus was "A" prophet of God, but it goes no further than that.

That kind of belief is ON Jesus, as acknowledging He lived, preached, and died. Believing IN Jesus, means you believe INTO, or WITHIN, Jesus.

It is a DEEP belief that not only believes Christ existed, but believes He existed as God in the flesh, that He was the VERY SON of God the Father, a human that was sinless, that lived a life FAR above what ANY other human being has ever lived. And it is a belief in Jesus that transforms the very mind, thoughts, words, and actions, of the one so believing.

For further expounding on this DEEP INWARD belief I refer you back to chapter 15 and the sub-heading "Jesus Remembers Those Who Did Believe And Repent."

After all these words from Jesus, it was just too much for some of His own disciples, and they drew back, packed their bags so to speak, and departed from Him, no longer wanting to be a part of those who went about the towns and villages with Him.

Seeing this, the departing of some of His disciples, He looked at the chosen twelve and said, "Will you also go away and stop following me?" Simon Peter was the one to answer for the twelve, "Lord, to whom shall we go? It is only you that has the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One sent by God."

Looking intently at the twelve Jesus then said, "Was it not I that chose you, the twelve, yet one of you is a devil." Jesus was thinking of and referring to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for it was he, one of the twelve, who would later betray Him to the religious authorities, who would desire to have Him put to death (John 6:25-71).

If we notice carefully the words Jesus said here, we can see clearly that He taught very plainly that He came from heaven, from the Father. He taught that He existed in heaven with the Father before He came to earth as a flesh and blood human being.

We see that Jesus was not meaning to say people should try to literally eat and drink His blood. But some thought that was exactly what He was meaning, or they just found it so hard to now understand His words, and so kind of revolting, they just walked away from Him, and no longer were counted among His disciples. But, it was all as Jesus had said, only those called by the Father, only those who were being led by the Holy Spirit, having their minds opened to the truths of God, that could come to Jesus and stay with Him in any case.

And for them the words He taught and who would make those words a part of their lives, it was like was eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Believing IN Jesus as well as believing ON Jesus, would mean they had eternal life, and would in the last day be resurrected to immortal glory in life eternal.

False Traditions Condemned By Jesus

As usual the scribes and Pharisees were not too far away from Jesus at all times. The Pharisees were in every community, they were the "religious party of the people" but the scribes were mainly found in Jerusalem.

When some of the scribes came from Jerusalem they banded together with the local Pharisees. They happened one day to see Jesus' disciples eating food with unwashed hands, and they called this sort of thing "defiled hands."

The Pharisees had taught the people to wash their hands before eating, but this washing of hands was not what we may do before we eat. It was a ceremonial type

of washing, a ritual process, washing all the way up to the elbow. When they came from the marketplace, before eating, they would go through a ritual of purifying themselves with water. It was a somewhat elaborate washing system. There were many other purifying and washing rites that they did with various cups and pots and pans and vessels of bronze, even tables and beds. Well, it was all traditions that the Pharisees and scribes had added to the religious system for the people. It was way and far beyond what God had ever instructed in the Old Testament. It was all man made rules and regulations, but passed off as something God had decreed to be done. Of course God had decreed no such practices. It was all false traditions that had no bearing on true holiness with God.

The pompous scribes and Pharisees, believing their traditions were God sanctioned, came to Jesus and said, "We see here that your disciples eat with unwashed hands. Why do they do this and eat with defiled hands? Why do they not follow the traditions of the elders?"

Jesus answered with some exasperation, and a little anger, "Oh, it is of a truth that Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, religious pretenders, when he wrote, 'This people honor and worship me with their lips, but their heart is FAR from me. In VAIN do they worship me, teaching as doctrines of God what is merely the precepts and invented ideas of men.' And what do you do as a way of life? You leave off doing the commandments of God, while you hold fast to the traditions of men."

He further went on to say, "You sure do have a fine way of rejecting the commandments of God, in order to keep your own man made traditions. For Moses wrote, 'Honor your father and mother'; and 'He who speaks evil of his father or mother, let him surely die'; but you say, 'If a man tells his father or mother, what you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God) - then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, so you make void the commandments of God through your traditions which you hand on to people. And many such like things you do to cast away what God has command."

What does this thing about "Corban" mean, and how did it void the commandment of God about honoring your parents? This is how it went. If someone had say \$10,000 or maybe a \$100,000 they could "dedicate" it to the "church" - which in this case was the Pharisee religious synagogue or "religious work" of the Pharisees. They did not have to give it over to them at the time it was dedicated to them, it could be dedicated to them any number of years in advance to the actual handing it to them. Maybe it was dedicated with the stipulation they would not receive the money (land, house, etc. that could be sold for money) till they died. If then, their father or mother became in need of physical help, the child could say, "Well I cannot give you any of my money, or sell the land for money to help you, because I've dedicated it to the 'church'" (the Pharisee church in this specific case of our Gospel story).

And so with this clever move on part of the Pharisees, based upon man made rules and "theology" traditions, they had people disobeying the very clear commands of God, by following their self made religious traditions. And that was only one example Jesus gave. He said that they did many other such things with their invented traditions, which also had people disobeying other commandments of God.

Jesus called the people to Him and said, "Listen and understand, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but it is what comes out of his mouth that defiles him."

His disciples came to Him and told him how the Pharisees were offended by what He had spoken. Jesus simply replied, "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Just let them alone, let them be, they are blind leaders, and if a blind man should try and lead another blind man, they will both fall into the ditch or into a pit."

Sometimes to teach and uphold the commandments of God, either by word or by action, and to reveal the falsehoods of a so-called "religion" towards God, it will offend some people. Sometimes there is no way around it, the truth often cuts people and they may get offended, even if the truth is presented in the kindest way possible, though I doubt Jesus was trying to be gentle and kind here with the Pharisees. He was probably stone faced and very upset in the tone of His voice, as He uttered these words to the Pharisees. They were after all pretending to be "godly religious leaders" and Jesus knew how false and damaging was much of their theology. This was not the first time the Pharisees accused Jesus of not being truly and correctly "religious." Now, on Jesus' part it was time to call a spade a spade, and as they say, "to let them have it between the eyes."

Sometimes in life, situations arise when it can be no other way. This was one of those times. But, even the disciples were puzzled again by the parable, not offended as the Pharisees were, but still puzzled, and they asked Jesus to explain clearly what He was meaning.

"Are you still without understanding?" Jesus said as He was answering their bewilderment. "Do you not see that whatsoever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on and out? But that which comes out of the mouth, really comes from the heart and mind, and this defiles the person. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, hate, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, coveting, deceit, pride, an evil eye, silly foolishness. These and other such things are what defiles a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a person" (Matt.15:1-20; Mark 7:1-23).

We need to note here that the whole context is talking about "washed hands" or "unwashed hands" as we eat food. It has nothing whatsoever to do with God's clean and unclean foods laws. The context is clearly the Pharisees disputing with Jesus over His disciples not washing their hands, in their special ritual way, before eating food. The Pharisees put more importance on making sure there was not one speck of dirt on the hands before eating food, than some of the commandments of God. Jesus was showing where the real priority should be.

Some translations at the end of Mark 7:19 say, "Thus he declared all foods clean." The translators want you to think this is part of the original Greek, and that Jesus was making void the clean and unclean foods laws that God gave in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. But such words are not found in the original Greek. The Greek reads, "...but into the belly, and into the waste-bowl goes out, purging all the foods."

Yes, of course, if some dirt is on your hands and you eat without washing them, some dirt may get on the food and into your mouth, but the body's automatic cleaning system will take care of the matter and clean it out through the bowels. Some dirt in the bowels from food does not defile what comes out of the mouth via the thoughts and intent of the heart and mind. Again, the whole context here is concerning washing the hands or not washing the hands before eating food with your hands, and has nothing to do with God's clean and unclean food laws.

CHAPTER 19

MORE MIRACLES AND THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND THE SADDUCEES

Canaanite Woman's Daughter Healed

Jesus thought it was time to move away from the Jewish people as a whole, for a short time, and go to the towns of Tyre and Sidon up on the north-west of the coast of Palestine. Arriving there He entered a house in order to be alone for a while, but a Canaanite Greek woman by race, knowing of Him, and hearing that He was there among them, came running to Him crying out as she fell down at His feet, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon." She begged Jesus to cast out the demon from her little girl.

But Jesus said not one word. He just seemed to ignore what she said, and didn't even seem to recognize that she was present. She persisted in her request, until finally the disciples asked Jesus to send her away because of her anguished crying.

Finally Jesus spoke:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The woman was unrelenting and not shaken. She came again and knelt before Him saying, "Lord, help me!"

Jesus replied, "The children should be fed first. It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs."

"Yes, Lord," the woman said, "but even the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

"O woman," Jesus said on hearing this, "GREAT is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire. You may go your way, the demon has left your daughter."

Matthew says in his Gospel that the child was healed instantly, and when the woman went home she found her child lying in bed and the demon gone, adds Mark in his Gospel (Matt.15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30).

What a fine example this woman is for us. She used persistence and logical wisdom is asking for the Lord Jesus to help her child. She had true faith that has works (James chapter 2). Faith without works is a dead faith the apostle James was inspired to tell us.

Jesus was impressed and it is recorded for all mankind to ever read, that He said this woman had GREAT faith. This is the SECOND recorded GENTILE (non-Israelite) person who is said to have outstanding faith, according to Jesus. The first we read about earlier was the "centurion" - I hope you remember that story that we have already covered.

Jesus Heals A Deaf Mute And Many Others

It was not long after this incident of the Greek woman's daughter having a demon cast out, that Jesus left that area and returned to the sea of Galilee. He went up into the hills there, but great crowds of people soon came to Him bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and so many others with sicknesses and afflictions. They put those sick folk at His feet and He healed all of them. When they saw all the sick being healed the people praised and glorified the God of Israel.

One healing at this time is especially recorded for us by Mark. Some people brought before Jesus a man who was not only deaf, but who also had a speech impediment.

Jesus took the man aside from the multitudes. He wanted this healing to be a private matter. We are not told why, but Jesus wanted this healing to be more private than open before all the multitude of people present. He took His fingers and placed them in the deaf man's ears. And He spat and touched his tongue, and looking up to heaven Jesus sighed and said, "Eph-phatha," that is, "Be opened." And the man's ears were opened and he could hear, and his tongue was released from the speech impediment and he spoke plainly.

Jesus, as He often did, told those who knew the man before he was healed, to tell no one, but the more He told them not to tell, the more it seemed they did the opposite and zealously proclaimed all that He did. The people were astonished beyond measure, saying among themselves and to others, "This Jesus has done all things well; He even makes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak" (Matt.15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37).

The Miraculous Feeding Of Four Thousand Plus

Once more the crowd had enlarged to a very great number. They had been with Jesus for a full THREE DAYS, and they had nothing at all to eat in those three days. Jesus called together His twelve disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion on the crowd, because they have had nothing to eat over these last three days they have been with me. If I send them away to their homes hungry, they will surely faint on the way, and some I know have come a long way."

"Well Master," the disciples said, "how can it be possible to feed all these people with food in a wilderness place like this?"

"How many loaves of bread do you have?" asked Jesus.

"We have seven loaves and a few small fish," the disciples replied.

Jesus took the seven loaves and the few fish, blessed them and told His disciples to distribute them among the people. This the disciples did and all the people ate till they were full and satisfied. And after all had eaten the disciples took up seven baskets of left over food.

The number of men only was about four thousand, and besides the men there were women and also children. So the total crowd of people could have been well around 6,000 or maybe even more. Stop and think about this. Of course Jesus worked another great miracle, but I'm thinking about the zeal, the dedication, the high enthusiasm all these people, including children, must have had to go for three days

without food, in order to be around Jesus as He taught and worked healing miracles. They were certainly zealous, at least in a physical way.

After all had eaten Jesus sent them away, back to their homes. He then immediately got into boat with His disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha or Magadan (Matt.15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10).

Jesus Reveals What The Leaven Of The Pharisees And Sadducees Is

The two main groups of religious leaders (the Pharisees and the Sadducees) were never far behind Jesus, always tagging along even if they just observed from a distance. But sometimes they came close to ask Jesus questions, often trying to test or trip Him up to smash His credibility with the people. This was another one of those times. They came wanting to argue with Him and specifically wanted Him to give them a sign from heaven. They just could not accept that He really was who He said He was, the Son of God, coming from heaven, being sent by the Father.

Jesus sighed a great sigh literally and within His mind. He said, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather; for the sky is red.' And you say in the morning, 'It will be stormy weather, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the face of the heavens, but you just cannot interpret the signs of the times all around you."

The signs the Pharisees and Sadducees had seen coming from Jesus were so many they were countless, and still they were not satisfied, but wanted an extra super-doooper sign from out of the heavens. I suspect that if Jesus had given it to them, they would still have said to the crowds that He did it by the prince of demons, the Devil, and would have continued in their unbelief, still denying that He was the Son of God.

Jesus continued: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but I've told you already, no sign will be given to you except the sign of Jonah."

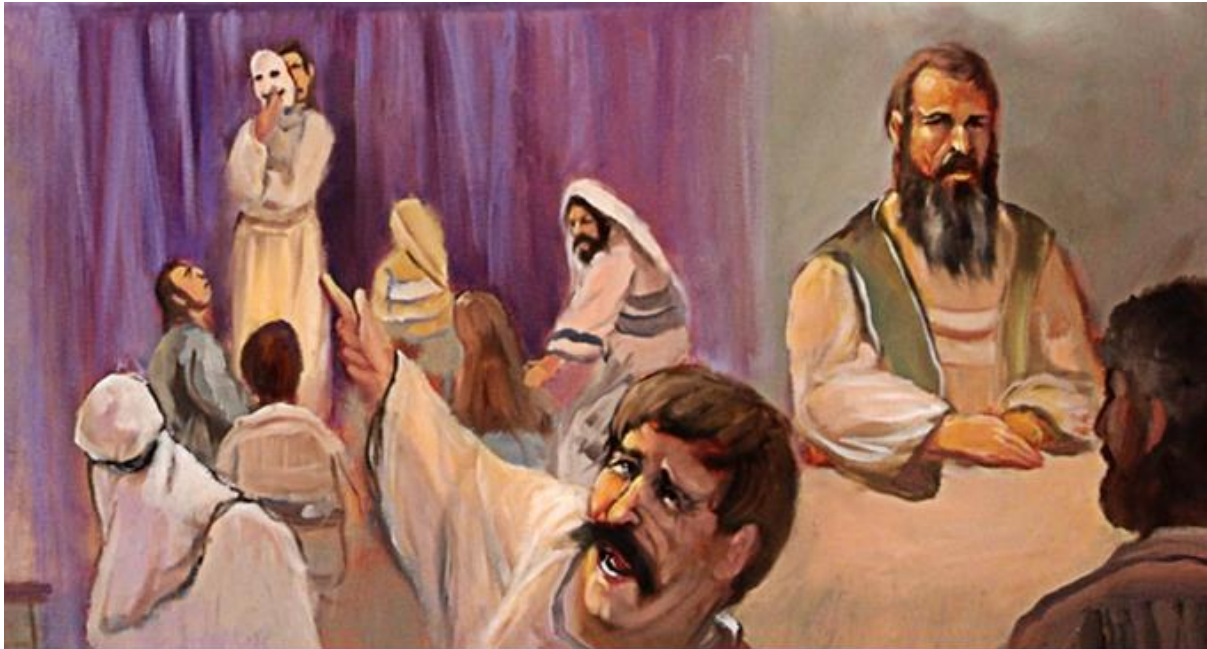
We saw in a previous chapter that that sign Jesus would give was that He would be three days and three nights in the grave as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish.

Jesus had enough of all this argumentative unbelief from those religious leaders, and with His disciples He got into a boat and once more crossed to the other side of the sea of Galilee.

When they got to the other side, the disciples realized they had not brought with them any bread except for one loaf. Jesus used the opportunity of the conversation about physical bread to tell and teach them about a much more serious leaven and bread they needed to be very aware of.

"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees," said Jesus.

The disciples discussed among themselves what Jesus was meaning, as they had brought no bread but one loaf, and the Pharisees and Sadducees were not near them on this occasion.



Beware of the leaven of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees

Jesus, knowing they did not understand Him, said to them, "O men of little faith, why is it that you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? Do you not yet understand. Does not your hearts perceive? Having eyes do you not see? Do you not remember the five loaves and the five thousand and how many baskets of food you gathered up after they ate? Do you not remember the seven loaves and the four thousand and more people who ate, and how many baskets of food you gathered up after they ate? How is it that you fail to perceive that I was not talking about physical bread? I said to you that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

Ah, the penny finally dropped as we say, and they understood then that He was not talking about the leaven of physical bread, but of the TEACHINGS and the PRACTICES of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt. 16:1-12; Mark 8:11-21).

Oh yes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had SOME things "technically" correct. They upheld the keeping of the weekly Sabbath, and the observing of the Feasts of the Lord, they observed the clean and unclean food laws. They did not bow down to idols of wood or stone as many of the pagan nations around them did. They kept many other commandments of God, but on the overall view of things theologically, they had many errors, many false ideas, many incorrect practices, and many traditions that they observed while nullifying the commands of God as we have seen.

Jesus, told His disciples to be very careful and very much on guard, when it came to the theological practices and teachings of the two main religious groups in Judea. Both groups were full of leaven, and leaven is often used in the Bible to represent SIN and UNRIGHTEOUSNESS and WICKEDNESS (see 1 Cor. 5).

Healing A Blind Man Near Bethsaida

Jesus and His disciples moved on to the town of Bethsaida. It was here that some people brought to Jesus a blind man and begged Him to touch and heal this man. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town, and when He had spit on his eyes and laid hands upon him, He asked the man, "Do you see

anything?" And the man looked up at Jesus and said, "Well, I see men; but they look like trees walking." After hearing this, Jesus once more laid hands upon his eyes. The man looked intently and his vision was restored perfectly, and he could see everything clearly and as it should be.

Jesus sent him away to his home, telling him not to enter the town, but go straight home. He knew that if the man entered the town and the people saw that he had his vision restored, all the people in the town would be flocking around Him, and at this time Jesus did not want a large crowd of people following Him.

We are not given the reason WHY Jesus did this healing of the blind man this particular way. Some things may seem strange to us, the spitting on the eyes, the man first seeing people walking but looking like trees (perhaps they still looked blurry), Jesus re-touching him, and then the healing all taking place. Jesus could have just said the word and the blind man would have had his sight restored. So it may seem a little puzzling to us as to why Jesus did it all this way, and we are not given any explanation.

We can only contemplate as to the why of it all. Maybe Jesus was giving us a lesson that some physical things need to be done in having healing. It is not wrong to use whatever is good of the physical world to help restore our health. And then, maybe it is a lesson for us to remember that God heals in His time, maybe not all at once, maybe in part we are helped and healed, and we need to keep on looking to Him for complete healing. Maybe we have to remember that complete healing is in God's time frame, when He decides that He will fully and completely heal us.

Those are some of the things we may learn from this recorded healing. There may be more things to learn, as we meditate upon it.

CHAPTER 20

JESUS SPEAKS OF BUILDING HIS CHURCH

It was time for Jesus to visit the villages of the district of Caesarea Philippi, about 120 miles north of Jerusalem, and about 30 miles inland east from Tyre (on the coast north of Palestine). On the way Jesus stopped to pray for a while and then asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

"Well Master," the disciples began to say, "some say you are John the Baptist, others say you are Elijah, and still others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"Now who do you say that I am," Jesus asked them.

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," replied Peter with assurance in his voice.

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona!" replied Jesus, "for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter (Greek - Petros, small stone), and on THIS ROCK (Greek - Petra, huge boulder) I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then He told the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ (Matt.16:13-20).⁵

Jesus' fame was large enough and the people flocking to see Him was overwhelming at times, without His disciples making a direct effort to pronounce that Jesus was the promised Messiah to come.

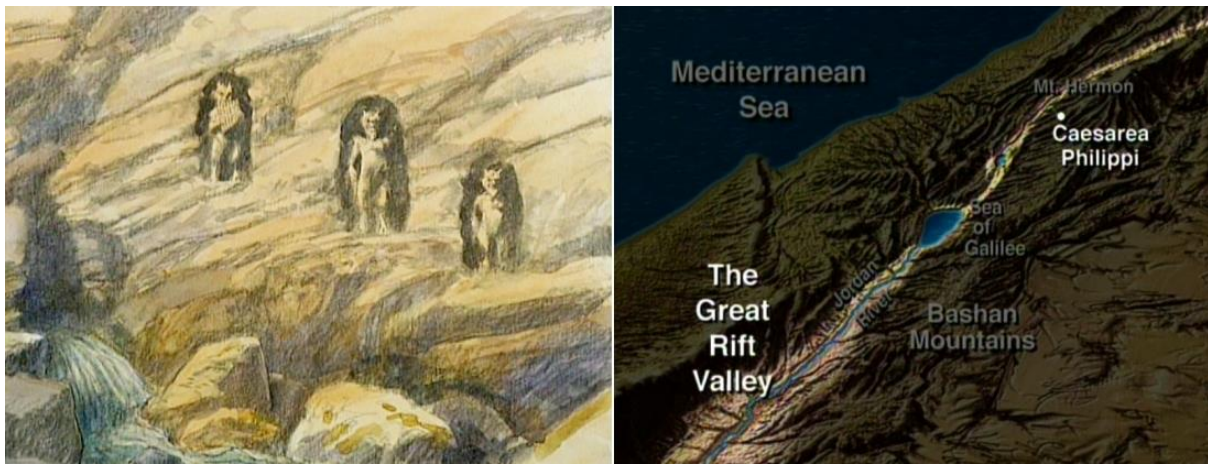
Many have been puzzled over this section of teaching by Jesus. But when you understand the Greek language it was written in, all the difficulties should solve themselves. Jesus was not saying that the Church of God would be built upon the man Peter as some claim. The New Testament shows that Jesus is the "chief corner stone" and it is upon Jesus as the head of the Church, that the Church of God is built. Jesus is the "petra" - the huge massive crag of a stone, while Peter the man was "petros", the small stone.

⁵ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** It is clear that the church being built on Peter is not what Jesus was meaning. If he meant Peter He would not have changed Greek words from "petros" (peter) to on this "petra" (rock).

When Jesus says that the gates of hell would not prevail against it most have the idea that it is the church in the defensive position of being attacked. This may be the wrong way around. Gates were the defensive stronghold of a city. Jesus seems to be saying that the gates of the city of hell will not prevail, implying that it is hell that is being attacked. Perhaps Jesus means that the devil's kingdom will not prevail against the rock of Christ (along with the saints at His return) – an allusion to the rock cut without hands (Christ) destroying the Gentile kingdoms at His return in the prophecy of the great image in Daniel 2.

Concerning the authority to "bind and loose" and have it bound or loosed in heaven, this also has given thought and even with some, established a kind of "divine authority for ministers" doctrine. Some think that at times a "priest" or "minister/s" can make God bind or loose decisions they make for other people or for their "church flock."

Again, understanding the Greek, and the tense it was written in, can answer our questions we may have. In the translation of the New Testament by B.J. Phillips there is a comment among the appendix footnotes, telling us the tense of the Greek and that it is more probable that the translation of this section should have been something like this: "And whatsoever you bind on earth must be what is already bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven."



Caesarea Philippi (Tell Dan) near the source of the Jordan River which sprung through an underground cave was the site of a pagan shrine to the Greek god Pan (half man / half goat). The underground cave was the "gate to hell" or the pagan underworld. It was here that Christ told His disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church.

Jesus then was telling Peter and all the disciples that they could have authority to bind and loose, but they better make sure it was within the laws and will of God in heaven, and that they need to keep in mind that the Church of God is founded upon Jesus, not any human man.

Now, if we do not want to bother with the Greek language, and we stay only with the KJV English translation, we can still make a case for understanding what Jesus said here without putting it into the sanction of "divine human authority" bracket. There are certain times within the Churches of Christ that binding or loosing decisions must be made to safeguard the Church. An example of this is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Here is a case of an unrepentant sinner (large sins of a wrong life style), and the apostle Paul telling the church at Corinth to disfellowship the man, to put him out of the local church congregation, so such sins as he was practicing would not be multiplied and practiced by others in the church. This was a decision that had qualities of binding and loosing.⁶

⁶ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** This practice of judgment regarding binding and loosing probably is a reference to the statute in Deuteronomy 17:8-10 where if a matter was too hard to judge between two people who couldn't come to an agreement that they could voluntarily take it to the judges to have it judged upon. It was voluntary but if they did so they would be bound to the judgment. Paul implies in 1 Corinthians 6 that this statute is now transferred to the church.

Yet, even this was something that was within all the laws and commandments of God, where God's truth and way on the matter was very clear. The congregation in that instant that Paul was addressing were upholding the laws of God. Binding and loosing in the context of 1 Corinthians 5 is a context of living within and upholding, the commandments of God.

Binding and loosing for the disciples of Christ has nothing to do with that which God has allowed and permitted as "freedom of choice" for each individual in the body of Christ. A group of disciples cannot tell you to only wear one certain color of dress or suit in attending church services, for example. Such things God does not have a law for, so no human person or persons can bind or loose on such a matter.

At another time in Jesus' ministry He said to His disciples, "Whoever sins you remit or cancel, they shall be cancelled, and whoever sins you retain, they shall be retained (John 20:23). This would again be a situation as Paul was addressing in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. It could also apply to a disciple or disciples leading someone to baptism. Some only want to be baptized because their friend was baptized, or their wife or husband was baptized, or because their parents want them to be baptized. It is not a genuine personal repentance to baptism. And so discriminating disciples of Jesus would in all baptism cases decide if it is truly from a genuine heart, that the person wants to be baptized. If it is genuine, then baptism can be performed and the individual's sins can be cancelled. If it is not genuine then no baptism should be performed and hence the individuals sins are retained, until the day of true heartfelt repentance.

So, there is a certain amount of authority given by Jesus to His disciples, in binding and loosing, within His church, but that binding and loosing must always be within the laws and commandments of God.

Also of course, any organization, such as a church congregation of an area, must make "administrative" decisions. The place to meet, the time of the day to meet, how long the service or meeting will last, and a hundred and one other like things. This must be done by a body of people within that organization that have been given authority by the whole organization to make such decisions, or by a vote of the congregation as a whole. Such decisions must be made for a smooth operation of an organization made up of many people. And needless to say, all such decisions will not please everyone all the time.

Jesus Foretells His Death And Resurrection

From the time of Jesus' visit to the region of Caesarea Philippi He began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, but on the third day be raised to life once more.

This news hit Peter like a bolt out of the blue, as if struck by lightning. With dismay he said to Jesus, "God forbid Lord! This shall never happen to you!" Peter was meaning that he and all the disciples would do whatever it took to make sure He would not die by the hands of the elders and religious leaders of their day.

"Get behind me Satan," Jesus, with severe and grim tones to His voice, quickly replied, "You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God but of men." And with those words all went silent, no one venturing to say anything more about

the subject. But, many of the disciples kept what Jesus had said in their hearts, meditating on what they could possibly mean, for none wanted to believe Jesus would die, being so young and so popular among the people. They just could not imagine that the elders and priests could have enough power to have Jesus put to death.

At that time, Judea being under the overall rule of the Roman Empire, only by the authority of the Roman government could any citizen of Judea be put to death. The disciples, at that time, could not in their wildest dreams, imagine what was to come, but Jesus knew, and knew it was the Father's will that it should be as the prophets of old had foretold (Matt. 16:21-23).

What It Takes To Follow Christ

Jesus then called all the multitude to Himself as well as His disciples, and said, "If any person would follow me and be my disciple, they must deny themselves and take up their cross of burden and imitate me. For whoever would save their life shall lose it; but whosoever loses his life for me and the Gospel's sake, will save it. What does it profit a person if they should gain the whole world, yet lose their life. For what can a man give in exchange for his life? Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Jesus was speaking of the life a person can have in Him, the inner Holy Spirit life, that leads to eternal life at the resurrection day. You could gain the whole world, be head of the physical Empire that rules the whole world, you could be the richest person in the world, you could have the fame of the whole world, like some Hollywood movies stars have, but if you are not raised to eternal life one day in the resurrection when Jesus returns in glory, then what have you really gained?

In the long run you will have gained nothing lasting, certainly way less, very much less than those who will have gained that resurrection. They may have had to deny themselves many things in this lifetime (great wealth, fame, splendid comfort, prominent and illustrious jobs or positions on the human scale of things) to follow and imitate Christ Jesus, to stand up and not be ashamed of belonging to Christ, and obeying His commandments. The end result will be everlasting glory in the Kingdom of God.

And then Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death before they see a sight of the Kingdom of God, with glory and power" (Mark 8:34 to 9:1)

Jesus was speaking about a soon transfiguration event that some of His disciples would witness.

Jesus' Transfiguration And The Elijah To Come

Matthew and Mark state that "after six days" while Luke is somewhat more specific in stating "about eight days after these sayings." It would seem by all the accounts it was around eight days later, that Jesus took with Him, Peter, James and John his brother, up into a high mountain. There was just the four of them.

The disciples must have been wondering what was going to happen if anything at all special was going to happen. They did not have to wait long for the answer. Suddenly there was "light" but light like they had never seen before. In their eyes Jesus had CHANGED! His face had become like the sun for brightness and glory, and all His clothes were whiter than any bleach could make them white. It was brighter than their eyes could look at, but somehow they were able to see it all in its fully splendid powerful GLORY!

Then something else happened that shocked the socks off them as we say. There stood Moses and the prophet Elijah, talking to Jesus. Obviously at this time in history there was enough physical information that had been handed down through the centuries, as to the physical appearance of Moses and Elijah. They knew it was Moses and they knew it was Elijah that were having a conversation with Jesus.

"Lord!", exclaimed Peter, "It is good that we are here, if you wish I will make three booths here; one for YOU and one for Moses and one for Elijah."⁷

Peter was still speaking when a bright cloud over-shadowed them, and then they heard this voice from the cloud saying, "This is my beloved Son, with Him I am well pleased; listen to Him."

At the sound of this voice the three disciples fell on their faces and were filled with great awe and fear, realizing they were witnessing the very glory and presence of God, as well as the future event of the resurrection that Jesus had so often by now spoken about. The resurrection to glory of all the children of God at the coming of Christ in glory, at the end of the age, when the Kingdom of God would be a literal reality on the earth.

The disciples were still fallen down on their faces when Jesus came and touched them and said, "Rise up, and have no fears." And when they lifted up their heads and looked, they saw no one but Jesus only.

They were on their way down the mountain when Jesus commanded them, "I want you to tell not a single soul about the VISION you have seen today. Do not tell anyone until I am raised again to life from death."

At this request and command the disciples said, "Then why is it that the scribes say that Elijah must first come?"

⁷ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Peter's automatic reaction here implies that he made a connection with the millennium and the future resurrection with the meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles.

In the Jewish mind there is a strong connection between weddings and the Feast of Tabernacles. Jewish marriage ceremonies are performed under what's called a huppah – a wedding tabernacle – where a couple seek the shelter and protection of God in their marriage.

One prophetic interpretation I've heard based on this claims that the Marriage of the Lamb (Christ symbolically marrying the church) will occur for 7 days over the Feast of Tabernacles. Whether that is true or not, only time will tell.



Peter, James and John witness the Transfiguration

They thought that they had the proof and the golden opportunity now to really declare that Jesus was the promised Messiah, because they had seen Elijah come, and the very scribes of their nation were saying that Elijah had to come first before the Messiah would come on the scene.

"Oh, Elijah shall come," replied Jesus, "and shall restore all things, but at this present time Elijah has indeed already come, and they did not know or recognize him, but did and said evil and whatever they liked about him from their darkened hearts. So they will also do to the Son of man, who will also suffer from their hands."

Then, it became clear, they knew He was speaking to them about John the Baptist (Matt. 17:1-13).

The three disciples had witnessed a foretaste of the resurrection in glory at the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, when Jesus will return in power and glory. So it was as Jesus had said some days earlier, that some would not taste of death until they saw the Son of man coming in power and glory.

You will notice that Matthew says it was a VISION the three disciples saw. A vision is in the mind's eye, not something that is a literal happening per se. Moses and Elijah died, they are still dead to this very day. They, like all who have lived, are in the grave waiting that blessed resurrection day. When the last trumpet, the voice of the archangel, will sound, and the dead in Christ shall rise first and then we which are alive, shall be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, and we shall all be gathered by the angels to rise and meet Jesus in the clouds, in the air, and so be with Him for ever more (2 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15; Matt. 24:29-31).

The prophecy concerning the coming of Elijah before the Messiah, is found in Malachi chapter 4.

Here Christ makes it clear that it is not the literal first Elijah that lived centuries earlier, that is meant, but someone who will come in the power and might of Elijah, someone who will speak the words and truth of the Almighty God as Elijah did in his day.

Christ also makes it clear that this prophecy has a DUAL prophetic fulfilment - one fulfilment at the first coming of Christ, and another yet future fulfilment just before the second coming of Christ. The context of Malachi is just before the prophetic "day of the Lord" - just before "the Lord's day" that most of the book of Revelation is all about. Jesus makes it clear that another Elijah man (as John the Baptist was before Christ's first ministry on earth) "shall come" (future tense) as Jesus said, and shall "restore all things."

This also tells us that by and near the end of this age, the truths of the word of God will have been so distorted and bent out of shape, that a "restoring of all things" will be greatly needed. The Elijah to come will restore all things to its purity.

As before when John the Baptist fulfilled that prophecy, most did not recognize him as the Elijah to come. So it probably will be at the end of this age, most, even many within the very true Church of God, will not recognize or know who the end time Elijah is. It will only be those who have their nose in the Bible, who are searching the Scriptures, who are willing to be corrected, who desire to grow in grace and knowledge, that shall understand who the end time Elijah is. May you and I be among those who will recognize the Elijah to come, should he appear in our lifetime.⁸

⁸ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Our author Keith has a less than positive view of the former leader of the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert Armstrong, unlike the majority within the Church of God, in regards to his character in the last 20 years of his life which I do not share.

Keith notes above: "The truths of the word of God will have been so distorted and bent out of shape, that a 'restoring of all things' will be greatly needed. The Elijah to come will restore all things to its purity."

The split-offs from the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) have simply maintained the truths once taught. They have not truly restored what was lost. While Keith feels his character went south in his latter years, I am sure that Keith would concur that there was a major restoration of many truths to the Church of God in the early days of Herbert Armstrong's ministry (By one account, 18 restored truths: www.rogerswebsite.com/others/18-Restored-Truths.htm).

While some may argue this may refer to someone involved in restoring the truth to one of the WCG splitoffs and think this Elijah is yet to come, it is my personal belief that the restoration in the early days of Herbert Armstrong's ministry was a fulfillment of the prophecy of a restoring of all things.

An Epileptic Boy Is Healed

The next day when coming down from the mountain, as they approached the other disciples, they saw a great crowd about them and scribes arguing with them. Immediately the crowd when seeing Jesus ran up to him. Jesus looked at them all and said, "What are you discussing with the scribes?"

One person spoke up and replied, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, but you were gone. Well, I brought him for healing, because he has a dumb spirit, an evil spirit takes and seizes him and dashes him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to cast out the spirit, when I saw you were not among them, but they could not cast it out."

Jesus answered, "O faithless generation, how long do I have to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son to me."

They brought the boy forward towards Jesus, and when the evil spirit saw Him it took the boy and convulsed him, and he fell to the ground rolling about and foaming at the mouth.

"How long has the boy been like this?" Jesus asked the father. "From childhood," the father replied, "and it has often cast him into the fire and into water, trying to destroy him. But if you can do anything at all to heal him, please have pity on us and help us."

Jesus said to the man, "If you can! Why, all things are possible to him that believes."

Then the father of the child with a loud cry and anguish said, "I believe Lord, I believe, please help my unbelief!"

As a large crowd was gathering about Him, Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again."

The evil spirit was not about to give up without some sort of a fight. He took hold of the boy once more and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was lying there like a corpse; so that most of the people there said among themselves that the boy was dead.

But Jesus leaned over and took the boy by the hand and he arose, perfectly well and healthy, free from any evil spirit.

Later, in private, the disciples asked Jesus why they had not been able to cast out the spirit. Jesus said to them, "Because of your little faith. Truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move over to another place,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Then again, such healing can only be done by much prayer and fasting" (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29).

We see here that it is faith that is required to do such mighty healing miracles, and we also see that Jesus taught that faith comes by and through much prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting draws us close to God, and it is by being close to God that faith grows and is made strong.

Moving mountains in a literal way (unless for some specific reason such would be required) was an analogy that Jesus was giving to show that through faith miracles can be done. To do this type of healing that Jesus did (which is as great a miracle as literally moving a mountain to a different location), took as much faith as if for some reason a mountain had to be moved to save life or avert continual pain, grief, and sorrow. Jesus was simply pointing out that through faith nothing is impossible with God. For He has power over all the spirits of the unseen world and all the physical laws of this planet and universe.

CHAPTER 21

CHILDLIKENESS AND FORGIVENESS

Jesus Foretells His Death A Second Time

Once more Jesus and His disciples are back in the Galilee area. For a little while He did not want anyone to know they were there, for He had some important private teachings to do. For the second time He instructed His disciples concerning His death, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He is killed, after three days He will rise again."

For the second time the disciples were perplexed and did not understand what He was saying, although He said it to them in pretty plain words. They just could not imagine that such a thing could happen to such a mighty miracle working man as Jesus. They also did not understand all the Old Testament writings of the Messiah and His first coming to earth, and what the prophets of old had been inspired to write about what would happen to Him.

And, like before, although they were puzzled by His words, they were afraid to ask Him about them, to inquire any further (Mark 9:30-32).

The Temple Tax And The Fish

When they arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel Temple tax came up to Peter and inquired of him, saying, "Does your teacher pay the tax?"

A tax imposed on the Jewish people for the upkeep of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was not a part of the laws of the Old Testament, yet not wrong either, certain physical things of God like the then Temple, did need physical maintenance at times, and God did not issue laws for everything that needed to be taken care of. Some things were left to the leaders of the people to figure out how best to keep things in good repair and order.

"Well....yes, of course He does," replied Peter, with a little hesitation in his voice. Peter really was not sure, as it had never come up before and had never been talked about with Jesus.

Jesus later that day said to Peter, "What do you think, Simon? From who do the kings of the earth take taxes? From their sons or from others?"

"O, it is from others Master," replied Peter.

"Then the sons are free, yes, indeed that is so." Jesus said, and continued with, "However, not to give offense to them, I want you to go to the sea and cast a fishing line and hook. Take the first fish that bites, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel; take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."



Peter finds a coin to pay the Temple tax in the mouth of a fish Jesus told Him to catch.

The Temple in Jerusalem belonged to God, and all the services done there, all that the Levites and priests performed there as under the laws of the Old Testament, were from God and towards God in worship. He owned it all. Jesus as the Son of God, had part ownership in the Temple and all things performed there. He really did not have to pay taxes on what belonged to Him. Kings of the earth collected taxes from others, not from their own children. God, as King of the earth, and hence the Temple in Jerusalem, did not have to collect a tax from His own Son.

But, Jesus did not want to offend them, the tax collectors, or those who were keepers of the Temple. They did not understand who He was, did not believe who He was. Their minds were still in blindness to a large extent, hence Jesus would not offend them. He worked a miracle and told Peter to pay the Temple tax.

Sometimes in life there are many situations where we may be free to do or not do something that's within the righteousness of God, and sometimes in order to not offend people, we should do it, if not doing it would offend them. You may be able to think of such circumstances and if reading this Bible Story with more persons than yourself, you might like to discuss such situations.

This is a life example that Jesus gives us to not offend people if it is within your power to not offend them.

Who is the Greatest and Childlikeness

They had been out in the town of Capernaum and were now on the way to the house they always stayed in when in that town (some have speculated that it was a house Jesus had built earlier in His life as it is always designated as "the house"), and

arriving Jesus asked them, "What were you discussing on the way here?" They were silent for a while, for on the way they had been discussing who was the greatest among them (apart from Jesus of course). "Well, Master," they began in their reply, "we were wondering who was the greatest among us. And so Lord, who is it, who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?"

It was now Jesus' turn to be silent for a while. He sat down, and called the twelve over to Him, and said, "If any one would be first, he must put himself last of all and put himself servant of all." Then calling for a child to come over to Him, He put the child in the midst of the disciples, and put His arms around him, and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and receiving me actually is receiving not me so much as receiving the One who sent me, my Father. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble and sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."



"And whoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in Me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck and he were cast into the sea" (Mark 9:42).

Entering the Kingdom of God, being a part of it now in this lifetime, to Jesus was not about trying to be the greatest among other believers, trying to "out do" in speech, works, power, or whatever else humans think about in putting themselves greater than others. To Jesus, the greatest ones were those who were humble like a child and who served others, who did not even think of themselves as anything great. Then if some, as they do, think that riding rough-shod over others is being powerfully

great, and would cause little ones in Christ to stumble and sin, so they gave up on salvation and remaining faithful to the end, then it would have been better for that person who so causes such to stumble, if they had been drowned in the sea, or we may say today, "never been born." Being great for the Kingdom of God is nothing like what the world thinks about "being great" is. Greatness to God is being humble minded and serving others and making sure little ones in Christ grow and stay faithful to the end.

As Jesus was speaking about all this, John broke in and said, "Master, teacher, we saw a man casting out demons in your name, and we told him to stop doing such things because he did not belong to our company of disciples."

Why did John bring this up at this particular time? Maybe it was because John thought this man was trying to be great by doing such works. Greater than they were, as we saw earlier that the disciples could not cast out the demon from the child that the father brought to them to have his son healed. Maybe seeing this man casting out demons in Jesus' name caused them to start thinking about who was the greatest among them, for surely they were greater than this man, they probably thought, as he did not even belong to their group of disciples that Jesus had personally chosen Himself.

Jesus replied to John and all present, "Do not forbid him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon after to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us. For truly I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear my name, will not loose his reward."

Jesus was showing them that God works in many ways. He is not bound by a certain "club" or "church group." He was showing them that those who work for Him in a certain time and way, are not necessarily "the only ones" on the circuit of His work. And others could be doing huge things in His name or even very small simple things for Him and for others who believe in Him. Even those doing small things like giving a cup of water in His name to others who also believe in His name, will not be forgotten by God. The man the disciples had seen casting out demons was believing in Jesus, doing it in His name, and those coming to him were also believing in Jesus, not the man doing the work, but believing in the power that was in the name of Jesus. God will remember those who have the simple attitude of wanting to serve others through Him, they will have their reward.

The disciples by their action and words of telling the man to "stop" because he was not part of "the gang that walked around with Jesus," could have offended him where he would have given up his personal conviction of Jesus, been as we say, "turned right off" and Jesus wanted to make sure His disciples knew the seriousness of offending people, so He went on to expound with words very similar to what He had said to them in a previous teaching. He also did not want them to offend each other by trying to figure out who was the greatest among themselves.

"Woe unto the world because of offenses! For offenses must come; but woe to the person by whom the offense comes! Therefore if your hand or your foot cause you to offend, cut them off, and cast them from you, for it is better for you to enter into life with one hand or one foot than to have two hands or two feet to be cast into the fire that shall destroy forever. The same goes for your eyes, if one should cause you to offend, better cast it off and enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the fire of Gehenna.

"Take heed, pay close attention, that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is there in heaven. The Son of man has come to save the lost, that is His main aim, not to destroy but to save."

Jesus was making it as clear and as plain as possible, that He and those who follow Him, are to put away anything in their lives, that which would cause people to be offended and to be lost. He was in the business of SAVING not destroying lives. As we saw before when Jesus uttered similar words, of cutting off a hand or foot or plucking out an eye, He was not talking of doing this literally to your body, for it is really the mind that offends, the hand or foot or eye follows what the mind tells it. Jesus is using an analogy again, whatever is precious and close to you, if it is wrong and leads to you offending people, better own up to it and get rid of it.

And we notice in passing that it would seem that believers, as a whole, have what some have called "guardian angels" over them. Jesus here refers to them as "their angels in heaven."

To show the disciples still further that He was in the work force that was busy searching and seeking for the lost, to save them, He went on to say:

"Think about this. If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them gets lost, does he not leave the ninety and nine and does he not go out into the mountains or wherever, to seek for the one that has got lost? And if he manages to find it, does he not rejoice more over that sheep, than over the ninety and nine which did not go astray or wander off and get lost? Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven, that ONE of these little ones should perish.

Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you give its saltiness back? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another" (Matt.18:1-14; Mark 9:33-50).

We are to be the "salt of the earth" as Jesus once told His followers. We are to be salt not poison to people. We are to be humble like a child who knows he/she is not self-sufficient. We are to not think about being great in the eyes of other human beings, but think about how we can serve mankind. And we are to do all we can not to offend others, so they and us can be saved and not lost.

Forgiveness - A Key To Salvation

This was a good time for Jesus to speak about the very important subject of "forgiveness" and He did:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. but if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he still refuses to listen, even to those who have come with you, then tell it to the church; and if he refuses to even listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector."

Non-Israelites (Gentiles) and tax collectors back then were viewed as outsiders and not associated with on any social activities, they were the black sheep of the family so to speak. Here Jesus gives the basic formula for righting wrongs that people do to

each other within the family and church of God. It is really pretty clear and straightforward enough, yet few observe it as Jesus instructed.

You first must go to the person who has wronged and in the right manner "have it out with them" - or "clear the air between the two of you." In most cases most problems can be solved between the two parties involved. If not, then you are to take along two or three others as witnesses, maybe even as intercessors, as third party mediators. Once more at this level the problem can usually be rectified. But in a few cases it may not be solved at this second level of "problem confrontation" and it will need have to go to the "church."

The important thing here is that it is the "church" that has the final say. And the "church" is not the minister or board of deacons, it is the "church" - the whole body of Christ for that locality. They then must hear the problem and rule as to the right and wrong of the matter, and who is right and who is wrong and the means to correct the situation, with repentance and whatever else is needed to correct the matter. If that person will not hear the "church" then the church is to put them out of their fellowship. It is then the rule and principle of what Paul and the church at Corinth was into as we read 1 Corinthians chapter 5.

We need in all of this last ditch circumstance to also remember Galatians 6:1-3 and 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

The "church" must make a ruling and a decision on matters that cannot be solved with the first two approaches, and as a collective decision by the members in whom is the Holy Spirit, God will back that decision of who is right and who is wrong and what should be done.

Jesus showed this by going on to say, "It is truth that I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name there I am in the middle of them."

The context here about binding and loosing even with a small number agreeing together, is the context of "church problems" and the third part of trying to solve them having to be applied. Far too many have taken these words out of context and tried to apply them to far too many things, including setting rules and regulations that are directly at odds and against the unmoveable laws and commandments of God (Psalm 111:7, 8).

As Jesus was talking about problems and sins that brother has with brother, Peter naturally had a question come to his mind and he wanted Jesus to answer it, "Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother if he sins against me? As many as seven times?" Peter thought there must be after all a limit to forgiving your brother. Probably all the other disciples thought so also, but to the surprise of everyone Jesus replied, "I do not say to seven times, but you must forgive to seventy times seven."

They all knew that by Jesus using the phrase "seventy times seven" He was meaning you must be willing to forgive to never ending, there was no limit to forgiveness. And to illustrate the importance of forgiveness that knows no end, Jesus gave them this parable or story illustration:

"The Kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He could not pay, so the king ordered that he and his wife, and his children, and all that he had should be sold to pay back the debt. On hearing this the man fell down before the king and begged him, 'Oh, king, please be patient with me, and I will pay it all back.'

"The king was filled with pity and compassion for him, and he released him and forgave him of the huge debt he owed. But, when the man left the king, he immediately went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant re-payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time, 'Be patient please, and I will pay back what I owe you,' he pleaded. But his creditor would have none of it, would have no mercy or patience at all. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid back in full.

"When some of the other servants saw this, they were very angry and upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened. The king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You unthankful and evil servant! I forgave you the huge debt you owed me because you pleaded with me for patience and mercy. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the outraged and indignant king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny he owed him.

"That's what my Father in heaven will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters the sins and trespasses they commit against you" (Matt.18:15-35).

Jesus made it quite a simple matter, if you want God to forgive you your sins and mistakes that really amount to a great number in a lifetime, then you had better be forgiving towards other fellow human beings, of the relatively less in number, sins and trespasses they might commit against you in a lifetime.

Forgiveness - having it towards others is a vital key to obtain salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of our Father who is in heaven.

CHAPTER 22

JESUS AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

It was the fall of the year, the harvest of the barley and wheat grains had been gathered in (the end of March to late June), the fruits had been gathered in (July/August - some grape gathering started, figs, walnuts, olives, etc.), and the main harvest of grapes, as well as dourra, maize, cotton, pomegranates, were all gathered in and harvested.

By this time in Jesus' ministry some leaders of the Jews had got to the point of hating Him so much they were ready to find a way to kill Him, so He did not want to openly, on a long term basis, travel around the district of Judea (Jerusalem area), hence He went about the Galilee townships, far to the north of Jerusalem.

As it was the fall of the year the Feast of Tabernacles that God had given to the Jews and Israelites under Moses, was close at hand to being observed in Jerusalem especially, as this was still the appointed place to observe the Feasts of the Lord as prescribed under the Old Testament. Jesus' literal brothers (half brothers we would say today) came to Him and said, "You should leave here and go to Jerusalem and Judea, that your disciples may see the works that you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known for doing the work of God. So go and do these things, show yourself to the world." His brothers did not as yet believe in Him as the Son of God.

Jesus answered them, "My time has not yet come, that all things that are written about me must happen, but your time to see and do God's will, is always here. The world does not hate you, but it does hate me, because I testify to its face that its works are evil. You go up to the feast; I won't go up just yet to the feast, for the time to do what I must do is not going to come as quickly as you might like to see it come."

His brothers shrugged their shoulders in complete disbelief and packed up their things and headed out south to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus stayed on in Galilee for a number of days, then in a private way He also departed for Jerusalem and the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. It was the greatest rejoicing time of the year, when for seven days all that came to Jerusalem would sing, worship, present animal sacrifices, eat and drink to their hearts content (within the law of God of course, after all this was still a "religious" festival observance), and just praise God for all the ingathered harvests of the year.

Three People Thought They Could Be Disciples

The days were fast drawing near for Him to offer Himself up for the sins of the world. It was time to go up to the city of Jerusalem. He would be going through the area of the Samaritans, and sent messengers ahead to people in a certain village where He thought He would pass through on His way to Jerusalem, but they would not receive Him because He was only passing through and not stopping with them. They were hoping He would stop and teach and work the works of God among them, but because He was setting His mind on going to Jerusalem, they got offended and would not allow Him and His disciples to stay overnight in their village.

James and John, when they heard about this from the returning messengers, said to Jesus, with righteous indignation in their voices, "Lord, how about us calling for fire from heaven, to come down and consume them?" Jesus rebuked them for such evil thoughts and words. And they went to another village that was happy to receive them all for whatever length of time.

As they were making their way to this village and walking the dusty road, a man came up to Jesus and said, "I will follow you wherever you go." He was probably taken up with way too much emotion and not enough thinking about the cold facts of reality as to what his words to follow Jesus anywhere, would really mean. Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no permanent home. Often He does not know where He is going to lay His head down to sleep. It is a life of wandering around, always on the go."

The account does not say if the man continued to follow Jesus after he heard those words.

Then, Jesus Himself said to another man, "Follow me," but the man replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father who has just died."

"Oh, you need to let the dead bury the dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God," was Christ's answer to the man. We are not told if he listened and obeyed Jesus' directives to him. There are times when we need to let the unconverted, spiritual dead, take care of physical matters, and we need to be about doing God's work, if God calls and if God has other priorities He thinks we should be doing first, other than running around over physical matters.

Then yet another fellow along the way, said to Jesus, "I will surely follow you, but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

The reply Jesus gave may not have sat too well with him. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Jesus knew the heart of this man. It was not that it is always wrong to say "good bye" to loved ones before going off to do the work of God, that is not wrong of itself, or under certain situations. Yet it is obvious Jesus thought there were some situations where it would only be used as an excuse to procrastinate, to put off, and to reject, the calling of God. If you are called to go and do the work of God as a special disciple of Christ (as these three men were called to be and to do), then no physical thing should be allowed to stand in your way.

This calling is not for everyone, but it is a reminder from Jesus that with such a calling, He and God's work must come first, and physical things are to come second, even sometimes having to leave off some physical things that are not wrong in and of themselves, under a different situation. Jesus reminds those so called in this special way for His work, that it is not always easy to follow, as far as the physical is concerned (Luke 9:51-62).

Confrontation With The Jews

The Jews, were looking for Him at the feast (knowing Jesus always observed the Festivals of the Lord and would so be in Jerusalem somewhere). "Where is He?" Many of the Jews asked among themselves. Some muttered to each other that He

was a "good man," while others conversed that He was leading the people astray and was up to no good thing. All this conversational talk was done in a very hush-hush way, not openly and loudly for the people feared the Jewish leaders and what anger it might provoke in them if they knew the people were asking for and talking about Jesus.

It was about half way through the eight day festival and Jesus finally showed Himself and went up into the Temple and started to teach the people. The Jews there could not believe how He was teaching with such wisdom, knowledge and authority. They even said to one another, "How can this man teach like this when he has never been to or attended any of our schools of Theology or Universities of learning?" (John 7:1-15).

And of course they were, on this point correct. Jesus had never attended or had any certificate of accomplishment from any of their Theology schools or any other school of "higher learning" in their land. It was a complete mystery to them that He could speak so mightily about the Scriptures and things pertaining to the Almighty God.

Jesus knew exactly what was going through their minds, and said, "My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me: if any person will do His will, they shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority and my own ideas. He who speaks on his own authority seeks to simply glorify himself; but he who seek the glory of the one who sent him is true, and in that person there is no falsehood. Did not Moses hand down to you the law that was given to him from God, for you all to observe? Yes, but yet none of you observe it! Why to you seek to kill me?"

"You are crazy," replied the people, "who seeks to kill you? You are possessed by a demon," they continued to shout at Christ.

Jesus knew the inner most thoughts and attitude of their hearts, they really were more than upset at Him, the scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees had been doing a pretty good number on them, in teaching them that He had broken the Sabbath (which they held in such high regard, but as we have seen, mainly with their false traditions and man made rules and regulations) and other commandments of God.

Jesus answered them on this by saying, "I did one miracle on the Sabbath. Think about this, Moses gave you the commandment of circumcision, not that it was from Moses but really it was from the fathers before Moses time. Yet it was a part of the laws of Moses, given to you. And so you circumcise a child upon the Sabbath, so if you circumcise a child on the Sabbath so the laws of Moses will not be broken, why are you so angry at me because I healed a man on the Sabbath day? You need to judge not according to outward appearance, but you need to judge righteous judgment" (John 7:16-24).

Ah yes, here we see that judging between right and wrong, judging the actions and works, and deeds, and life practices, of people, is not necessarily wrong to do at all! Jesus here did not say they were never to judge between matters, but He did say that people were to judge with righteousness, judge in the correct way with the results then being that which would be favorable in the sight of God, where God would agree with the judgment decided upon. In this case the Jews were so off track, they were so wrong in their judgment of the law of God and how to apply it, that they were taking something small and trivial in comparison, saying it should be done even

on the Sabbath, but they could not see or understand that to heal a person from sickness or a demon on the Sabbath, was a much greater work, and so much more pleasing to God to see someone do on the Sabbath day, than circumcising a baby.

There were others there who had their "pet thoughts" about this fellow Jesus, knowing that some Jews sought to kill Him. They didn't believe Jesus either, but came at Him from a different angle. They spoke up and said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And look, here He is, as bold as brass, speaking openly, and they do nothing to him! Ah, maybe the authorities really do know and think that this is the Christ? Yet, we know this man and where he comes from; we know his brothers and sisters and his home town. He's just a man only. The Christ, when he comes, no one will know where he comes from."

In response to this Jesus said, "You think you know me and know where I come from, but I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and you just do not know Him. I know Him, for I came from where He is and He sent me."

The Jews were now really mad at Jesus, and thought to send for the temple guards to arrest Him, but it was not Jesus' time yet for all that, it would come but it was not to happen yet, so no one laid any hands on Him.

There were many Jews there who did believe in Him, for they said, "When the Christ appears as it is written he will, shall he do more miracles than what this man has done?"

The Pharisees and chief priests were not too far away during all this, as usual, and they soon heard the crowd muttering against Him, and thought it would be a good time to have officers sent and to arrest this Jesus. He knew this was in their mind and declared, "I shall be with you a little longer, and then I will go to Him who sent me. You will seek me, but you will not find me. And where I shall be you cannot come."

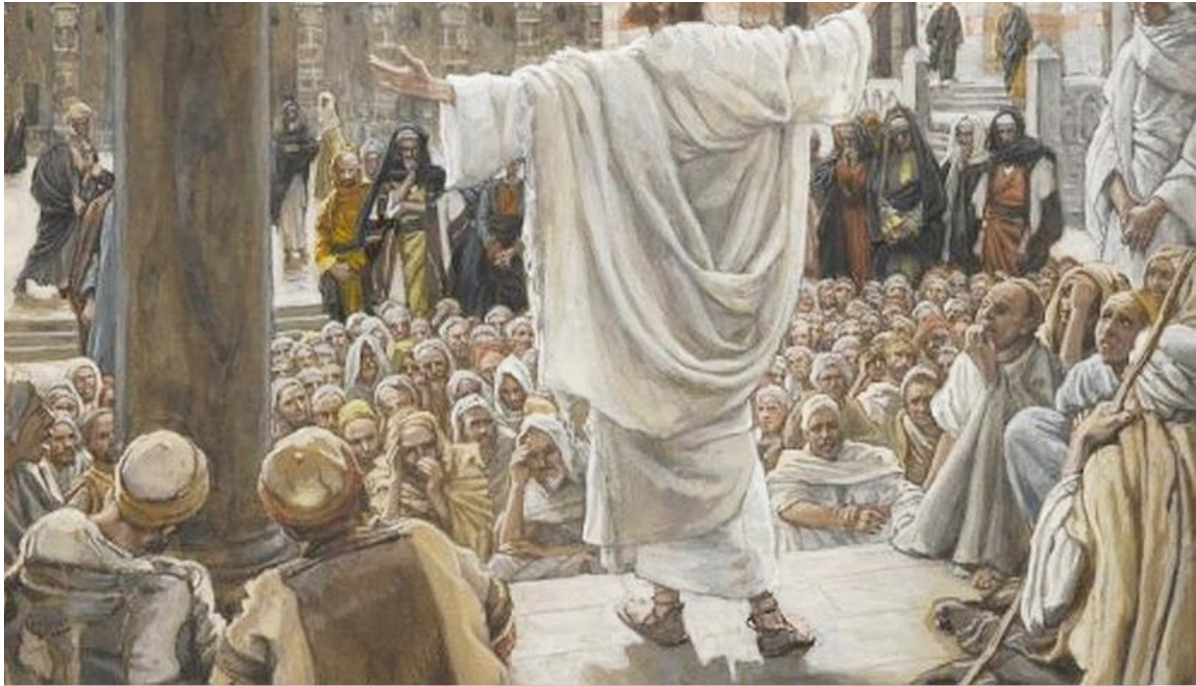
The Jews were scratching their heads saying to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we shall not be able to find him? Does he intend to go to our fellow Israelites who are dispersed in the various countries of the Roman Empire, and maybe teach also the Greeks? What on earth does he mean by saying, 'You will seek me and you will not find me,' and, 'Where I shall be you cannot come'?" (John 7:25-36).

All, or most of the people anyway, were left in confused bewilderment. It was not yet time for Jesus to be arrested and put to death, so the people at large and the Pharisees and chief priests walked away from Him and went about doing other things in the Temple area.

The rest of the feast passed and now it was getting close to the last day of this seven day feast.

The Last Great Day Of The Feast Of Tabernacles

It is written in John 7:37-39: "On the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.' He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' But He spoke this about the Spirit."



**And on the last day of the great feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying,
"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37).**

Many among today's church organizations that do observe the Feast of Tabernacles (and there are indeed many around the world) have taught or still do teach, that this last, great day, is NOT the 7th day of the feast of Tabernacles, but the 8th day that follows the feast of Tabernacles. And many have called this last Sabbath day (which comes after the feast of Tabernacles - see Lev.23) "The Last Great Day" thinking that it was on this 8th day that Jesus stood up and proclaimed the words we find in John 7:37, 38.

This is not what Jewish recorded history tells us. It was not on this 8th day that Jesus uttered these words but it was on the LAST DAY of the feast of Tabernacles - the SEVENTH day of the feast, or the last day of this feast, which was called in Jewish traditional usage, "the great day of the feast."

The Jewish Christian scholar Albert Edersheim in his well known book "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah" chapter 7, pages 156-160, gives us the true meaning and symbolism that took place in and around the Temple on this 7th and last day of the feast of Tabernacles.

It was 'the last, the great day of the Feast,' and Jesus was once more in the Temple. We can scarcely doubt that it was the concluding day of the Feast, and NOT, as most modern writers suppose, its OCTAVE, which in Rabbinic language, was regarded as 'a festival by itself.' But such solemn interest attaches itself to the Feast, and this occurrence on its last day, that we must try to realize the scene....

Not only did all the priestly families minister during that week, but it has been calculated that not fewer than 446 Priests, with, of course, a corresponding number of Levites, were required for its sacrificial worship. In general the services were the same every day, EXCEPT that the number of bullocks offered decreased daily from thirteen on the first, to seven on the seventh day....

But 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' was marked by special observances. Let us suppose ourselves in the number of worshippers, who on 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' are leaving their 'booths' at daybreak to take part in the service. The pilgrims are

all in festive array....the festive multitude would divide into three bands. some would remain in the Temple to attend the preparation of the Morning sacrifice. Another band would go in procession 'below Jerusalem' to a place called Moza, the 'Kolonia' of the Jerusalem Talmud....

At Moza they cut down willow-branches, with which, amidst the blasts of the Priests' trumpets, they adorned the altar, forming a leafy canopy above it. Yet a third company were taking part in a still more interesting service. To the sound of music a PRECESSION started from the Temple. It followed a Priest who bore a golden pitcher, capable of holding a LOG (rather more than two pints). Onward it passed, probably through Ophel....to the very verge of Siloam, down the edge of the Tyropoeon Valley, where it merges into that of the Kedron....

Here was the so-called 'Fountain-Gate,' and still within the City-wall 'the Pool of Siloam,' the overflow of which fed the lower pool....The Pool of Siloam was fed by the LIVING spring farther up in the narrowest part of the Kidron Valley....

When the Temple-procession had reached the Pool of Siloam, the Priest filled his golden pitcher from its waters (except on the Sabbath, and on the first day of the Feast.



Gathering water from the Pool of Siloam during the Feast of Tabernacles

On these occasions it had been provided the day before). Then they went back to the Temple, so timing it, that they should arrive just as they were laying the pieces of the sacrifice on the great Altar of Burnt-offering, towards the close of the ordinary Morning sacrifice service. A threefold blast of the Priests' trumpet welcomed the arrival of the Priest, as he entered through the 'Water-gate' (one of the gates that opened from 'the terrace' on the south side of the Temple), which obtained its name from this ceremony, and passed straight into the Court of the Priests. Here he was joined by another Priest, who carried the wine for the drink-offering. The two Priests ascended 'the rise' of the altar, and turned to the left.

There were two silver funnels here, with narrow openings, leading down to the base of the altar. Into that at the east, which was somewhat wider, the wine was poured, and, at the same time, the water into the western and narrower opening, the people shouted to the Priest to raise his hand, so as to make sure that he poured the water into the funnel. For, although it was held that the WATER-POURING was an ordinance instituted by Moses, 'a Halakhah of Moses from Sinai,' this was another of the points disputed by the Sadducees....

Immediately after 'the pouring of water,' the great 'hallel,' consisting of Psalms 113 to 118 (inclusive) was chanted antiphonally, or rather, with responses, to the accompaniment of the flute....

The festive morning-service was followed by the offering of the special sacrifice of the day, with their drink-offerings, and by the Psalm of the day, which on the 'last, Great Day of the Feast,' was Psalm 82 from verse 5....

As the people left the Temple, they saluted the altar with words of thanks, and on the last day of the Feast they shook off the leaves on the willow-branches round the altar, and beat their palm-branches to pieces. On the same AFTERNOON the 'booths' were DISMANTLED, and the Feast ended. We can have little difficulty in determining at what

part of the service of 'the last, the Great Day of the Feast,' Jesus stood and cried, 'If any one thirst, let Him come unto ME and drink!' It must have been with special reference to the ceremony of the OUTPOURING OF THE WATER, which, as we have seen, was considered the CENTRAL PART of the service.

Moreover, all would UNDERSTAND that His words must refer to the HOLY SPIRIT, since the rite was UNIVERSALLY regarded as SYMBOLICAL of his outpouring. The forth-pouring of the water was immediately followed by the chanting of the HALLE. But AFTER that there must have been a SHORT PAUSE to PREPARE for the festive sacrifice (the Musaph).

It was THEN, immediately after the symbolic rite of the water-poring, immediately after the people had responded by repeating those lines from Psalm 118 - given thanks, and prayed that Jehovah would send salvation and prosperity, and had shaken their Lulabh towards the altar, thus praising 'with heart, and mouth, and hands,' and THEN SILENCE had fallen upon them - that there rose, so loud as to be heard throughout the Temple, the VOICE of Jesus. He interrupted NOT the services, for they had for the MOMENT CEASED. He INTERPRETED, and He FULFILLED them.

But yesterday they had been divided about Him, and the authorities had given directions to take Him; today He is not only in the temple, but, at the close of the most solemn rites of the Feast, asserting, within the hearing of all, His claim to be regarded as the fulfilment of all, and the true Messiah....

So then, it was nothing new, only the happy fulfilment of the old, when He thus 'spake of the Holy Spirit, which they who believed on Him should receive'...." (capitals are mine for emphasis).

Yes, Jesus took the water ceremony on that last great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and gave the people its true symbolic meaning. It was all to do with HIM and the Holy Spirit that would be given, poured out upon and into, to flow out of, all those who would believe in Him.⁹

John writes that the Holy Spirit was not yet given at that time because Jesus was not yet glorified. We need to remember that John in saying that, was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a new and special way, people having the Holy Spirit united with their spirit to beget them as Jesus in the flesh was begotten of the Father.

Before that time the people of God had the Holy Spirit "with" them but not "in" them as it would be when given and poured out upon people AFTER Jesus was glorified in

⁹ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Bible, by and of itself, gives insufficient evidence to indicate whether Jesus gave His message about rivers of living water flowing out of those who believe in Him during the day part of the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles or the evening part of the Eighth Day (commonly referred to as the Last Great Day). After much debate this remains the current position of my church group, the United Church of God.

I would, though, agree with Keith's support of Albert Edersheim's view that Jesus would have given this during the morning service of the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The amount of detail the Jews have preserved about this festival service indicates that it is likely to be historically accurate.

It should also be noted that Jesus said that out of the believer would flow the Holy Spirit (living water). This is another supporting proof for the belief that God is reproducing Himself through mankind as God's spirit will, at a future time, flow from the believer.

His resurrection glory, and on the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2), which we shall come to later in our Bible Story.

People Confused About Jesus

After the service of that last great day of the Feast, and people had heard and seen Jesus speaking and teaching during the Feast and now hearing Him say He was the way to living waters of the Spirit, some shouted out, "Oh, indeed, look at what this man has done and taught, He must be THE prophet." Others cried out in response, "Yes, he has proved himself to be the promised Messiah."

But still others lifted up their voices and said, But how can he be the Messiah. Will the Messiah come from the Galilee area as this man comes from? The Scriptures teach clearly that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the town where King David was born."

The people who declared this, were of course correct in understanding the Scriptures but they just did not know Jesus in His birth had indeed fulfilled them. They did not know what you have read about in the early chapters of this New Testament Bible Story.

So the crowd was divided and confused in their opinions about Christ. And some still wanted Him arrested, but there was no one who dared touch Him. The Temple guards who had been sent to arrest Him returned to the leading Priests and Pharisees.

"Why have you not arrested and brought him in?" they demanded to know from them.

"Have you also been led astray?" the Pharisees mocked with an evil smirch of a smile. "Can you find a single Pharisee or any one among the rulers of the people, who believe in him? Many of these silly ignorant people do, but what do they know about spiritual matters and who is from God? A curse on them anyway!"

Well, there was one among those Pharisees and rulers, who had met with Jesus secretly a while back, as we saw in an earlier chapter. You remember? He was Nicodemus. He had kept it a secret that he felt this Jesus fellow was from God and had God with Him. Now he spoke up in Jesus' defense, well somewhat in His defence, "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.

They cynically and quickly replied, "Hu, are you from Galilee too? Are you wanting to stick-up for this fellow who works by the prince of the demons? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself - no prophet from God has ever come from Galilee!"¹⁰

Nicodemus was correct, the law of the Jews prohibited any one from being condemned without a legal hearing, but those leaders by this time were so filled with

¹⁰ **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Some find this phrase about no prophet coming from Galilee confusing given a number of them did come from this area. In some early Aramaic manuscripts it states that "THE prophet does not come from Galilee." This seems to allude to the prophecy about THE prophet like Moses in Deuteronomy 18-15-18.

hate for Jesus they were willing to turn a blind eye to any of their laws of proper justice. They were now filled with one thing in their hearts and minds, how they could have Jesus killed. Nicodemus, was out numbered by far, and was silenced by their mocking words in reply to his statement.

Everyone had enough of the whole scene and confused opinions about this man called Jesus Christ. They dispersed and all went to their respective homes for the evening and the night (John 7:37-53).

The Eighth Day - The Last Great Feast

Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives, in prayer and meditation. He knew there was much to happen the next day. He was back at the Temple very early after spending the night in spiritual refreshment and physical rest. He was back in the Temple to teach because it was the EIGHTH day, the day AFTER the Feast of Tabernacles. Many have missed this very important understanding because of their wrong understanding of John 7:37 and the day on which that took place.

We are now at the NEXT DAY AFTER the seven day Feast of Tabernacles. It is called the "eighth" day in the book of Leviticus, chapter 23. It was an ANNUAL SABBATH day. It was in reality the LAST FEAST of a total of SEVEN Feasts of the Lord as outlined in Leviticus 23.

As Alfred Edersheim has mentioned above, it was regarded as a SEPARATE FEAST to the Lord. It was NOT a part of the Feast of Tabernacles. As we have seen from Edersheim, the "booths" for the Feast of Tabernacles were dismantled on the AFTERNOON of the 7th day of the Feast of Tabernacles. On the OCTAVE DAY, the 8th day, a Sabbath day, there were different SPECIAL sacrifices offered as prescribed in the law of Moses, besides the regular daily sacrifices.

Jesus was back in the Temple to teach on this LAST GREAT FEAST DAY! As He was teaching the crowd that had gathered about Him, the teachers of the religious law and Pharisees brought a woman they had literally caught in the act of adultery (sleeping with another man other than her husband). They put her in front of the crowd that was listening to Jesus.

"Teacher," they said to Him, "this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her to death for such a sin and violation of God's law. What do you say about the matter?"

They were once more trying to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him, and hence make Him look foolish and inept on the matter of religious law, in front of the general populace of the people gathered around Him. Jesus said not a word. He stooped down and wrote in the dust with His finger. The religious leaders still demanded an answer from Him. He stood up and said to them, "All right, stone her, but let those who have never sinned throw the first stone at her!" He then stooped down again and wrote in the dust more words. When the accusers heard this and saw what Jesus had written, they started to slip silently away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left of the religious teachers, and the woman. Jesus then stood up once more and said to her, "Where are your accusers? Wasn't there a group of them here? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she answered.

"Very well, then neither do I condemn you. Go your way, but remember, sin no more" Jesus told her, and she departed with thanksgiving in her heart for God's mercy.



Jesus writes in the dirt after the Pharisees bring to Him a woman caught in adultery.

One thing we see immediately from this account. To commit the physical act of adultery takes TWO people, a MAN as well as a woman. These religious leaders said they caught the woman in the very act of adultery. They brought the woman to Jesus, but they did not bring the man. We must ask, why did they not? Even if we assume the man was too powerful and strong and broke away from them and ran for his life, Jesus did not ask where the man was. He did not fall into the trap of getting into all that question.

He knew their hearts and what their mind was trying to accomplish by bringing the woman before Him. It was not for any kind of mercy, if the woman was repentant, but just to see what Jesus would do about the letter of the law of Moses. As well as to try and have Him break the law of the Romans who, though allowing just about all freedom to the Jews to practice and teach their religion, DID NOT allow the Jews to put anyone to death without authority from the Roman Government via its representative in Palestine.

The words of Jesus that anyone among them who had never sinned should throw the first stone, and whatever words He wrote in the dust, it got to the heart of each of those religious teachers, and they clearly knew they had sinned, and did not want to go any further with the matter. It was a bad enough embarrassment to each of them as it was, without having Jesus do any more public declaring of "their sins" that no doubt also carried the death penalty with them under the letter of the law of Moses.

Although a number of the laws of Moses carried the death penalty if violated, that did not mean the death penalty was automatically inflicted upon people, without the matter being righteously judged by the court and judges of the land of Israel. Mercy could be allocated to the offender if deep repentance could be shown by the guilty party. God has always been a God of mercy when mercy was deserved. The classic and outstanding example of that under the Old Testament was God's mercy upon the great King David. He also was guilty of adultery and more. When it was brought to his attention he repented DEEPLY, Psalm 51 is attributed to David as his

repentance poem and prayer to God for MERCY. He was punished (by losing his son in death when sickness befell him, which was covered in the Bible Story of the Old Testament) but God did have mercy upon him by not demanding the death penalty be applied to him.

Jesus was also having mercy upon the woman caught in the act of adultery. But we also need to notice Jesus told her to "go, but sin no more." Mercy is not a license to sin at one's pleasure (John 7:53 - 8:1-11).

Jesus' Straight Talk To The Pharisees

After the woman left Jesus turned to the people and said, "I am the LIGHT of the world. If you follow me, you will not stumble through the darkness, because you will have the LIGHT that leads to LIFE."

Some of the Pharisees still there who were not part of the departing group, said, "You are making outrageous and false claims about yourself!"

Jesus answered them, "No, these claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I KNOW where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know this about me. You judge me from all your human limitations, but I am not judging anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every way because I am not alone - I have with me the Father who sent me. Even in your own law you can read that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as true and factual. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other witness."

"Who and where is your Father," they asked.

"Since you do not know who I am, you also do not know who my Father is," Jesus replied, "and if you knew me, you would know my Father too."

John the apostles tells us that Jesus made these statements in the part of the Temple called the Treasury. And He was not arrested because it was not yet the time for that event to happen.

Later that day Jesus said to them again, "I am going away. You will search for me but will not find me, and you will die in your sins. You cannot come where I am going."

The Jewish leaders had baffled and perplexed looks on their faces, and some among them said, "Is he planning to commit suicide? What does he mean, 'You cannot come where I am going'?"

Jesus continued, "You are from below, this world; I am from above. You are of this world, I am not. That is why I said you would die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am who I say I am, you will die in your sins."

"Tell us who you are," they demanded.

Jesus replied to them, "I am the ONE who I have always claimed to be. I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but I will not, for I say only what I hear from the one who sent me, and He is very true."

They still did not understand that He was talking to them about His Father in heaven. Many times Jesus had made it pretty clear to those religious leaders that His Father was the ONE God who was in heaven, and that He came from Him and was sent by Him, but no matter how He put it to them, it was like water running off a duck's back, they just didn't get it.

Once more Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realize that I am He and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak what the Father has taught me. And the one who sent me is with me - He has not deserted me. For I always do those things that are pleasing to Him."

Jesus was referring to His being lifted up on the cross when He said those words about "When you have lifted up the Son of man" - but they also did not understand what He was meaning about that either.

With all that Jesus had spoken during the Feast of Tabernacles and now what He had so far spoken on this Last Great Feast Day, John records in his Gospel that "many who heard Him say these things believed in Him" (John 8:21-30).

CHAPTER 23

CONTINUATION OF THE LAST GREAT FEAST DAY

True Sons Of Abraham

To those Jews who now believed in Jesus He said, "If you continue and endure in following my word, then you will truly be my disciples, and the truth you shall know, and what is more the truth will make you FREE!"

Many other Jews were standing and listening to Him, and when they hear these words about being "free" they answered with some disgust in their voices, "We are Abraham's offspring, and were never in bondage to any man: why then do you say, 'You shall be made free'?"

Jesus answered them saying, "It is the truth I'm saying unto you. Whoever practices a life of sin, just flowing along with it, is the slave and servant of sin. And the servant does not abide in his master's house forever, but the Son of the master does abide there forever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Jesus was talking about Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. With faith in His death, shed blood on the cross, and His risen immortal life, we can have freedom from being a slave to sin. The Jews were once more not getting it, and were horrified to think He was telling them that they were slaves. They had a large amount of self-righteous "religious" canopy over them as a people who had been chosen by God as "His special favored people" of all the peoples on the earth. Mentally, they never thought they were in bondage to anyone or anything.

Jesus continued: "I know that you are Abraham's offspring; but I also know many of you seek to KILL me, because you cannot understand my word, it's just going in one ear and out the other ear. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and you speak what you have seen with your father."

"You are talking ridiculously, how can we have been speaking with Abraham who has been dead for centuries, as he is our father," the Jews retorted again.

"If you really were Abraham's children in attitude of mind and spiritual maturity, you would be living and doing the works of Abraham," Jesus replied to them. "But now many of you seek to kill me, a man who has told what the truth is, which I received from God. Abraham did not do what I've done. But you indeed do the deeds of your father, the one who is not Abraham."

Oh, these words from Jesus really got them as mad as a wild snorting bull ready to charge. They knew there was some question about His birth, and that Mary His mother was "with child" before she was married to Joseph, so using this "crept out knowledge" from ones who knew Mary and Joseph before they were married, they flung back these words at Jesus, "Well....we are not born from fornication (sexual relations before marriage). We have ONE father, even God."

Now, they changed from claiming Abraham as their father to what they certainly felt was an answer that Jesus would not be able to penetrate - that the one Almighty God was their father.

But Jesus answered them, "If God was really in your heart and mind your Father, you would love me; for I have come from God; and I did not come of my own will and mind, but God Himself sent me. You do not understand my words, because you cannot comprehend in your mind what they are saying to you."

Then, looking straight at them with piercing eyes, Jesus spoke words that must have cut them like a sharp two-edged knife, right between the ribs and into the heart. They were the plainest words He ever spoke to any of His enemies up to this point in time, "You are of YOUR FATHER THE DEVIL, and the lusts of your father you keep doing. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from what he is, for he is a liar, and he is the father and originator of lies. And because I tell you the truth, you do not like to hear it, and so do not believe me.

"Tell me if you can, which one of you convinces me of sin? None of you, for it is the other way around, it is I that tells you the truth, and convinces you of sin. So why then do you not believe me? I will tell you. He that has a heart and mind that God loves and can communicate with, they can hear and understand God's word. But you hear not and do not understand because you are not of the same mindset as God. You are not His children!"

Many Jews had in the past openly thought, said, and taught others, that this Jesus Christ man was from the Devil, doing all He did by the power given to Him from the Devil himself. Jesus had now laid it down also openly and plainly, that He taught it was THEY not Him who was from the Devil. Once more they shouted back to Jesus and all within hearing range, their old theme about Him, "We have said well and correctly, that you are from the Samaritan sect and that you have a demon in you."

The Samaritans were a Jewish sect just to the north of Judea. In going to Galilee from Jerusalem, as Jesus and His disciples often did, they would frequently have passed through this area called Samaria (not the land area of the Old Testament Samaria, but only a small portion of land, see a Bible Atlas on the four Gospel period). The Samaritans were hated by the Jews of Judea because they had their own "temple" and "Jewish worship system" apart from and separate from, the Jews of the rest of Palestine. To say that you were a Samaritan and had a demon possessing you, was about the lowest, and dirtiest language of the time, that a Jew could rail at anyone.

Jesus was not about to back down this time around, "I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and you, by your words and mental attitude, dishonor me. I do not seek my own glory. There is ONE that seeks and judges, He knows my heart and your hearts. I'm telling you the truth, if any person will obey my saying, live by what I teach, he shall not die."

"Oh, now we know for sure, " the Jews replied, "now we know you have a demon in you. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you stand here and tell us that if anyone keeps your words, they shall not taste of death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? Are you greater than the prophets, who are dead also? Who do you think you are? What are you saying about yourself?"

Jesus was not saying to them that people who lived by His words would never taste of physical death, but somehow keep right on living. He was saying (as we have seen before in other chapters) that people who follow Him, would have eternal life

within them, and would one day inherit the Kingdom of God. They would not die forever, but be raised to immortal life in a resurrection. In some translations from the Greek, it is rendered this way, as Jesus actually saying, "If a man keep my sayings he shall not die forever."

But, the Jews took it to mean Jesus was teaching that those who followed Him would never die in this physical life. They knew that great men of God like Abraham, was not still alive. They knew such men did not have an immortal soul that kept on thinking, and talking, and walking around, in some "other world" - be it heaven or wherever. So they naturally wanted to know who He thought He was that could have followers who would live and never die.

Jesus was not about to lose the opportunity to now be pretty plain and frank about who He was and that He had lived in the ages past.

"If I honor myself, my honor is then nothing, just ones man's talk and idea. It is my Father that honors me; of whom you are claiming He is your God, and that you are His children. Yet, you do not know Him, you just think you do. But I know Him, if I should say that I did not, I would simply be a liar, and so be like all of you. But I do know Him, and I keep His word and teachings. Your father Abraham rejoiced TO SEE MY DAY, and he did SEE IT, and was overjoyed."

The Jews knew exactly what Jesus was meaning by these last words especially. They were not blinded at all to what Jesus was now telling them. He was telling them that He lived in the days of Abraham. They knew He was saying this for with amazement they replied to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, no where near that age, and you are telling us that you lived when Abraham lived and that you saw Abraham when he lived on this earth. Is not that what you are telling us?"

With truth at His side, Jesus replied to them, "It is true, very true, I'm saying to you that before Abraham was ever born, the I AM was me."

The letters "I AM" in the English translations as found in the book of Exodus. The God that talked to Moses at the burning bush, the God who told Moses to tell the people, if they asked who had sent him to them, to tell them His name was I AM. It means "Eternal, self-existent one." All religious Jews of Christ's time knew very well that the "I AM" of the Old Testament was none other than God Almighty. They did not know there were two person in the one God or Godhead, and that both had the same names, just as it sometimes is with a father and son who have the same names (but with us we usually call the son, John Junior, and the father as just John). They did not know that fact, and to them it would not have mattered anyway. All they knew for sure was that this Jesus man, was now clearly claiming to be their God, the I AM, the eternal one of Moses' time.

For anyone to claim such a title, to claim they were God, was, in Jewish eyes complete and utter blasphemy! Such blasphemy of sin was punishable by death. They knew Roman law forbade them to put anyone to death without consent from the Roman authorities, but they were so filled with outrage at what they now knew Jesus was saying about Himself, that they forgot about any Roman law and immediately picked up stones to throw at Him and to kill Him on the spot. But Jesus walked through the midst of them. It was not yet His time to be put to death (John 8:31-59).

Healing The Man Born Blind

Jesus leaves the Temple and as He is walking along He sees a blind man, and it is known by the disciples that this man was born blind. They asked Him, "Master, tell us, who was it that sinned, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Before we see how Jesus answered them, we need to note that in this question we find that there are physical sins we or others can commit, and in so doing there could very well be a physical penalty to carry with us for the rest of our lives. The disciples knew this truth and so asked their question to Jesus.

He replied, "It was not this man that sinned, nor was it his parents that sinned, but it was so ordained that he be born blind so the works of God could be manifested in him by his healing." This answer may at first seem somewhat harsh. Why would God ordain that a person be born blind and have to wait many years before God would heal him of that blindness? All I can give you for the answer to that question is to read Romans 9:14-23 in a modern translation.

Jesus continued to answer them, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the LIGHT of the world."



Jesus heals the man born blind

Jesus was relatively soon going to be arrested and finally put to death on the cross. In that sense it would be night. Then He was going to be resurrected and return to the Father in heaven. So, now He was in the world in person, and now it was day and light and time to work the works of God.

After He had spoken these words, He spat on the ground and made some clay of the spittle. He then anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said to him, "Go and wash your face in the pool of Siloam (which word means - Sent). He did as Jesus commanded and washed, and he was healed from his blindness and came among the people seeing clearly.

Why did Jesus make clay from spittle and anoint the blind man's eyes with it, and tell him to go and wash? Why not just say "the word" and heal him? Possibly the answer is that sometimes in being healed from our sicknesses and afflictions, we must do our part in doing whatever needs to be done on the physical side, a "getting in harmony with nature" some like to call it. Our body is a very intricate machine and we must keep all parts in balance and good working order to have and maintain good health. The physical laws of food, water, sleep, exercise, proper mental and emotional health, must all be kept in balance and correct function within God's physical laws, to be healthy.

Then again, Jesus making clay and anointing his eyes might just have been an example to us that God heals in different ways, at different times, with different people.

As the man went among the people now being healed, many who had known that he was born blind began to talk among themselves. "Is this not the man that we know was born blind and sat and begged?" some asked with amazement. "Yes, it is indeed him!" replied others, but then some said, "No, I do not think so, it is someone who just looks like him." But the man himself, on hearing all this, spoke up and said, "It is I, I am the man who was born blind, but now I can see like the rest of you."

"Well, this is fantastic," some shouted out, "so please tell us who performed this miracle on you?"

"A man they call Jesus. He made some clay, anointed my eyes with it, and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Shiloam and wash,' so I did, and I received sight in my eyes," replied the man with great happiness and excitement in his voice.

"Where is this man,?" they asked him.

"Well....he is....hummm, I don't know," he answered them.

Some individuals brought the man to the Pharisees. John the apostle tells us, as it is in the original Greek, "it was Sabbath when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes." Yes, it was the same day as Jesus was teaching in the Temple earlier, which was the day AFTER the seven day Feast of Tabernacles. It was the EIGHTH day (as Leviticus chapter 23 calls it). It was a Sabbath, not THE SABBATH, which is used in the Gospels to indicate the SEVENTH DAY Sabbath of the fourth commandment. The word "THE" is not in the Greek. The Greek reads, "It was Sabbath...." And the context makes it clear that it was Sabbath of the EIGHTH DAY FEAST, the LAST GREAT FEAST of God's festivals as outlined in Leviticus 23.

Some knew the Pharisees would be very interested in this man and who had healed him ON a Sabbath day. They would deem it as breaking the Sabbath, especially when going to the work of making clay. Such was their interpretations and man made rules of "not working on a Sabbath" as we saw earlier, and as we can find in written history by orthodox Jews even to this day.

Now it was the turn of the Pharisees to ask the man how he received his sight. He answered them as he did the people before who asked the same question.

Sure enough, when the Pharisees heard the man's reply as to how he was healed, some said, "The man who did this healing is not of God, because he has broken the law of Sabbath keeping." But to this some replied, "How can such a man you claim is a sinner, do such mighty miracles?" So once again there was division among them concerning Jesus.

They then turned to the man himself who had been healed and said, "Well, what do you think about this man that opened your eyes so you can now see? Do you think he is from God?"

"I think he must be a prophet from God, yes, I think he must be," the man answered them.

Now, the Pharisees, began to doubt that the man had ever been born blind in the first place. They decided they wanted to hear from his parents if such was really true. They called for the parents to be found and to coming to them, they asked, "Is this

your son, who you say was born blind? If so, then how do you suppose he can now see?"

"Yes, he certainly is our son, and yes, he was indeed born blind, this we know being his parents. But we have no clue as to the means by which his eyes were opened to be able to see. He is an adult, he can speak for himself. Ask him," responded the man's parents.

The apostle John tells us that the reply by these parents was precipitated because they feared the Pharisees and their supporters, as they had agreed among themselves to put out of the synagogue's fellowship, anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Christ. So the parents turned it back to their son to answer this question of how he was healed from blindness.

The man who could now see was called again to appear before the Jewish leaders. They confronted him with, "You should give God all the praise, for we know the man who did this to you is a great sinner."

"If he be a sinner or not a sinner, I do not know. I only know this one thing, whereas I was blind, I can now see," answered the man.

"Very well, but what did he do to you, how did he go about healing you and restoring your sight?" asked the leaders.

"I've already told you, I've answered you before on this question. Why are you asking me again the same question? Is it because you want to be his disciples?" the man replied with some sarcasm in his voice, knowing they had no such intention in being disciples of Jesus.

Did this reply ever make them upset, and with anger they told him, "We are Moses' disciples, but we bet that you are a disciple of this man Jesus. We know God spoke to Moses face to face, but as to this fellow who healed you from blindness, we don't know where he is from or who has sent him."

With a gasp of amazement the man answered, "Well, this is surely quite something, what a marvel, you do not know even from where he comes, yet he opened my eyes. We know it is a fact that God does not hear gross sinners, and we also know that if someone be a worshipper of God in sincerity and truth, and obeys Him, then God will hear that person. Then, it is also a fact that since the world began, no one has ever heard of anyone opening the eyes of a person born blind. If this man Jesus is not from God, he could not do anything like this miracle."

Getting even hotter under the collar, the leaders screamed back, "You were born in sins, you are from the gutter of society, and are you trying to teach us?" Then they cast him out and away from their company.

It was reported to Jesus that the man had been cast out by the Jewish leaders, and He went searching for him. Finding him Jesus said, "Do you believe on the Son of God?"

"Who is He, Lord, that I might believe?" the man asked.

"You have seen Him, and He is the person now talking to you," Jesus answered.

"Oh yes, Lord, I do believe," the man replied with praise in his voice, and he fell down and worshipped Him.

Jesus said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and they which see might be made blind."

Some of the Pharisees standing nearby and hearing these words, said, "Are we blind also?" They knew what Jesus was meaning, and they knew the truth of what had been going on this whole day. They knew the truth as to what Jesus was saying and the miracles He was performing, that it was all from God. Deep in their hearts they knew the truth.

Jesus knew they knew and so responded to their question with these words, "If you were blind, you should have no sin; but now you admit, 'We see'; therefore your sin remains."

When you are ignorantly blind there can be a good reason to say "we have no sin" for you do not know or understand that you have sin, but when you know better, and say "Are we also blind?" meaning that you are not blind to the truth, then you are in a position to repent of sin. These Pharisees knew the truth, but would not repent, hence their sins still remained on the books so to speak, and could not be blotted out by mercy through believing in Christ.

The giving of sight to the man born blind was done on a Sabbath day, the one after the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the eighth day, the last great Feast Day of the religious festivals outlined in Leviticus 23. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the 1,000 years reign of Christ on the earth, the millennium as it is commonly called today (see Zechariah 14).

The Last Great Feast Day pictures the second judgment resurrection, when millions who were spiritually blinded in their physical life, who died in that blindness, will be raised to physical life once more, and will be given the book of life and a chance to have that spiritual blindness removed. They will be given an opportunity to be healed from sin, and to accept Jesus as Savior, as the Son of God, and to worship Him, just as the man born blind was given his physical sight and an opportunity to know who the Son of God was, and to worship Him.

It was and is a wonderful example of what is to happen in the future when this Last Great Feast Day becomes a reality, as the plan of God for the salvation of all who have ever lived, is unfolded for all to see. For most they will accept sight, but for some, their sins will remain, and sadly they may reject knowing the very Son of God (John 9:1- 41).

More Last Feast Day Truth

Jesus taught more fitting truths on this Sabbath Feast Day, saying:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he that enters not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that enters in through the door is the shepherd of the sheep. And to him the gatekeeper opens; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when he leads out his own sheep he goes before them leading the way,

and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but will actually flee from him; for they do not know the voice of strangers."



The Good Shepherd

Again, most of the people did not understand what Jesus was talking about. They could not gather that He was talking about Himself being THE shepherd and only through Him could you enter the Kingdom of God. Salvation could not be obtained by being a "good"whatever....Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Communist, native in some tribe in dark Africa or anything else, WITHOUT Christ as your Lord and Savior. Jesus is the ONLY door, the only shepherd of the sheep (Acts 4:12). Those that are His sheep will know Him and know His voice. This is why there needs to be a day, an age, when millions who have never known the only shepherd and door to the Kingdom, will be raised to life again, so they can have blindness removed and the book of life opened to them (Rev.20: 11-15).

Jesus continued and explained, "Truly, it is very true, that I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; by me if any person enters in, they shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture."

Yes, all other forms of religion, or self-help, or "new age" philosophy or whatever else is out there to teach people they can find eternal life through belief in them, are simply thieves and robbers. They just don't cut it as we might say.

Jesus went on talking about the thief and Himself as the good shepherd:

"The thief comes, but only to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that people might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is only hired as a stand in for the shepherd, is not the shepherd, and the sheep do not belong to him. When he sees the wolf coming, he doesn't care about the sheep, and runs off. The wolf then breaks in, catches some, and scatters the rest of the sheep. The hired hand flees, because he is only a hired hand, and doesn't really have personal

concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and they know me.

As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And there are other sheep I have which are not of this fold of Judah: them I must also bring into the my sheep-fold, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be ONE fold, and ONE shepherd. Therefore my Father loves me, because I will lay down my life, that I might take it up again. No man takes it from me, but I willingly will lay it down. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This commandment I have received from my Father."

Jesus' life was "in his own hands" we would say. It was the Father's wish, directive, that He lay it down for the sheep, and in so doing He had the knowledge that it would be taken up again. His life would be resurrected from the dead. Jesus was a willing sacrifice for the sheep, and so the Father loved Him greatly. Also the sheep-fold of Jesus was more than just the people of Judea, even more than all the people of Israel. It would include people from all nations of the world eventually, as we shall see when we come to the Bible Story in the book of Acts. But being made up of many from all nations it would still be ONE sheep-fold, belonging to Christ, and He would still be the only shepherd of that fold, the only door for the sheep to enter to obtain eternal life.

After Jesus ended this teaching, there was once more disagreement and division among the Jews about Him for all that He taught. Some again said He had a demon, that He was mad, and not to listen to Him. Others said, "No, these are not the words of him that has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (John 10:1-21).

FROM THE EDITOR (Roger Waite): We have now come down to the last 6 months of Jesus' life now that we have finished looking at the events of his last Feast of Tabernacles and Eighth Day on earth.

In volume 2 Keith Hunt will continue the story of Jesus Christ's last 6 months of His ministry that culminates in His death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

We hope that you have enjoyed and learned a great deal from volume 1 and hope that you will join us in reading volume 2 of this New Testament Bible Story.