

# *The Synoptic Gospels*

## *Volume I*

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## **Outline of the Synoptic Gospels**

### **Page Numbers Are Incorrect**

<b>I. The End of the Exile and the Intertestamentary Period</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. The Birth of John the Baptist and the Announcement of Christ's Birth—Lk. 1: 5-80; Matt. 1: 18-25</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>III. The Birth of Christ; His Circumcision and Presentation in the Temple—Lk. 2: 1-38</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>IV. The Visit of the Magi and Satan's Attempt to Destroy the Christ—Matt. 2: 1-23; Luke 2: 39</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>V. Jesus' Childhood—Luke 2: 40-52</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>VI. The Ministry of John the Baptist—Matt. 3: 1-12; Mk. 1: 1-8; Lk. 3: 1-20</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>VII. The Year of Inauguration</b>	<b>15</b>
A. The Baptism of Jesus—Matt. 3: 13-17; Lk. 3: 21-22; Mk. 1: 9-11	15
B. The Temptation of Jesus—Matt. 4: 1-11; Lk. 4: 1-13; Mk. 1: 12-13	17
1. The First Temptation	17
2. The Second Temptation	18
3. The Third Temptation	19
C. Jesus' Early Ministry according to John—Jn. 1: 19-4: 42	20
<b>VIII. The Year of Popularity—The Early Galilean Ministry (Summer of AD 27 to October AD 29)</b>	<b>22</b>
A. The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry—Matt. 4: 12-17; Mk. 1: 14-15; Lk. 4: 14-15; Jn. 4: 43-54	22
B. The Calling of the First Disciples—Matt. 4: 18-22; Mk. 1: 16-20; Lk. 5: 1-11(?)	22
C. Miracles in Capernaum: The Healing of the Demoniac in the Synagogue, Peter's Mother-in-Law, and Other Sick and Demon-Possessed—Matt. 4: 23-25; 8: 14-17; Mk. 1: 21-39; Lk. 4: 31-44	26
1. Healing the Demoniac	26
2. Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law	28
3. Healing the masses	29
4. Rest followed by Continued Ministry in Other Cities in Galilee	29
(Excursus: Temporal Connections in the Synoptic Gospels)	29
D. The Healing of the Leper—Matt. 8: 2-4; Mk. 1: 40-45; Lk. 5: 12-16	30
E. The Healing of the Paralytic—Matt. 9: 2-8; Mk. 2: 1-12; Lk. 5: 17-26	33
F. The Calling of Matthew—Matt. 9: 9; Mk. 2: 14; Lk. 5: 27-28	36
G. Early Sabbath Controversies—Matt. 12: 1-21; Mk. 2: 23-3: 6; Lk. 6: 1-11	38
1. Disciples in the Grainfields—Matt. 12: 1-8; Mk. 2: 23-28; Lk. 6: 1-5	38
2. Man with the Withered Hand—Matt. 12: 9-13; Mk. 3: 1-5; Lk. 6: 6-10	40

3. The plot to kill Jesus followed by His withdrawal —Matt. 12: 14-21; Mk. 3: 6-12; Lk. 6: 11	41
H. The Calling of the Twelve Disciples—Mk. 3: 13-19; Lk. 6: 12-16	41
I. The First Great Discourse in Matthew: The Sermon on the Mount —Matt. 5-7; Lk. 6: 17-49	42
1. The Structure of the Sermon	42
2. The Purpose of the Sermon	43
3. The Error of Literalism in Interpreting the Sermon	46
4. Jesus as the New Law-Giver	46
5. Citizens of the Kingdom—their Character	48
a. The Beatitudes in Matthew	48
b. The Beatitudes in Luke	55
6. Citizens of the Kingdom—Their Influence in the World: Salt and Light	56
a. Salt	56
b. Light	60
7. Citizens of the Kingdom—Their Righteousness: The Christian's Relationship to the Law	62
8. The Righteousness of the Kingdom in Personal Relationships—5: 21-48	65
a. Murder and Anger—vv. 21-26	66
b. Adultery—vv. 27-32	66
(1) Lust	66
(2) Unlawful Divorce	67
c. Vows—vv. 33-37	69
d. Retaliation versus Loving our Enemies—vv. 38-48	70
9. The Righteousness of the Kingdom in Giving and Prayer—6: 1-15	72
a. Sincerity in Giving	72
b. Sincerity in Prayer	74
c. A Guide for Prayer—the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6: 9-13)	75
d. Sincerity in Fasting—vv. 16-18	79
10. Hearts for the Kingdom—the Cure for Confusion and Anxiety (Matt. 6: 19-34)	80
a. The Confusion of Treasures	80
b. The Confusion of Masters	82
c. The Cure for Anxiety	82
11. Judging Others—Matt. 7: 1-6	84
12. Persistent Prayer—Matt. 7: 7-12; Lk. 11: 5-13	86
13. The "Golden Rule"—Matt. 7: 12	87
14. The Conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount—7: 13-27	87
J. The Healing of the Centurion's Servant—Matt. 8: 5-13; Lk. 7: 1-10	90
K. Jesus Raises the Dead Son of the Widow of Nain—Lk. 7: 11-17	91
L. The Doubts of John the Baptist; Jesus' Mild Rebuke and Generous Tribute—Matt. 11: 2-19; Lk. 7: 18-35	91

<i>M. Unrepentant Cities—Matt. 11: 20-24; Lk. 10: 12-16</i>	94
<i>N. The Sovereign Self-Revelation of God the Father and God the Son—Matt. 11: 25-30; Lk. 10: 21-24</i>	95
<i>O. Jesus Anointed by a Prostitute—Lk. 7: 36-50</i>	97
<i>P. Ministering Women—Lk. 8: 1-3</i>	99
<i>Q. The Charge of Madness—Mk. 3: 20-21</i>	99
<i>R. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—Matt. 12: 22-37 Mk. 3: 22-30; Lk. 11: 14-28</i>	99
<i>S. The Multitudes Seek for a Sign—Matt. 12: 38-45; Lk. 11: 29-32</i>	103
<i>T. Jesus' Mother and Brothers—Matt. 12: 46-50; Mk. 3: 31-35; Lk. 8: 19-21</i>	105
<i>U. The Third Great Discourse in Matthew: Parables of the Kingdom— Matt. 13: 1-52; Mk. 4: 1-34; Lk. 8: 4-18</i>	106
<i>1. The Purpose of the Parables—Matt. 13: 11-17; Mk. 4: 10-12 Lk. 8: 8-10</i>	106
<i>2. The Parable of the Sower—Matt. 13: 3-9; 18-23; Mk. 4: 3-9, 13-20 Lk. 8: 4-15</i>	107
<i>3. The Parable of the Tares among the Wheat—Matt. 13: 24-30, 36-43</i>	109
<i>(Excursus on the Interpretation of Parables)</i>	110
<i>4. The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven—Matt. 13: 31-33 Mk. 4: 30-32; Lk. 13: 18-20</i>	111
<i>5. Parables as the Fulfillment of Prophecy—Matt. 13: 34-35</i>	112
<i>6. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price—Matt. 13: 44-46</i>	112
<i>7. The Parable of the Dragnet—Matt. 13: 47-50</i>	113
<i>8. Conclusion to the Parables in Matthew—Matt. 13: 51-52</i>	113
<i>9. Additional Parables found in Mark and Luke Discourse on Parables —Mk. 4: 21-29</i>	114
<i>V. The Cost of Discipleship; the Calming of the Sea —Matt. 8: 18-27 Mk. 4: 35-41; Lk. 8: 22-25; 9: 57-62</i>	115
<i>1. The Cost of Discipleship</i>	115
<i>2. The Calming of the Sea</i>	118
<i>W. Healing of the Gerasene (Gadarene) Demoniac(s)—Matt. 8: 28-34 Mk. 5: 1-21; Lk. 8: 26-39</i>	119
<i>X. Jesus Returns to Capernaum—Matt. 9: 1; Mk. 5: 21; Lk. 8: 40</i>	123
<i>Y. Matthew's Dinner—Matt. 9: 10-17; Mk. 2: 15-22; Lk. 5: 29-39</i>	123
<i>1. Eating with Tax-collectors and Sinners</i>	123
<i>2. The Question of Jesus' Authority: Fasting or Feasting (?); the Lesson of Cloth and Wineskins</i>	124
<i>a. Fasting or Feasting (?)</i>	125
<i>b. The Lesson of Cloth and Wineskins</i>	127
<i>Z. The Healing of Jairus' Daughter and the Woman with a Hemorrhage—Matt. 9: 18-26; Mk. 5: 21-43; Lk. 8: 40-56</i>	129
<i>AA. The Healing of Two Blind Men and a Demon-possessed Man—Matt. 9: 27-34</i>	132
<i>BB. Jesus Rejected in Nazareth—Matt. 13: 54-58; Lk. 4: 16-30; Mk. 6: 1-6</i>	133
<i>CC. The Second Great Discourse in Matthew: The Sending Out of the Twelve</i>	

— <i>Matt. 9: 35—11:1; Mk. 6: 6b-13; Lk. 9: 1-6</i>	135
1. <i>The Priority of the Jews—Matt. 10: 5a-6</i>	136
2. <i>The Message Preached—v. 7</i>	136
3. <i>The Ministry of Mercy—v. 8</i>	137
4. <i>Supporting the Ministry—vv. 9-10</i>	138
5. <i>Judgment upon Those Who Reject the Gospel—vv. 11-15</i>	141
6. <i>Facing Persecution—vv. 16-33</i>	143
a. <i>Persecution by the Jews</i>	143
b. <i>Persecution by political rulers</i>	144
c. <i>The Christian's response to persecution</i>	145
(1) <i>Our relationship to Christ</i>	145
(2) <i>The security of believers</i>	147
(3) <i>Our value to the Father</i>	148
7. <i>Persecution from family—vv. 34-39</i>	148
8. <i>The Meaning of Verse 23b</i>	152
 <i>IX. The Year of Opposition—The Later Galilean Ministry</i>	154
A. <i>Herod "Haunted" by John the Baptist whom he Beheaded</i>	
— <i>Matt. 14: 1-12; Mk. 6: 14-29; Lk. 9: 7-9</i>	154
B. <i>The Feeding of the Five Thousand—Matt. 14: 13-21; Mk. 6: 30-44</i>	
<i>Lk. 9: 10-17; Jn. 6: 1-14</i>	157
C. <i>Jesus Walks on the Sea—Matt. 14: 22-36; Mk. 6: 45-56; Jn. 6: 15-21</i>	160
D. <i>Jesus' Discourse on the Meaning of the Feeding of the Five Thousand</i>	
— <i>Jn. 6: 22-71</i>	164
E. <i>Jesus' Teaching Concerning the Traditions of Men—Matt. 15: 1-20</i>	
<i>Mk. 7: 1-23</i>	164
F. <i>The Syrophoenician Woman—Matt. 15: 21-28; Mk. 7: 24-30</i>	170
G. <i>The Deaf and Dumb Man and other Miracles—Matt. 15: 29-31</i>	
<i>Mk. 7: 31-37</i>	172
H. <i>The Feeding of the Four Thousand—Matt. 15: 32-39; Mk. 8: 1-10</i>	172
I. <i>The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek for a Sign—Matt. 16: 1-12</i>	
<i>Mk. 8: 11-21</i>	173
J. <i>Jesus Heals a Blind Man—Mk. 8: 22-26</i>	176
K. <i>Peter's Confession—Matt. 16: 13-20; Mk. 8: 27-30; Lk. 9: 18-21</i>	176
L. <i>Jesus Foretells His Death and Second Coming; Peter's Recession</i>	
— <i>Matt. 16: 21-28; Mk. 8: 31—9:1; Lk. 9: 22-27</i>	182
M. <i>The Transfiguration—Matt. 17: 1-13; Mk. 9: 2-13; Lk. 9: 28-36</i>	186
N. <i>The Healing of the Demoniac—Matt. 17: 14-21; Mk. 9: 14-29</i>	
<i>Lk. 9: 37-43a</i>	189
O. <i>Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection—Matt. 17: 22-23</i>	
<i>Mk. 9: 30-32; Lk. 9: 43b</i>	191
P. <i>The Miracle of the Tribute Money—Matt. 17: 24-27</i>	191
Q. <i>The Fourth Great Discourse in Matthew—Matt. 18: 1-35</i>	191
1. <i>The little child (Christ's model of a kingdom citizen)</i>	
— <i>Matt. 18: 1-6; Mk. 9: 33-37; Lk. 9: 46-48</i>	192
2. <i>Protecting His little ones from sin—Matt. 18: 5-9; Mk. 9: 42-50</i>	193

3. <i>The Father's love for His little ones—Matt. 18: 10-14</i>	196
4. <i>Pursuing the erring brother—Matt. 18: 15-20</i>	199
5. <i>The unforgiving slave—Matt. 18: 21-35</i>	209
6. <i>The intolerance of the disciples—Mk. 9: 38-41; Lk. 9: 49-50</i>	211
<b>X. <i>The Year of Opposition—The Judean and Perea Ministry</i></b>	<b>213</b>
<b>A. <i>Luke's Narrative of Jesus' Teaching as He Travels to Jerusalem</i></b>	
<i>(The "Central Section")—Lk. 9: 51—19: 44; Matt. 19: 1-2; Mk. 10: 1</i>	213
1. <i>The Misplaced Zeal of James and John—Lk. 9: 51-56</i>	214
2. <i>The Cost of Discipleship—Lk. 9: 57-62</i>	214
3. <i>The Sending Out of the Seventy Disciples—Lk. 10: 1-20</i>	214
4. <i>Pharisaism Contrasted with the Good Samaritan—Lk. 10: 25-37</i>	216
5. <i>Mary and Martha—Lk. 10: 38-42</i>	218
6. <i>Instruction about Prayer—Lk. 11: 1-13</i>	218
7. <i>The Blasphemy of the Pharisees and Their Insistence upon a Sign—Lk. 11: 14-32; Matt. 12: 22-45; Mk. 3: 22-30</i>	220
8. <i>Jesus Pronounces Woes upon the Pharisees—Lk. 11: 37-54</i>	220
9. <i>Further Instructions to His Disciples—Lk. 12: 1-12</i>	221
10. <i>The Parable of the Rich Fool—Lk. 12: 13-34</i>	221
11. <i>The Call to Readiness—Lk. 12: 35-48</i>	225
12. <i>Christ Divides—Lk. 12: 49-53</i>	228
13. <i>Interpreting the Times—Lk. 12: 54-59</i>	229
14. <i>A call to repentance—Lk. 13: 1-5</i>	229
15. <i>The Parable of the Fig Tree—Lk. 13: 6-9</i>	230
16. <i>Healing on the Sabbath Day—Lk. 13: 10-17</i>	231
17. <i>Parables of the kingdom—Lk. 13: 18-21</i>	232
18. <i>The parable of the narrow door—Lk. 13: 22-30</i>	232
19. <i>Jesus' prophecy concerning Jerusalem—Lk. 13: 31-35</i>	233
20. <i>Jesus teaches in the house of a Pharisee—Lk. 14: 1-24</i>	236
a. <i>Healing a sick man on the Sabbath—vv. 3-6</i>	237
b. <i>The parable of the wedding feast—vv. 7-11</i>	238
c. <i>Showing kindness to those in need—vv. 12-14</i>	240
d. <i>The parable of the big dinner—vv. 15-24</i>	241
21. <i>The cost of discipleship—Lk. 14: 25-35</i>	243
22. <i>Parables in response to the scribes and Pharisees who grumbled because Jesus received sinners and ate with them—Lk. 15: 1-32</i>	246
a. <i>The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin—vv. 3-10</i>	246
b. <i>The parable of the lost son and the elder brother—vv. 11-32</i>	247
23. <i>The parable of the unrighteous servant—Lk. 16: 1-13</i>	267
24. <i>Jesus' response to the scoffing of the scribes and Pharisees—Lk. 16: 14-18</i>	253
25. <i>The parable of the rich man and Lazarus—Lk. 16: 19-31</i>	255
26. <i>Further instructions to His disciples; the parable of the unworthy slave—Lk. 17: 1-10</i>	258
27. <i>The cleansing of ten lepers—Lk. 17: 11-19</i>	260
28. <i>The second coming of Christ—Lk. 17: 20-37</i>	261

<i>29. The parable of the persistent widow—Lk. 18: 1-8</i>	262
<i>30. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer—Lk. 18: 9-14</i>	264
<i>B. Jesus' Teaching on Divorce—Matt. 19: 3-12; Mk. 10: 1-12</i>	265
<i>C. Jesus Blesses the Little Children—Matt. 19: 13-15; Mk. 10: 13-16</i>	
<i>Lk. 18: 15-17</i>	269
<i>D. The Rich Young Ruler—Matt. 19: 16-26; Mk. 10: 17-27; Lk. 18: 18-27</i>	271
<i>E. Rewards for Discipleship—Matt. 19: 27-30; Mk. 10: 28-31; Lk. 18: 28-30</i>	275
<i>F. Laborers in the Vineyard—Matt. 20: 1-16</i>	276
<i>G. Jesus' Third Prediction of His Death and Resurrection—Matt. 20: 17-19</i>	
<i>Mk. 10: 32-34; Lk. 18: 31-34</i>	277
<i>H. The Ambition of James and John—Matt. 20: 20-28; Mk. 10: 35-45</i>	278
<i>I. The Healing of Two Blind Men—Matt. 20: 29-34; Mk. 10: 46-52</i>	
<i>Lk. 18: 35-43</i>	280
<i>J. The Conversion of Zaccheus—Lk. 19: 1-10</i>	280
<i>K. The Parable of the Minas—Lk. 19: 11-27</i>	282

## *The Synoptic Gospels*

### *I. The End of the Exile and the Inter-testamentary Period*

The Inter-testamentary Period is the period of time between the last prophetic book of the OT, *Malachi*, and the first advent of Jesus Christ, about 400 years. No prophetic writings had occurred during this long period of time, but the years had been anything but insignificant in the history of Israel. Following *The New Testament History* of F.F. Bruce (pp. 1-19), an attempt will be made here to fill in the gaps between the inspired history of the OT and that of the NT.

In 539 BC, Cyrus the Persian had issued a decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem which was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 587 BC. The returning Jews, about 50,000 in number, enthusiastically returned to Jerusalem about 536 BC to prosecute this order and had laid the foundation of the temple. Discouraged by political opposition (cf. *Ezra*) but mostly misled by their carnal desires and half-hearted devotion (cf. *Haggai*), the Jews had ceased building the temple. The temple lay unfinished for 15 years until the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah (520 BC). Approximately one century after the first return of the exiles, in 457 BC, Ezra the priest came to Israel and was instrumental in calling the people back to the Law—particularly the law concerning marriage to foreign wives who worshipped false gods. Nehemiah came in 444 BC and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (as only the temple had been rebuilt earlier; cf. *Nehemiah*). The prophecy of Malachi takes place at about the time of Nehemiah. He also preaches against lack of holiness in marriages by Israelites who were divorcing their older wives and marrying younger women. The people were also stealing from God by not giving him their tithes and offerings. The prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, together with the historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, prove that for all the judgment which had befallen the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah, they had learned almost nothing.

However, God had preserved a remnant of those who feared him and were zealous to keep his law. During the 400 years between Malachi and the NT era by far the majority of Jews were living in foreign countries as the “Diaspora” and had no ready access to the sacrificial system afforded by the temple in Jerusalem. Yet, it was painfully evident to many that their forefathers had been led away into exile for unfaithfulness to the covenant. The synagogues were developed to fill the need of dispersed Jews to study the Law of God and teach it to their children. As we learn from Luke 4: 16, synagogues also sprang up within the boundaries of Palestine for the same purpose.

During this same four hundred year period, the world had witnessed one empire conquering another in succession according to the predictions of Daniel the Prophet. Babylon had fallen to Medo-Persia before the OT period had ended in 539 BC. Persia had then dominated the world scene for 200 years until its fall to the Macedonian Empire and the lightening fast conquest of Alexander the Great in 331 BC after only 3 years of conflict with Persia (cf. *Daniel* 7). Upon his death in 323 BC, Alexander’s empire was divided among the four generals of his army, the most important in relation to Biblical history being the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria.



Judea was under the control of the Ptolemies of Egypt until 198 BC when the Seleucids of Syria won a major victory against them at what is known in the Bible as Caesarea Philippi. For the next 50 years and beyond, Judea was under the Seleucid Empire, a Hellenistic (Greek) dynasty which allowed the Jews of Palestine a large degree of self-government. During most of this period, Jerusalem itself was organized as a *temple-state with the priestly law of the Pentateuch as its constitution*. The high priest was head of this Jewish temple-state in which only the Jews living in Judea came under his jurisdiction. The high priest came exclusively from the family of Zadok who was high priest during the reign of Solomon.

During this time the Roman Empire was gaining strength and inevitably clashed with the Seleucid Empire, defeating the Seleucid king Antiochus III in 190 BC at the battle of Magnesia. Afterwards the Seleucids were forced to pay tribute money to Rome, a factor which led to much of the priestly intrigue in the years to come. In order to raise the tribute money for Rome, Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes, son of Antiochus III) received payment from **Jason** who wished to buy the high priesthood away from his brother **Onias III** (the Zadokite high priest). The bribe money was used to pay off Rome. However, when a bigger bribe came later from **Menelaus**, who was not from the family of Zadok, Antiochus IV made Menelaus high priest instead of Jason. Thus, during Antiochus' reign, the high priesthood was sold to the highest bidder. To make up for his father's losses to Rome, Antiochus IV attempted to add Egypt to the Seleucid Empire and would have succeeded had it not been for the intervention of the Roman navy in 168 BC. This failure is predicted in Dan. 11: 29-30.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, news of Antiochus' defeat by Rome ("Kittim"—*Daniel*) encouraged the Jews to oust Menelaus as high priest and reinstall Jason (a descendent of Zadok). Antiochus interpreted this as political rebellion, and on his way back from his humiliating defeat by the Romans in Egypt he punished the whole city of Jerusalem for reinstalling Jason as high priest. (Remember that he had first installed Jason as high priest only to take the priesthood away from him and give it to Menelaus who paid him more for the position.) The Pentateuchal law pertaining to the priesthood was abolished as the constitution in Jerusalem and unclean sacrifices were instituted in the temple according to the predictions of Daniel in 11: 31, "the abomination of desolation". For a period of three years, from 167 to 164 BC, Antiochus caused much suffering and havoc to the Jews who were faithful to the law and would not surrender to Greek idolatry (Dan. 11: 32—"those who know their God will display strength and take action").

Many Jews were killed during this time. Those who put up non-violent resistance to the sacrilege were the Hassideans. Those who resisted by military means were the Hasmoneans under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, the son of the aged priest, Mattathias. Mattathias had been ordered to sacrifice a pig on the altar, an order he refused. When another priest agreed to offer the pig, Mattathias killed both him and a Syrian soldier. Due to the military skill of Judas Maccabeus, as well as Antiochus' decision not to allocate troops to a new military front in Judea, Antiochus agreed to withdraw his efforts to Hellenize the Jews and their religion. The proper Jewish sacrifices were reinstituted in 164 BC, but this concession did not satisfy the ambitious Hasmoneans who fought for 20 more years to achieve political independence from the Seleucid dynasty. This autonomy was achieved in 142 BC under Simon, the last son of Mattathias and brother to Judas Maccabeus, and is known as the Maccabean Revolt. For 100 years the

descendents of Simon occupied the position of high priest in Jerusalem and for 75 years of that same period enjoyed political independence in Judea.

Eventually, the religious idealism which had given birth to the Maccabean Revolt gave way to political and religious ambition and corruption. *Simon* (son of Mattathias and successor to his brother Judas Maccabeus) was followed as high priest by his son *John Hyrcanus* who in turn was followed by his two sons *Aristobulus I* and *Alexander Janneaus* both of whom *extended the kingdom of Judea by military means to an area equal to that of the kingdoms of David and Solomon*. (Thus since the time of Simon the office of king was combined with the office of priest, something not allowed by the law of God and given express condemnation by the cessation of Saul's dynasty—1 Sam. 13). Both Jannaeus and his brother Aristobulus were ungodly men who acted more the part of Greek rulers than religious reformers. Jannaeus, in particular, cared for nothing but personal power. He is followed in 76 BC by his wife Salome Alexandra whose elder son Hyrcanus II becomes high priest while her younger son, Aristobulus II becomes a military commander. After her death in 67 BC, the opposing factions of her two sons wage a civil war which becomes the advantage of the ambitious Antipater (an Idumean or Edomite—descendent of Esau) who cooperates with the Roman occupation of Judea in 63 BC by Pompey. Thus, Judea comes under the domination of the Roman Empire, and the golden age of independence under the Maccabees comes to an end.

Since Rome was actively opposed only by Aristobulus II, Pompey establishes Hyrcanus II as high priest and gives him titular (by title only) leadership of the nation. In reality Antipater is the real power behind the throne in Jerusalem because of his cooperation with the Roman government. After Julius Caesar rises to power in Rome, Antipater is useful to him and as repayment is named by Caesar as the procurator (or governor) of Judea under the supervision of Rome. This is an ironic twist of history—a descendent of Esau and archenemy of Israel becoming the local political leader of the Jewish nation. The situation becomes even more unacceptable to the nation when Antipater's son, Herod the Great, is named king of the Jewish nation by Antony and Octavian of Rome. Antipater continued to support whoever was in power in Rome until his assassination in 43 BC. By that time his sons (Phasael and Herod—who became Herod the Great) had learned his political savvy (ability to survive) and were appointed the joint tetrarchs (ruler of part of a province) of Judea.

When the Parthians invaded Palestine in 40 BC, Phasael was captured and killed while his brother Herod escaped to Rome where he was named king of the Jews at the age of 25. By that time Julius Caesar had been assassinated (44 BC) by those who claimed to be his friends (Brutus and Cassius), and this treacherous coalition had been suppressed by Antony and Octavian working together. The Parthians, for their part, place the son of Aristobulus II, Antigonus, on the throne of Jerusalem in the place of Hyrcanus II. Aristobulus II, you remember, was the brother of Hyrcanus II and the one who had opposed the invasion of the Roman armies of Pompey. Thus, in reward for his opposition to Rome, the Parthians place the son of Aristobulus II on the throne to replace Hyrcanus. The Parthians are able to hold out against the Romans and control Judea for about 3 years until they are driven out by Herod's army (with Roman support) in 37 BC.

When Herod takes control of Judea in 37 BC, he has Antigonus (the Hasmonean king installed by the Parthians) executed by his friend, Antony of Rome. This infuriates the Jews who

recognized only a Hasmonean (descendent of the Maccabees) as the rightful ruler of Judea. Herod is never accepted by the Jews in spite of his marriage to Mariamme, a Hasmonean princess, his magnificent reconstruction of the Jewish temple, (He also built many pagan temples), and his efforts at famine relief (William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 160). He nevertheless reigns in Judea for 33 years until 4 BC. He is the murderous Herod of Matt. 2 who had all the babies of Bethlehem two years old and younger murdered in an attempt to kill Christ.

The biggest initial threat to Herod's kingdom was the political ambition of Cleopatra VII of Egypt who wished to regain the control of Palestine which had belonged to her ancestors the Ptolemies who lost Palestine to the Seleucids in 198 BC. Having gained substantial influence over Antony, Cleopatra may have eventually succeeded in ousting Herod from Judea had it not been for the growing tension between Antony and Cleopatra on the one hand and Octavian on the other. Antony makes an alliance with Cleopatra against Octavian to achieve joint control of Rome and Egypt. They are decisively defeated by Octavian in the battle of Actium in 31 BC which leaves Octavian as the supreme power in Rome, later taking the name Caesar Augustus becoming one of the worst persecutors of the Christian church. Antony and Cleopatra, on the other hand, commit suicide one year after their defeat in 30 BC leaving Octavian as the undisputed ruler in Rome whom Herod must please for the rest of his reign in Judea until his death in 4 BC.

Herod was a cruel and ruthless man who, on his deathbed, ordered the execution of many Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to insure that all Judea would be mourning on the day of his death, an order which was not carried out. On the same day of his death he ordered the execution of his son Antipater whom he suspected of plotting against his life earlier. Years earlier he also had the only wife he "loved", Mariamme, executed in 29 BC for suspicion of plotting against him as well as his two sons by her 22 years later in 7 BC. (His suspicious behavior—not trusting anyone including his own family—is an historical forerunner to that of Joseph Stalin of Russia who, before his death, used to sleep in a different room in the Kremlin every night to avoid assassination. He failed, for he was killed by poisoning by another powerful member of the Communist Party.)

Herod's kingdom was divided between three of his sons: **Herod Antipas** ruled in Galilee and Peraea; Antipas' full brother **Archelaus** reigned in Judea, Samaria and Idumea; and **Philip**, half brother of Antipas and Archelaus, reigned in Iturea and Trachonitis (Lk. 3: 1; cf. Bible maps). Herod Antipas is Herod the tetrarch of Matt. 14 who has John the Baptist beheaded because he confronted Antipas for taking Philip's wife, Herodias, away from him. He is also the Herod to whom Pilate sends Jesus for questioning (Lk. 23). He ruled as tetrarch for 42 years and Philip, his half-brother over his realm for 37 years. Archelaus, on the other hand, was so oppressive in Judea that Caesar Augustus removed him in 6 AD after a reign of nine years to prevent a Jewish revolt. Joseph, husband of Mary, was very hesitant to move his family to Judea in light of what Archelaus had recently done. It seems that two of the beloved religious teachers in Jerusalem (Judas and Matthias) had encouraged some zealous young students to destroy the golden image of an eagle which Herod the Great had placed above the gate of the temple. To strict Jews, this was a sacrilege since the eagle, to them, also represented Roman gods. The young men were given light sentencing but their teachers were executed. This caused a riot to break out during Passover. To quell the rebellion, Archelaus sent out Roman troops who killed 3000 Jews.

Joseph had mixed feelings since he really wanted to return to Bethlehem where they had lived since the birth of Jesus except for the short stay in Egypt. The warning from the angel to go instead to Nazareth was the deciding factor in his decision (Matt. 2: 22-23; William Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 187-188). After Archelaus is removed in 6 AD, Augustus Caesar decided to place Judea directly under Roman rule administered by provincial governors or procurators appointed by the emperor. This is why Judea was under the supervision of Pontius Pilate when Jesus was crucified while Galilee was ruled by Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great.

(See timelines in the Appendix for more clarification of the Inter-testamentary Period.)

**II. The Birth of John the Baptist and the Announcement of Christ's Birth—Lk. 1: 5-80; Matt. 1: 18-25**

The NT begins not with the birth of Jesus but the birth of his forerunner who is predicted in Mal. 4: 5-6 and confirmed by the angel Gabriel in Lk. 1: 17. The story begins with the announcement of John's birth to Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah (Zacharias), the aged and childless priest who is reluctant to believe that they will have a son in old age. The favorable assessment of Zechariah and Elizabeth in v. 6 is by no means unnecessary since this was not the character of so many priests in his day, particularly the high priest, whose office had been sullied (tarnished) by the combination of the office of high priest with that of king during the Hasmonean dynasty of the Maccabees. Later, from AD 6 onward, the office of high priest was often sold to the highest bidder and became the property of the wealthiest priestly families who were members of the Sadducees and anxious to keep Rome happy at any price. This practically resulted in "an unhealthy concentration of power in the hands of a few rich and influential families" in Judea who "exercised power out of all proportion to their numbers" (Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 63, 67). Zechariah is not the high priest and he has little in common with those who occupied the office of priest or high priest with political ambitions. Yet he is judged in the passage for having insufficient faith in the express promise of God. For this he will not be able to speak until the birth of John.

Following this announcement by six months, Mary is also visited by Gabriel in her city of Nazareth of Galilee. Judeans looked down upon the Galileans as socially and religiously inferior, yet God chooses the lowly to shame the wise (1 Cor. 1: 25-31). Even today the Jews shun the city of Nazareth, now called En-Nasirah, which is occupied by 10,000 people two-thirds of whom are Christians and one-third Muslims (Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 75). Mary is already engaged to Joseph and the news of her pregnancy, though a blessing, understandably put her in a serious predicament. How could she explain this to Joseph? As it turns out, she need not have worried. The Lord knew that it would take something supernatural to convince Joseph that she had not been unfaithful (Matt. 1: 18-25). There is no doubt in her mind that this prediction would be fulfilled, unlike Zechariah, and any indication of judgment for unbelief is lacking in the narrative. The only question she had was: How?

The answer is forthcoming in v. 35. For Jesus to be born without the taint of human sin, he had to be born of a virgin, not because sin is passed on to one's offspring by the father exclusively—something which is not taught in the NT. There is nothing in the NT remotely suggesting the sinlessness of Mary. ***Rather, in Christ there is the new beginning of the human race through the sovereign power of God.*** Jesus is born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the

will of man, but of God” (Jn. 1: 13). This is also true of every Christian, not literally (as with Christ), but spiritually because we are in union with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are a new creation in Christ.

Assuming for the present the doctrine of Adamic guilt as defined in traditional dogmatics [systematic theology], it is clear that such guilt was not imputed to Christ. The only factor available to help us understand this immunity is the virgin birth. Adam begot a son in his own image (Gn. 5: 3). But Adam did not beget Christ. The Lord’s existence has nothing to do with Adamic desire or Adamic initiative. As we have already seen, Christ is new. He is from outside. He is not a derivative from, or a branch of, Adam. He is parallel to the first man, a new departure, and as such not involved in the guilt which runs in the original stream....

The argument that there is some connection between the virgin birth and the sinlessness of Christ is reinforced by the fact that a sinless humanity is impossible without a miracle. The first man was holy because God made him so; the new man (the Christian) is holy because God makes him so; the Last Man is holy because God makes him so. Holiness can exist in human life only by virtue of divine action and so far as Jesus Christ is concerned that action occurs in the very commencement of his existence (Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, p. 41).

Mary’s news is met with enthusiasm by her relative Elizabeth to whom advance notice had already been given, thus also eliminating the need for explanation. On the other hand, the news is not met with much enthusiasm by Joseph, who kindly plans to put her away privately by divorce. In those days, engagement had the same effect as marriage. We cannot discern from scripture when the transition from death by stoning to divorce had taken place, but obviously divorce for sexual immorality was now permissible even though it had not completely eliminated the death penalty (Jn. 8: 3). It is not true, as the Jews attested of Jesus, that they were forbidden under all situations to administer the death penalty (Jn. 18: 31). Surely this did not hinder them from putting Stephen to death (Acts 7). In Jesus’ case, it was expedient for the chief priests and Pharisees to allow the Romans to do their dirty work, so they branded Jesus as a political insurgent threatening Caesar’s regime.

Notice from the narrative that Joseph kept her a virgin “until” she gave birth to Jesus. There is no evidence from this text or any other that she continued to live as a virgin the duration of their marriage. This would have been a considerable, unnecessary burden to both Joseph and Mary and a violation of the obligations of marriage (1 Cor. 7: 4-5). On the contrary, the evidence suggests that Jesus had brothers and sisters of whom James and Jude were included (Jn. 7: 5; Mk. 3: 31; Gal. 1: 19; Jude 1: 1; Matt. 13: 55-56). The absence of any reference to Joseph or any other “husband” in the Matthean text implies that Joseph had already died and that Mary never remarried. Thus, the brothers and sisters were Joseph’s offspring, not another man’s. In other words, Joseph and Mary had normal sexual relations after Jesus’ birth which produced offspring. What the passage *does* prove is that marriage can exist under special circumstances without sexual relations. The Christ had to be born of a virgin; thus, Joseph kept Mary a virgin until the birth of Jesus. This situation would never arise again, but other situations do arise which prevent sexual relations between husband and wife, including sickness, injury, and old age. Marriage is a covenant of companionship which requires sex under normal conditions (1 Cor. 7: 4-5), but can exist inviolable (unbroken) if sexual relations are no longer possible.

Both in the Magnificat of Mary (Lk. 1: 46-55) and the prophecy of Zecharias at the birth of John (Lk. 1: 68-79), there is a deep awareness of the fulfillment of the covenant promised to Abraham who is mentioned in both monologues (vv. 55 and 73).

### ***III. The Birth of Christ; His Circumcision and Presentation in the Temple—Lk. 2: 1-38***

The census of Luke 2 illustrates the common practice of Rome to count the population every 14 years (Harrison, *A Short Life of Christ*, p. 36). This was for the purpose of levying taxes and may have led to the Zealot movement which conspired to overthrow the Roman government. As in Zachariaias' prophecy, the fact that Jesus would be from the house of David is emphasized (cf. 1: 69 and 2: 4). From the house of David the Messiah would come to restore the kingdom back to Israel (Jer. 23: 5; 30: 9; 33: 15, 17; 33: 20-21; Ezek. 34: 24). For most Israelites this promise meant only the restoration of the kingdom of Israel to its former glory in the kingdoms of David and Solomon. Thus the nation as a whole was looking for a purely earthly Messiah to deliver them from Roman domination. Christ comes to give them a different kind of deliverance—deliverance from the bondage of sin.

It is not accidental that the angels first appear to shepherds in the announcement of the Messiah. Throughout the history of Israel, the kings of Israel are likened to shepherds who either led the people or scattered them. Most of the kings did not lead the people in sacrificial service, but used the sheep to enrich themselves (1 Kings 22: 17; Ezek. 34: 5, 8), much like many modern rulers. Another shepherd is promised, however, who will properly feed his sheep and lead them into obedience (Micah 5: 4; Ezek. 34: 23; 37: 24; Isa. 40: 11). Jesus later identifies himself as the one who fulfills the prophetic promises of a "good shepherd" who lays down his life for the sheep rather than fleecing the sheep and using them for his own selfish ends. It is appropriate, therefore, that the announcement of the Christ first be made to shepherds, not because they were more spiritually humble than the rest of the population (shepherds were known to be rough characters) or because they represented the poor, but simply because they were symbols of what Christ came to do—shepherd God's people.

Furthermore, we must reckon with the fact that Luke often emphasizes the universality of the gospel to the Gentiles, including the poor and lowly. Only in Luke do we find this emphasis in the following stories and parables: Jesus' announcement of the Year of Jubilee in Lk. 4: 18; the emphasis on the economically poor in the Sermon on the Mount (compare Lk. 6: 20 with Matt. 5: 3); the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31); the repentance of Zaccheus who gave his money to the poor (Lk. 19: 1-10); the parables of the invited guests and the dinner in which the poor, crippled, blind and lame were invited (Lk. 14: 7-24). In addition to these stories were some which were also included in Matthew which also dealt with the poor: the poor widow (Lk. 21: 1-4) and the rich young ruler (Lk. 18: 18-25).

The declaration of the angels must be qualified, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is well-pleased" (2: 14). The "peace among men" is qualified. Christ did not come to bring peace to everyone, but to those with whom he is pleased—i.e. those who repent and embrace him as Lord and Savior; those who lay down their weapons and surrender to his Lordship. Christ expressly declared at another time that he "did *not* come to bring peace but a sword" of division even among those of the same household (Matt. 10: 34). Even family ties and loyalties would be challenged by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and those who would be loyal to family members and tribes at the expense of their loyalty to Christ would not be worthy of Christ (10: 35-37).

The offer of peace is also interesting in light of the historical context. At this time in world history, the world was enjoying an external peace the likes of which had never been known—the Pax Romana or “Peace of Rome”. Rome had virtually conquered the world with its Roman legions, and there were only small pockets of resistance to its power, but as the Roman scholar, Epictetus, of the first century once said, “While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace” (Geldenhuys, p. 112). Sixty years after the birth of Christ Paul would declare, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5: 1). True and lasting peace with men can only come from the inward peace of being reconciled to God. This is something the Pax Romana could not supply but is amply supplied through the atoning death of Christ. Eventually the Roman peace fell apart, and the continual “wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24: 6) which have since resulted prove that military might alone cannot bring lasting peace.

The announcement of the angels is, in a sense, not only a declaration of peace but a declaration of war. Christ is now invading the universe to quell (crush) man’s rebellion against him with the power of his atonement and the work of his Spirit. He will not accomplish this peace all at once in the first advent. He will first declare peace to those who will surrender to his Lordship. This offer of peace is symbolized by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt. 21: 5)—the customary transportation kings used in offering peace to a city. Christ will then leave his disciples as soldiers to continue the work he began. These will wield the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, in preaching, evangelism and missions, and will thus attack the gates of hell which will not prevail against the kingdom of God (Matt. 16: 18). These same soldiers (Christians) are also ambassadors for Christ who are making every effort to persuade men and women to lay down their weapons and make peace with God before it is too late (2 Cor. 5: 20). When Christ has gathered all his sheep into the fold, he will then come again, no longer riding on a donkey, but, in the apocalyptic language of *Revelation*, on a white horse with a sword coming out of his mouth to slay those who refused to accept his offer of peace (Rev. 19: 11-16).

Eight days after his birth, Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the temple for circumcision, purification, and presentation to the priest (Lk. 2: 21-38). Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant required of all Hebrew males, slaves, or proselytes to the Jewish religion. It signified the cutting off of the sinful flesh, i.e. repentance (Col. 2: 11 compared with Jer. 4: 4 and Deut. 10: 16). Why then did Jesus need to be circumcised since he was not born in sin? The answer is the same as that which answers the question: Why did Jesus have to be baptized with John’s baptism, a baptism of repentance? By being baptized, Jesus was fully identifying with the people he came to save, the people whose sins he would bear in his own body on the cross. His circumcision, in the same way, is a circumcision of identification. Jesus was born of a woman, born under the law (Gal. 4: 4). That is, he voluntarily subjected himself to all the conditions of the law including circumcision.

The “purification” of v. 22 is a reference to Lev. 12. A woman who had given birth would be ceremonially unclean and must offer either a lamb and a turtle dove or two turtle doves if she were poor. Joseph and Mary’s poverty is indicated in the sacrifice of two turtledoves or two pigeons. Notice from the text that purification is applied to both Mary and Jesus, an indication

that the Israelites believed in the pollution of sin even at birth (cf. Ps. 51: 5). This purification is just another way of showing that Jesus, though sinless, fully identified with sinners.

Another kind of requirement is mentioned in v. 23 which was separate from the requirement of v. 22. This pertained to the first-born males—both animals and humans. The first born male animals were to be sacrificed, but the first-born males of the Israelites must be redeemed—i.e. bought back from the Lord (Ex. 13: 15). The reason for this is found in the Exodus event. Israel as a whole nation belonged to the Lord as the first-born son (Ex. 4: 22). The first-born was a symbol for the whole just as the first-fruits represented the whole harvest. By offering the first-born male animal the Israelite was dedicating his whole herd to the Lord. In the same way, the first-born male represented the whole family, but instead of sacrificing the first-born son as the heathens sometimes did, the Israelite would redeem him with an animal, thus purchasing him back from God, his true owner. Thus the first-born became, not a *dead* sacrifice, but a *living* sacrifice dedicated to the Lord's service. (It is in this vein of thought that Paul exhorts us to present ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices—Rom. 12: 1). Pharaoh, playing the part of God, had usurped God's authority over the nation by refusing to let the people go and worship God. By arrogating (seizing without right) to himself the rights over the nation which belonged only to God, Pharaoh was forced to forfeit the first-born sons of Egypt in exchange for the Israelites whom he should have given to God. This rationale (reason) for redeeming the first-born is given in Ex. 13: 15 as an explanation to the Israelite child who asks his father why such offerings were made (13: 14). In a very special sense, Jesus is the first-born of all believers (Rom. 8: 29), but rather than being redeemed, since he needs no redemption, he becomes our redeeming sacrifice. He sacrifices himself as a substitute for all the first-born among his brethren—Christians.

The sacrifice which is given in the text appears to be connected with the purification of the mother and the infant and not with the redemption of the first-born (cf. Calvin). The purification sacrifice was made in every event of birth, not just the first-born.

Despite the spiritually depressed state of the nation at the time Christ was born, God still had his people there who were "looking for the consolation of Israel". "Consolation" is the same Greek word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) in Isa. 40: 1. Christ would be the "comfort" or consolation of Israel, the shepherd who would tend his flock (40: 11). It had been revealed to Simeon that he would not close his eyes in death until he saw the Christ, the Messiah. His words indicate that he was not looking for a political Messiah who would defeat Rome but a Savior exhibited to "all peoples", one who would not only be "the glory" of Israel but "a light of revelation to the Gentiles" (including Romans) according to many of the prophecies of the OT scriptures (Isa. 9: 2; 42: 6). Christ was appointed for the fall and rise of many, a reference to the continuous theme in all of Scripture—the salvation of God's people and the destruction of his enemies. It is notable that Simeon is not a priest, otherwise Luke would have told us. He is one of the ordinary people of Israel in whom God had put his Spirit. When the religious institution and religious leaders of Israel had sunk to a very low condition, God raises up the "nobodies" to preserve the true faith. Simeon also prophesies about the *manner* in which Christ would be the salvation of many peoples in v. 35, an allusion to his death and Mary's sorrow. In spite of the great prophecies she has been blessed to hear about Jesus, Mary should not entertain unrealistic



hopes about his reception by the common masses or by the religious leadership (Calvin, Vol. 1, p. 147).

Anna was a prophetess and another example of the remnant of God's elect Jews who were anxiously awaiting a Savior who would redeem them from their sin.

#### ***IV. The Visit of the Magi and Satan's Attempt to Destroy the Christ—Matt. 2: 1-23; Luke 2: 39***

At this point in Luke's narrative, the visit of the Magi is left out. This is not an error in Luke's account but simply a story Luke considered unnecessary for his particular purpose. Most scholars believe that Luke was written after Mark and Matthew in which case Luke knew that the story of the Magi had already been adequately covered in Matthew's gospel.

Who are these magi? Most scholars identify them as scholars and astrologists (or even astronomers). They could have been either from Babylonia (cf. Dan. 2: 2 for a reference to "wise men") or from Persia. The word *magoi* has its origin in Persia (modern day Iran) and early Christian art has depicted these magi dressed in Persian robes. Many of the early church fathers including Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, and Chrysostom believed that they came from Persia. But the Babylonians are credited with much of the rudimentary knowledge of the planetary system, the calendar, and the computation of time. Hendriksen believes that we cannot know for sure who they were or where they were from. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Matthew leaves out many of the details in order to shift the whole focus to the one who deserves the attention, the Lord Jesus Christ. The wise men would not have wanted it any other way, for they had traveled a long way just to worship this new king (v. 2) (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 151, 155).

The timing of the Magi's visit is another debatable issue. The typical manger scene shows Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes surrounded by shepherds **and** three Magi from the east. (The text does not tell us how many magi were present. It only tells us that three different gifts were given.) The inn of Lk. 2: 7 would have had an animal stall for the convenience of their traveling guests, and this would have been the stall where Mary and Joseph would have stayed the night. But if you look carefully at the text of Matthew, you will notice that the Magi came to see Jesus while he was living in a **house** (v. 11). According to the fact that Herod kills all the children in and around Bethlehem two years old and younger, it has been argued that Jesus is two years old when the Magi see him in Bethlehem. Based on this theory, it took the Magi two years to follow the star which appeared to them either in Persia or Babylon. However, it could also be argued that they observed the star for almost two years before they came to the conclusion that the star was a sign for the Jewish king. It would not have taken two years to travel from Persia or Babylonia to Judea (unless you had a really slow camel!).

Calvin has argued that it is unlikely that Joseph would have desired to completely relocate his family from Nazareth to Bethlehem for two years after the census was taken. His livelihood would have been in Nazareth (*Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 1, 154). Furthermore, it does not necessarily follow that Herod would have killed the male children immediately after hearing that the magi had avoided him. He may have waited for a more opportune time to kill them after

the report of the Jewish king had been forgotten. This opportune time may not have come until two years later. Calvin has further noted that the magi were not looking for a two year old boy but for one “who has been born” (newly born) as the king of the Jews. The star may have appeared a year and a half or so before Christ was born to give the magi a chance to see him in Bethlehem when he was still an infant (*Harmony*, pp. 158-160).

All we really know is that they saw Jesus when he was living in a house. The important thing is not *when* they saw him but that they, in fact, *saw* him and *worshipped* him. These were gentiles, not Jews, and it is noteworthy that when Herod told the scribes and chief priests about these magi and their mysterious questions about the king of the Jews, *none* of them attempted to find the Christ themselves. (At least the text does not indicate any such search, a fact which Matthew would not have omitted if it had happened). The promised Messiah had been born in Bethlehem right under the noses of the scribes and chief priests, but they were too concerned with the political and religious control of the masses—not to speak of their own wealth—to be concerned about the promised Messiah. The whole story is a foreshadowing of what Christ would declare in no uncertain terms later in the parable of the landowner in Matt. 21: 33-44, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [the Jews], and be given to a nation [the gentiles] producing the fruit of it” (v. 43). Christ came and was rejected by his own people (Jn. 1: 11), but the gentiles *did* receive him and have been receiving him ever since. Matthew tells the story of the Magi as a rebuke to his Jewish audience who rejected their Messiah.

Also significant is the fact that God sought the magi before they sought Christ. We are not informed as to how they knew about the king of the Jews and the promise of the Christ. It is possible that they had been informed of these prophecies by exiled Jews who lived either in Babylon or Persia, but undoubtedly the exiled Jews were not the only ones helping these men, since God also helps them avoid Herod by warning them in a dream to go a different route back to their homeland (v. 12). God had given them special insight into this mysterious star. His plan had always been to incorporate the gentiles into the people of God. (Recall Simeon’s speech above.)

The wise men having departed, Joseph is warned by God in a dream not to go back home but to flee to Egypt, thus fulfilling prophecy (v. 15). Egypt had been used by God before as a place of refuge for his people and so again now—a table set before Christ in the presence of his enemies (Ps. 23: 5). As Israel was the son of God (Ex. 4: 22), Christ is the only begotten son of God and the new beginning of the people of God, the first-born among his brethren (Rom. 8: 29). His return from Egypt is symbolic of a new exodus of the people of God, the remnant according to God’s choice (Rom. 11: 5). It is one of the amazing ironies of the humiliation of Christ that he must flee the wrath of an earthly king when he, himself, is the King of kings and Lord of lords. His kingly reign is now invisible to most people, but there will come a day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Phil. 2: 10-11), and everyone, even kings, who have refused in this life to surrender to his lordship will call upon the mountains and the rocks to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6: 12-17).

Herod’s slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem is one of the many plots Satan will devise to destroy the Christ (cf. Rev. 12: 1-6). As always, Satan has his human accomplices (in this case, Herod) who do his bidding without knowing it. The Jews were mistreated by the Edomites, their

half-brothers, and now Herod, an Edomite, attempts to kill the Jewish king. Constant warfare is going on in the heavenlies as the forces of God and the forces of evil are engaged in deadly battle (Eph. 6: 12). As Rachel, who was so long barren, symbolically weeps for the children of Israel taken into exile, so she is now once more weeping for the slaughtered children of Bethlehem (vv. 17-18). But notice v. 19, “But when Herod was *dead....*” ***This verse is a turning point in the narrative signaling the end of man’s godless reign and the beginning of the reign of the God-man, Jesus Christ.***

To appreciate the significance of this clause, we would have to trace the political history of this godless man, Herod the Great, as seen in contrast with the perfect son of God. The slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem was by no means the first of his cruelties, but the grand finale of an entire life given over to his selfish passions and blood-letting. Here was a man—a king no less—who had ordered the assassination of his own wife (Miriamme) and sons for unproven treachery. Herod had ordered the death of another son, Antipater, whose mother Doris he had divorced 30 years previously to take Miriamme as his wife. Antipater had complained to his mother that his father was living so long that he would be an old man before becoming king himself, a sentiment which he had best left unspoken, since five days before his own death, Herod ordered the execution of Antipater. Knowing he was hated by the whole Jewish nation and that the nation would be rejoicing in the streets on the day of his death, a few days before he died he ordered the execution of all the principal Jewish men in Judea to ensure that the nation would be mourning instead of celebrating. Providentially, this order died with him and was not carried out. Josephus, a Jewish historian, described Herod as “a man of great barbarity toward all men equally, and a slave to his passion” (Hendriksen, pp. 185-186; for an excellent survey of Herod’s rise to power and his cruelties, see Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 156-165). It is small wonder, then, that when Herod is troubled about the magi’s report of the king of the Jews, all of Jerusalem is troubled with him (v. 3). “One born king of the Jews could readily stir the old fanatical enthusiasm for independence” (Everett F. Harrison, *A Short Life of Christ*, p. 53). Any report of a competitor to the throne would most certainly end in a Jewish bloodbath, as subsequent events proved (v. 16).

***What a contrast, then, is the Prince of Peace who inaugurates his kingdom, not by shedding the blood of others, but by shedding his own blood for the salvation of others.*** In so doing he lays down the unalterable pattern of ministry and kingdom-building for His disciples who will not “take up the sword” (Matt. 26: 52), thus reproducing the kingdoms of men, but will lay down their lives for others in humble service and self-sacrifice (1 Jn. 3: 16). His ministry to children (Lk. 18: 15-16) is also set in stark contrast to Herod’s infanticide.

When Herod dies, Joseph is told by an angel to take his family back to the land of Israel, but he is also warned not to go to Judea since Herod’s son, Archelaus who is equally cruel, is now reigning over Judea. Unlike his father Herod the Great, Archelaus’ cruelty is not balanced by superior administrative skills—skills he woefully lacked, so much so that he was removed as tetrarch of Judea and exiled. From 6 AD onward, the province of Judea was governed directly by a Roman procurator or governor, the most well-known being Pontius Pilate. Herod Antipas and Philip (Herod’s two other sons) remain as the tetrarchs of Galilee and Trachonitus and Ituraea respectively, both enjoying a long reign. Thus, Joseph takes the family to Nazareth instead of Bethlehem.

### ***V. Jesus' Childhood—Luke 2: 40-52***

It is here that Luke picks up the story again in 2: 39 with the return to Nazareth. He speaks briefly about the childhood of Jesus when he was twelve years old (v. 42). We know nothing more of His childhood than this brief account in Luke. Verses 40-52 are bracketed by vv. 40 and 52, each of which summarizes the childhood development of Jesus. Since Luke focuses on the true humanity of Christ (while John focuses on his deity), he emphasizes the fact that Jesus' earthly development was truly human development. Jesus in his true humanity did not enter this world with omniscience (exhaustive knowledge) but had to learn the same way we do. He crawled before he walked, and he walked before he could run. Verse 40 says that both his physical and spiritual development were a gradual process. He “***continued*** to grow and ***become strong, increasing*** in wisdom...” Jesus was one person with two natures, God and man. God cannot ***increase*** in wisdom because he is all-knowing, but Jesus in his true humanity can increase in wisdom. This is precisely what Jesus does, studying the scriptures carefully to gain the wisdom his Father wanted for him. (If this *seems* mind-boggling, it's because it *is* mind-boggling!) The wisdom he gains throughout his childhood included not only knowledge of the Bible but the wisdom of nature and human nature. Harrison has noted that Nazareth was a small secluded town which would have allowed Jesus to live a very unhurried childhood with ample opportunity to meditate on the ordinary elements of life. Examination of his many illustrations and parables leads us to believe that even as a child he was a keen observer of human nature and the natural world (the farmer sowing seed; a widow who lost her coin; etc.) (Everett F. Harrison, *A Short Life of Christ*, p. 57).

We should notice that Jesus demonstrated his humility in the temple with the teachers of the law. He is not lecturing them but skillfully answering their questions (v. 47). His subjection to his teachers and his parents is the foreshadowing of his perfect submission to his heavenly Father. It is evident that by this time he is humanly aware (he was always divinely aware) that he is the Christ and must be about his Father's business (v. 49). We may wonder why Mary and Joseph did not understand Jesus' statement and still seemed in the dark about his humanity. Most likely this identity is somewhat hidden from them throughout Jesus' childhood years; otherwise, a normal childhood would have been impossible for Jesus. The noteworthy thing about the silence of Scripture concerning these years is that they support the simple fact that Jesus does nothing extraordinary during that period of time. He was an ordinary child to all observers (Harrison, pp. 63-64). After he began his earthly ministry, his ordinary upbringing and occupation was an offense to educated Jews who had never suspected he was anyone special (Mk. 6: 2-3; Matt. 13: 54-58).

### ***VI. The Ministry of John the Baptist—Matt. 3: 1-12; Mk. 1: 1-8; Lk. 3: 1-20***

The ministry of John the Baptist is foretold in Mal. 4: 5-6 and Isa. 40: 3 (cf. Matt. 3: 3; 11: 14; Lk. 1: 17). He was a rugged character, not the pale, effeminate (noted for feminine characteristics) preacher routinely depicted in American movies. He wore a garment of camel's hair—not the most comfortable—and lived off the land eating grasshoppers and honey from wild bees—not the safest cuisine (food). His character was fitting for his unwelcome task—preaching a baptism of repentance. In the Greek language repentance literally means a “change of mind”

which also leads to a change of activity or direction. You are living one way, but you experience a change of mind which causes you to reverse course and live another way. This Biblical meaning of repentance led John the Apostle to say dogmatically (forcefully), “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 Jn. 1: 6). This is also the reason that John was not accepting insincere Pharisees and Sadducees for baptism, saying to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matt. 3: 7).

Several questions arise in connection with this passage. First, why were the Sadducees and Pharisees coming to John for baptism? Second, we learn from the Luke passage that John called not only the Sadducees and Pharisees a brood of vipers, but the multitudes (Lk. 3: 7). Is one of the gospel writers mistaken in his reporting of this event? In answer to the first question, John was a very popular figure who was recognized as a prophet by all the people (Matt. 3: 5; 14: 4-5 Mk. 1: 5). The religious leaders could add to their credibility with the masses by receiving John’s baptism, but they would seriously damage their reputation with the masses if they rejected John.

In answer to the second question, we must approach the Scriptures with humility presupposing (assuming) that they are correct and consistent. If there is a question of consistency, we must attempt to resolve it without questioning the inerrancy of the Bible. In this case, Matthew is emphasizing the guilt and deception of the religious leaders of the Jews who opposed the ministry of Jesus later on. They had no concern for repentance, only for power; and their understanding of obedience was external only, not internal. Luke, on the other hand, indicates that what was true of the Pharisees and Sadducees in particular was also true of the masses in general. Everyone, not just the Pharisees and Sadducees, were deceptive snakes (a reference to the deception of Satan) needing repentance. This much is evident in the instructions given to those who responded to John’s insistence on deeds which gave proof of repentance—“What shall we do?” (Lk. 3: 10-14). If a person is truly sincere in his repentance (change of mind) then he will also have a change of heart which leads to a change of actions. Those who are careless of the poor will begin to help them (v. 11); those who steal from others through fraud will begin to act with integrity (v. 12); and those with the power of the sword will not use their power illegitimately and would be content with their wages without using extortion (v. 14). To answer the question, then, both Matthew and Luke report correctly, but they emphasize two different groups of people, the common masses and the religious leaders.

Coming closer to home, 80% of Ugandans and 75 % of Americans claim to be Christian, but it does not appear that the “gospel” many have heard is the true gospel requiring repentance, but rather, a cheap substitute. The gospel is “good news” only to those who have had a change of mind about their sin. If there is no change of mind *about* sin, then why would there be a need for a Savior *from* sin. Sin is the “bad news” one must understand before he is ready to embrace the “good news”. People who do not feel sick do not go to the doctor (Matt. 9: 12), and people who do not think they are sinners do not run to a Savior. Jesus came to save sinners, not “righteous” people who “need no repentance” (Mk. 2: 17; Lk. 15: 7). At the same time, he is called “Jesus” because he will save his people *from* their sins, not *in* their sins. Salvation does not give us a ticket to heaven while we persist in our sins without repentance. Salvation is deliverance from the power of reigning sin.

Something else about John's message should be mentioned. His understanding of the ministry of the Messiah was entirely in keeping with the prophetic proclamations of the OT. The Messiah would come with power and judgment upon sinners (Mal. 3: 1-3). The Day of the Lord was considered a day of salvation from the *enemies* of Israel, but the prophets made it plain that the day would be just as terrible for unrepentant *Israelites*, a day which could not be endured (Joel 1: 15; 2: 11; Isa. 13: 6-7; Amos 5: 18). Thus, John described the Lord's ministry as an axe that was already poised to chop down every tree that did not bear fruit (Lk. 3: 9), as one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire and the thresher who would gather his wheat into the barn but would burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3: 11-12; Lk. 3: 16-17). When Jesus' ministry of healing and reconciliation did not exactly fit this description, he later wondered whether Jesus was the Messiah he was waiting for (Matt. 11: 3; see commentary below). On this occasion, Jesus assured him that there were other signs of the Messiah's coming, and that John could rest secure that He was indeed the one he had been waiting on (11: 4-6).

John's mistake was an honest one, for the prophecies concerning the Messiah did not distinguish between his first coming and his second coming (cf. Isa. 9: 1-7 with Isa. 53). Before Jesus comes to establish a kingdom which is universally recognized by all—sinner and saint alike—he must suffer and die, a reality which even his own disciples did not understand until after his death (Matt. 16: 21-23). All of this is not to imply that John's message was any different from Jesus' message. Luke 3: 18 tells us, "So with many other exhortations also he preached the *gospel* to the people." Jesus also came into Galilee exhorting the people, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; *repent* and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1: 15). This is the only message authorized by the Lord to be preached to the nations (Lk. 24: 47).

John's ministry was so powerful that people were wondering if even he might be the Christ (Lk. 3: 15). He denied any such claim and said that he was not even fit to tie the sandals of the one coming after him. He clearly understood his ministry as the forerunner of someone greater. When informed that some of his disciples were following Jesus, he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3: 30), an attitude that all preachers should seek to cultivate.

### ***VII. The Year of Inauguration***

#### ***A. The Baptism of Jesus—Matt. 3: 13-17; Lk. 3: 21-22; Mk. 1: 9-11***

The signal privilege bestowed on John was the baptism of Jesus. John immediately recognized the irony of the request. If this was the one whom John expected who would baptize with the Spirit and with fire, then he needed baptism from Jesus and not the other way around. Christ impressed upon him the need to "fulfill all righteousness" by being baptized by John. In this way, Jesus continued his incarnate ministry of fully identifying with those whom he came to save. We should not imagine that Jesus made a big show of his baptism, as if everyone else was made to sit down and observe while John baptized him. Rather, the text in Luke says, "Now when *all* the people were baptized, Jesus was *also* baptized...." Most likely he was simply standing in line behind the next person when, to John's amazement, he saw Jesus as the next person coming. As God in the flesh he had stooped low, taking on the likeness of human flesh in order to lift fallen humanity up to God. He *stood in line with us*, participating with our humanity, so that we in union with Christ could participate with Him, not in His deity, but in the

fellowship He had with God. Christ saved the world by being a servant, not by being a “Big Man” who required others to serve Him.

After being baptized, God the Father reinforced John’s conviction that Jesus needed no baptism of repentance. The Spirit of God came upon Jesus in the “bodily form of a dove” (that is, a visible dove). The dove may have some theological connection to the dove in Gen. 8 in which God gives man-kind a new beginning after the flood. God in Christ is also giving man a new beginning. A voice came from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” God could not give this unqualified endorsement to anyone else, including John. Jesus is the spotless Son of God who is sinless and perfect. God is speaking of Jesus in his humanity. From the time of his birth up until now, everything Jesus had done in his life had been well-pleasing to the Father. He had not sinned in deed or thought; even every motive of his heart had been pleasing to his Father. This, too, is our goal, unachievable in this life, but necessarily that for which we are striving—not only to be pleasing in all our actions, but for every thought of our hearts and minds to be pleasing to our Father. When we think of obedience in this light, we understand how far we are from perfection and how much we continue to need God’s grace. This is what the scribes and Pharisees did not understand who believed God was only concerned with outward actions, whose outward lives were like white-washed tombstones but inwardly were like dead men’s bones (Matt. 23: 27).

If there had been any doubt in John’s mind about whether this was the Son of God for whom he was “preparing the way in the desert”—the desert of men’s hearts—this event cleared away any doubt, at least for now (cf. Matt. 11: 2-3). According to John’s own testimony, he had been notified ahead of time that if he saw the Spirit resting on someone, this would be a verification of his identity as the Son of God and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1: 29-34).

It is not without significance that “immediately” after his baptism (Mk. 1: 12), the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, after which he begins his earthly ministry in the power of the Spirit (Matt. 12: 28). Harrison has noted the same pattern in *Acts* in which the Spirit

descends upon the disciples and they are then empowered for ministry (*A Short Life of Christ*, p. 76).

Therefore, in the life of Jesus the necessity of the Spirit’s work to fulfill his ministry is evident, and this necessity is given full expression in the Synoptics, all of which report his baptism by the Spirit. This should not be surprising in light of the OT expectation of the coming of the Spirit (Ezek. 36: 26-27; Joel 2: 28), and the utter failure of the Israelite nation to fulfill their purpose apart from the full radiance of the Spirit which comes only after the atonement, resurrection, and ascent of Christ to the Father (cf. Jn. 16: 7). The Jewish expectation was that the Messiah would come and that the Spirit would be given as a “recompense” (reward) to the covenant faithfulness of the nation. The Pharisees were intent on keeping the law so that God’s kingdom would come. But Vos has observed that “the new sequence is...

...first the Messiah will appear, as a gift of divine grace, and through Him Israel will be enabled to yield the proper obedience. The effect of this is twofold: by shifting the law from the beginning of the process to the

end the Jewish self-righteousness is eliminated; by vindicating for the law its permanent place at the end, the ethical import of the salvation is emphasized (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 330).

“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8: 3-4).

The next thing we hear of “the Baptist” is that he is taken into custody by Herod Antipas (Matt. 4: 12). The reason for his imprisonment is given briefly in Lk. 3: 19 and in detail in Matt. 14: 1-12. He was fearless in his preaching even before cruel rulers like Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, who had taken away Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip, to be his wife. John exposed this sin in Herod’s presence, and for his efforts to bring Antipas to repentance he was imprisoned and later executed. In rebuking Antipas he foreshadowed the words of Jesus to his disciples, “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10: 28). As a prophet before kings, John mirrored the ministry of many of the OT prophets—Nathan before King David, Elijah before King Ahab, and Isaiah before Hezekiah. Kings were never meant to become a law unto themselves, but must humbly submit to the law of God.

It is possible that John could have continued his ministry for another year from the baptism of Jesus before his imprisonment. This year can be traced from John 2: 13, the first Passover in Jesus’ ministry, and John 5: 1, the second Passover of Jesus’ ministry (Hendriksen, p. 239, footnote). Hendriksen believes that the events of John 1: 19-4: 42 occur during the year after Jesus’ baptism and temptation in the wilderness (p. 239). Thus, Jesus’ return to Galilee in Matt. 4: 12 is the same as that of Jn. 4: 3 and 4: 43. During the interval of time between his baptism and temptation and his return to Galilee, he had cleansed the temple, performed his first miracle of turning water into wine, and spoken to Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. John’s last testimony concerning Jesus occurs in Jn. 3: 22-36 which is just before he is thrown in prison (4: 24) and therefore, before the events of Matt. 4: 12. In this testimony it is clear that Jesus was already having a significant ministry in Judea to the extent that he was baptizing many people, more than John (though from Jn. 4: 2 it is evident that his disciples were actually doing the baptizing).

### ***B. The Temptation of Jesus—Matt. 4: 1-11; Lk. 4: 1-13; Mk. 1: 12-13***

Having fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, Jesus had reached the point of starvation, and he was obviously in a very weakened condition not ideal for the temptations ahead of him. Yet his weakness was necessary to revisit the weakness of the Israelites as they faced starvation and temptation in the wilderness for forty years. It is noteworthy that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted. God takes the initiative in putting Jesus in a position suitable for testing. Temptation and testing go hand in hand, for what Satan uses for temptation, God uses for testing (James 1: 2-3, 3). The similarities between the testing of the Israelites in the wilderness and the testing of Christ are clearly intended (Vos, p. 362). Christ was the new Israel who succeeded where Israel had failed. He is therefore, qualified to lead the nation out of bondage into a new exodus of freedom.



### 1. The First Temptation

In answer to the first temptation Jesus quotes from Deut. 8: 3, “And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.” Take note of the fact that God humbled the Israelites and allowed them to go hungry, then fed them manna which they did not produce themselves and could not have been produced through natural means. The manna was a supernatural act of God in sustaining his people, illustrating the fact that we are dependent upon God for everything in life, both physical and spiritual. Jesus indicates that we must not distinguish between the absolute necessity of physical food and that of spiritual food. He did not say that food was not necessary, but that bread alone would not sustain him. The Israelites had made the fatal mistake of thinking that if physical needs were met, all was well; but their history proves that they were destroyed by lack of knowledge and the famine of God’s word (Hos. 4: 6; Amos 8: 11). Jesus was not going to make this mistake. He knew that the Spirit had brought him into the wilderness to be tempted through hunger, and he was not going to circumvent (go around) the testing by taking matters into his own hands ***by putting the priority on material needs rather than the spiritual need of trusting God implicitly and completely***. He was also keenly aware that he had been born under the Law and was obliged to humble himself in subordinate obedience to the father. To turn the stones into bread without the express will of the Father would be an act of ***independent sovereignty*** (cf. Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, p. 28; Vos, p. 363). God would supply Jesus’ need in his own good time and in his own way, but in the meantime, starvation would accomplish the purpose God intended. Quite often, we plead for deliverance from physical needs before we learn the spiritual lessons that these needs are designed to teach us.

While focusing on the similarity between the temptation of Jesus with that of Israel, we should not miss the lessons that we should learn from the passage, for Jesus was tempted in every way we are yet without sin (Heb. 4: 15). One of the most fundamental temptations of this life is to put the physical ahead of the spiritual. When our stomachs are satisfied, we tend to be content even when our relationship to God is suffering. David said in Ps. 42: 1, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God.” Every believer should know something of the pangs of thirst David was talking about, though we may have never known them—or ever will—in the same degree as David. Material things alone do not satisfy the human soul though they may serve to distract us, for a time, away from our spiritual pain. The US is the richest nation on earth yet it also has the highest rate of suicide in the world. There is a yearning in the human heart which craves something more substantial than bread or money. Sadly, sinful man does not take the Bible seriously enough to believe that these material things are inadequate for every need, and he does not know where to go for satisfaction when these things inevitably fail him. While some are living in abundance, they are starving spiritually without knowing where to go for spiritual bread. The Lord’s Supper teaches us in a very tangible way that Jesus is the bread of life, and if we eat this bread (assimilate Jesus into our lives by faith) we will not go spiritually hungry, but will be satisfied. Physical suffering, even the suffering of temptation, can be a means of spiritual blessing, and blessing is always God’s purpose for it in the lives of believers (James 1: 2-4; Rom. 8: 28-30).

## 2. The Second Temptation

The pinnacle of the temple was the highest point of the temple some 450 feet above the Kidron Valley, and since the temple was a public place, Satan was tempting Jesus into a public display of his power (Chamblin, p. 28). Cleverly, Satan uses scripture *out of* context to assure Jesus that God will rescue him from all danger. Using Scripture *in* context, Jesus counters by comparing this temptation to the one encountered by Israel at Massah (Deut. 6: 16; Ex. 17: 1-7). On that occasion, the Israelites had grumbled to Moses that he had brought them out of Egypt to kill them with thirst, a foolish accusation given the miraculous deliverance from Egypt. Further, it was not at its foundation an accusation against Moses but against God himself. ***The testing on this occasion was an effort to force God into action to prove that he could be trusted***—“How do we know that we can trust God for our needs? We are now thirsty, so let him prove he loves us by giving us water to drink!” It was an effort to *manipulate* God into performing in accordance with their desires—the autonomous will of man forcing God to conform His will to man’s will. God then becomes the servant to the man rather than the man becoming servant to God. ***But Jesus already knew that his Father was completely reliable and trustworthy, and he did not need to arrange a test case to determine this.*** He knew his Father intimately (Chamblin, p. 29).

The context in Ex. 17 is completely different from the one in Mal. 3: 10 in which the Lord *invites* his people to test him. In that context, the testing was based on the foundation of positive trust that God would do exactly as he had promised to do—to pour out a blessing until it overflows if we trust him. We are invited on that basis to put God to the test in accomplishing his *express promises* to us given in his word; we are not invited to devise tests of our own to ensure that God performs in a *specific way* to meet our needs. In other words, ***we cannot dictate the terms of our deliverance.*** In Ex. 17, the testing was not invited, but sprang from the root of distrust in the express promises of God to deliver his people. He had already demonstrated his willingness to save Israel on many occasions: the plagues which destroyed Egypt; the deliverance through the Red sea, etc. How much evidence did Israel need to convince them that God would protect them and provide for them no matter what difficult situations they were facing?

Jumping from the temple to prove God’s providential protection would not differ from the unbelief of the Israelites at Massah. It might be considered by many as a grandiose (impressive) display of Jesus’ faith in God’s preservation on one specific occasion, but it would fail to exhibit the prolonged and steady trust of His Father that Jesus enjoyed on a daily basis. In Vos’ words,

And yet, while a momentary abandon to faith, the venture would have been inspired by shrinking from a protracted life of faith. In the sequel our Lord would have been led on in His ministry not by an ever-renewed forth-putting of the same act of trust, that God would preserve Him, but by the remembrance of this one supreme experiment, which rendered further trust superfluous [unnecessary]. It would have involved an impious experimenting with the dependability of God. Afterwards His sense of safety would have depended not on the promise of God, but on the demonstration solicited by Himself (*Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*, p. 363).

Once again, we see ourselves in this temptation experience, for we are prone to force God to demonstrate his trustworthiness in ways which are dictated by us. “Can we trust him? Let him prove himself by delivering us from this specific trial!” If God yielded to such “tests”, we would

be constantly forcing him to conform to our standards of protection, making him our servant—our “genie in a bottle” (according to the Persian myth of having a supernatural servant, living in a bottle, who responds to our every command). Graciously, God will not yield to our whims but will sovereignly place us in “the valley of the shadow of death” giving us an opportunity to believe that somehow, according to his wisdom, he will make a “table for us in the presence of our enemies”.

### 3. *The Third Temptation*

The third temptation most specifically *encourages Jesus to bypass the sufferings of the cross and assume his kingdom in another way—by means of a “short cut”* (Chamblin, unpublished class syllabus on Matthew, p. 29). This is what constituted the real temptation for Christ—a means of bypassing the cross, its suffering and separation from the Father. Yet, to worship Satan would itself constitute separation from the Father, *eternal* separation rather than *temporary*. While the Israelites imagined it possible to serve not only Yahweh but many other deities, Jesus recognizes that worship belongs exclusively to God alone, who alone is the true God. There can be no divided loyalties, as the first commandment makes clear. We cannot worship Satan and God; we cannot worship Christ and evil spirits; and we cannot worship ourselves and God, for the worship of self is the same as Satan worship. If Satan can get us to worship self, he has already accomplished his goals, for this was essentially the temptation of Christ, to abandon his worship of the Father and the accomplishment of his will, and instead, receive his kingdom *independent of the Father*.

The offer of the kingdoms of this world was essentially the offer of a materialistic kingdom of wealth and riches, the same kingdom that most unbelievers are looking for. Thus, in this temptation we have the fundamental counterpart of Satan’s continual offer to men to have their own materialistic kingdom of mammon and power—for money and power always go together—without the constraints of God’s sovereignty and law. This temptation must have been on Jesus’ mind when he urged his disciples not to worry about food and clothing, but to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. If they would do this, they would be given the things they truly needed (Matt. 6: 24).

Christ in his humiliation did not come to do his own will but the will of the Father who sent him. By coming in submission to His Father, Jesus imitated the kind of kingdom God had desired for man at the creation—the vice-regency in which man ruled on earth under a greater sovereign, the Lord himself in whose image he had been made. By listening to Satan, Adam abdicated (gave up) the kingdom God had given him for a different kingdom, the one promised him by Satan who said, “You will be as God”, making independent decisions yourself and subject to no other. By yielding to Satan’s lie—for that is what it was, and is—Adam fell from his proper place as vice-regent under God and entered into this imaginary kingdom which did not measure up to the promises made for it. Rather than ending in self-actualization (“you will be as God”), it ended in man’s ruin and death.

Despite the failure of this experiment, ever since the fall men have attempted to build their own kingdoms—not under God—but independent of God and his rule. The Tower of Babel in Gen. 11 is a supreme example of man’s ambition to “make a name for himself” and to “reach into

heaven” in defiance of God. If ever there was anyone who had the right to establish his own independent kingdom, Jesus did, but he declined in favor of a kingdom under the Father and in subjection to his law. The only way he could accomplish this was through suffering so that the legal requirements of man’s rebellion could be paid.

Naturally, the kind of kingdom man wants is one without personal suffering in which he is served by his subjects. It is also a kingdom in which the sovereign rights of God are left out of the picture, one in which man is a law unto himself with no constraints other than those which are self-imposed. The political history of the world is replete (plentifully supplied) with examples of powerful men who built their kingdoms upon the bodies of those who opposed them. Even many who began well ended up as tyrants who served themselves by oppressing others. Their kingdoms were inaugurated and built upon Satanic lies, for Satan is the father of lies. In the end, the idealistic promises of a kingdom without God never materialize; such kingdoms devour not only the oppressed but also the oppressor (Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Stalin, Idi Amin, Robert Magaube). By resisting Satan, Jesus established a kingdom under God *in which he who serves others the most is greatest in the kingdom* (Matt. 23: 11). It is not a kingdom of the survival of the fittest, but one in which those who are strong help the weak to survive (Rom. 15: 1).

### ***C. Jesus’ Early Ministry according to John—Jn. 1: 19-4: 42***

This portion of *John* enables us to determine what Jesus was doing between his baptism and temptation until he began his extended Galilean ministry. “He withdrew into Galilee” (Matt. 4: 12b). From what place did he withdraw? For a short time he was in Judea (Jn. 2: 13) where he cleansed the temple for the first time. (He cleansed it again during his final trip to Jerusalem.) During this year he also met Andrew and Simon Peter from the city of Bethsaida in Galilee (Jn. 1: 44) on the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee where the Jordan River enters the sea. Remember that Andrew and Peter were fishermen, as were James and John, sons of Zebedee who were also partners of Peter and Andrew (Lk. 5: 10). Philip, whom Jesus met the next day along with Nathanael, was also from Bethsaida (1: 44). Nathanael (also called Bartholomew; Matt. 10: 3) was from Cana (Jn. 21: 2). Another disciple is mentioned in Jn. 1: 35, 40 who met Jesus on the same day as Andrew and Peter. Out of modesty, he is unnamed, for he is the author of John’s gospel, the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn. 20: 2).

Thus far, we have met five of Jesus’ disciples (Andrew, Peter, John, Philip and Nathanael) during the first year of his ministry, the year of obscurity when few knew who he was. All five of these men were Galileans, not Judeans, from the portion of Palestine despised by many Judeans because of the mixed population of Jews and Gentiles and because of the tendency of the Galileans to mix the worship of Yahweh with idol worship.

Jesus also performed his first recorded miracle in Cana of Galilee (2: 1-11), converting 120 gallons (2: 6) of water into 120 gallons (480 liters) of wine. (It was a big party, and yes, this was real wine which could make you drunk; vv. 9-10.) After this miracle he went down to Capernaum (2: 12) where he stayed a few days without doing any miracles. He then made his way to Jerusalem where he cleansed the temple for the first time (cf. Matt. 21: 12 for the second time). While in Jerusalem he performed miraculous signs which caused many to believe in him

(2: 23), but apparently they believed only in a very superficial way (2: 24-25). He also met Nicodemus on this occasion and talked with him about the new birth (3: 1-21).

John's last testimony concerning Christ is found in 3: 22-36 (see above). This testimony takes place *after* John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan and *before* John is imprisoned (3: 24, 26). The words of v. 26, "He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have born witness" refer to the baptism of Jesus and the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus which John recounted in Jn. 1: 31-32. Shortly after this testimony John is imprisoned by Herod and later beheaded.

From Jn. 4: 3 we learn that Jesus departs "again" into Galilee. Remember he had lived in Nazareth of Galilee for thirty years (Lk. 2: 39; 3: 23) before settling down in Capernaum, where he kept his base of ministry (Matt. 4: 13). He had also visited Bethsaida, where he first met five of his disciples, and Cana where he turned the water into wine. These two cities are in Galilee.

He leaves Judea heading for Galilee (4: 3), but he must travel through Samaria on his way to Galilee (4: 4). At this point in his ministry he has a conversation with the adulterous woman of Samaria (4: 7-42), a very large portion of Scripture which points to Jesus' universal ministry which included the despised Samaritan half-breeds—part Jew and part Gentile. The conversation also highlights the importance of women in Jesus' ministry who at this point in history were essentially marginalized (set aside as unimportant) even among the Jews. This story is especially important to illustrate Jesus' willingness to ignore the established cultural norms (rules) of his time. The Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans, and if Jesus had wished to be popular with the Jews he would never have approached this Samaritan. But further, although it was customary for women to draw water for men, it was not customary for men to have prolonged conversations with women in public. Jesus often threw caution to the wind when dealing with people. Another specific interest of John is his portrayal of Jesus dealing with individuals rather than large crowds. He was not simply a public speaker, but a personal evangelist as well.

For the most part Jesus was not well-received in Judea, for "a prophet has no honor in his own country" (4: 44). By "his own country" Jesus was speaking primarily of Jerusalem as the center of the religious life of Judaism (Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 133). When he came into Galilee he was received by those who had seen him perform miracles in Jerusalem at the feast (v. 45, cf. 2: 23), most of whom were probably only superficial "believers" to whom Jesus was not entrusting himself (2: 45). We cannot always interpret NT words like "believed" or "received" as genuine belief (cf. Acts 8: 13-24).

### ***VIII. The Year of Popularity—The Early Galilean Ministry***

#### ***A. The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry—Matt. 4: 12-25; Mk. 1: 14-15; Lk. 4: 14-15; Jn. 4: 43-54***

It is difficult to piece together the narratives of the Synoptics into a coherent harmony. This is because each author had his own specific purpose dictating what he would include and what he would leave out. Furthermore, the writers are not constrained to report the events in strictly chronological order. To get a fuller picture we must also use John's account.

It appears that after leaving Judea, Jesus came back to Cana where he heals a nobleman's son at a distance. The son was sick in Capernaum (Jn. 4: 46-54). John tells us that this was the second sign Jesus had performed in Galilee (v. 54). He had already performed signs in Jerusalem at the feast of Passover between the miracle in Galilee and this miracle in Cana (applied in Capernaum).

After healing the nobleman's son, Jesus establishes his base for ministry in Capernaum, thus fulfilling prophecy (Matt. 4: 14-17). The area mentioned, Zebulun and Naphtali, was "Galilee of the Gentiles" because of its large population of pagans. It was the northern part of Palestine and, therefore, had been subjected to all the invading armies which devastated Israel and Judah (Syria, Assyria, and also Babylon which, although east of Israel, invaded from the north). They had also been the first areas of Israel to be heavily populated by Gentiles relocated by Assyria from other nations into Palestine. Thus, the region where Jesus chooses to conduct *most* of his earthly ministry is a region *mixed* with Gentiles and Jews, a foreshadowing of the gospel being given to the Gentiles, a nation who will produce the fruit of the kingdom (Matt. 21: 43; 8: 10-12).

This appears contradictory to his instructions to the twelve apostles later on not to go to the Gentiles or the half-breed Samaritans (Matt. 10: 5-6), but he gave this restriction *temporarily* to emphasize the unique privileges which Israel had always enjoyed as a nation called of God. He certainly did not exclude the Gentiles during his ministry (Matt. 8: 28-34—the demoniac) or the Samaritans (Jn. 4—the Samaritan woman). At the same time, the primary focus of the gospel to "the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1: 16) is *generally observed* during his ministry. Matthew alone records this statement from Jesus as an evangelistic tool to reach his primarily Jewish audience (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 456).

We notice from v. 17 that the content of Jesus' preaching is essentially the same as that of John the Baptist. The only difference is that John had carried out his ministry primarily in Judea and not in Galilee (Hendriksen, p.244). After coming to Capernaum, Jesus calls his first disciples which is followed by the incident of the demoniac in the synagogue.

### ***B. The Calling of the First Disciples—Matt. 4: 18-22; Mk. 1: 16-20; Lk. 5: 1-11(?)***

Jesus has already been introduced to five of his disciples—Andrew, John, Peter, Philip and Nathanael (Jn. 1: 35-51; see notes above), but on the basis on the synoptic texts above, it was an introduction which ended in the disciples going back to their previous occupations. Neither Matthew nor Mark reports the event of Lk. 5: 1-11 in which they catch two boat-loads of fish. It is clear from the language that Matthew and Mark relate the same event (cf. Matt. 4: 18 and Mk. 1: 16 where both passages speak of "walking by the sea" and the "casting nets") while Luke reports an event which occurs later.

We may ask why these four disciples responded immediately to Jesus' call. The reason is that this is not the first call and also that they were disciples of John the Baptist who familiarized them with Jesus' ministry. If Luke 5: 1-11 is a separate event (Hendriksen argues persuasively that it is—*Matthew*, pp. 245-246), then the disciples continue fishing from time to time after their calling in Matt. 4 until they leave this occupation permanently in Luke 5.

Later on Matthew (Levi) is called by Jesus to join Peter, Andrew, James, and John who apparently are present when Jesus dines with Matthew in his home (Lk. 5: 27-30; Matt. 9: 9-13). Notice from the text that the Pharisees and scribes are complaining that "his disciples" eat and drink with "tax-gatherers and sinners", a reference to Matthew and his friends. (If Jesus was concerned about being popular with the Pharisees, he does not show this concern by choosing Matthew, a hated tax-collector.) The other eight apostles are chosen from a larger group of disciples after Jesus spends a whole night in prayer on the mountain. The text says that "He called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he named as apostles" (Lk. 6:12-13). Thus, the apostles were disciples who were selected out of a larger group of disciples, but this does not imply that Jesus had delayed his final evaluation until the calling of the twelve. It is significant that Jesus spends the whole night in prayer before making his selection. In his humanity and subordinate position to the Father, he was dependent upon guidance from the Father in making his selection.

The number twelve is not accidental but symbolically represents the twelve tribes of Israel. Christ came to inaugurate a new covenant and to establish a new beginning with his church, the "new Israel" including both Jews and Gentiles. He did not sever (cut) connections with the past. When he told his disciples that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church (Matt. 16: 18, *ekklesia*—"assembly"), they must have associated the word with the "congregation" of Israel (Acts 7: 38—*ekklesia*). When Jesus promised the success of his church, the NT church was not in existence, but must have been understood by the disciples as the continuation of the old.

Of the first four disciples whom Jesus calls, three of them—Peter, James and John—become part of his inner circle (Lk. 9: 28; Mk. 14: 33; Matt. 17: 1). Jesus develops a close relationship particularly with John, a relationship which John acknowledges in his gospel in a very modest way without actually giving his name (Jn. 13: 23; 19: 26; 20: 2; 21: 7, 20). As Jesus was hanging on the cross, he entrusted the care of his mother, Mary, to John instead of any of his brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (or Jude—cf. Matt. 13: 55-56; Jude 1; Gal. 1: 19), who (judging from their absence at the cross) had not as yet come to trust him as their Savior (Jn. 19: 26; cf. Matt. 12: 47-50; Jn. 7: 3-5). James and Jude later came to the faith and wrote the two NT books bearing their names. James eventually emerged as the leader in the Jerusalem church along with Peter (Acts 15). Nothing is ever said in the Scriptures about the faith of the other two brothers or sisters. Jesus himself contradicted the proverb, "blood is thicker than water" (i.e. blood relationships are more important than those based on faith—cf. Matt. 12: 48-50). Relationships based on genuine faith in Christ are more fundamental and closer than those based merely on genetics, and he warned everyone that he had not come to bring "peace on earth" but would cause deep divisions within family relationships (Matt. 10: 34-36).

The professing Hutus who participated in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis in Rwanda proved on two accounts that they had no understanding whatever of the Christian faith. They not only

committed murder against their fellow man but they murdered those who professed the same Christian faith they professed. Their tribal “loyalties” were more important to them than Christ who will disown them before his Father in heaven short of repentance (Matt. 10: 32-37). On the other hand, how wonderful it is to have family members who are also genuine Christians—a double blessing! Peter and Andrew were biological brothers as well as brothers in Christ, as were James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

From Matthew 10: 2-4 we learn the names of the other eight disciples: Philip and Bartholomew (also called Nathanael), Thomas and Matthew (also called Levi), James and Thaddeus (also called Judas), Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. The twelve names are also recorded in Mk. 3: 16-19; Lk. 6: 14-16; and Acts 1: 13, 26. They appear to be in groups of four (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 450-451).

*Jesus’ choice of disciples is a distinguishing feature of his ministry* and is a lesson in itself. Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen, not teachers and doctors of the Law. Those in Palestine who were teachers and experts in the Scriptures, with few exceptions, opposed Jesus. One can only imagine the archbishop of the Church of Uganda, or a distinguished preacher in the Presbyterian Church of Uganda, going to the beaches of Lake Victoria and choosing simple uneducated fishermen as his disciples. Or perhaps he would choose carpenters or bricklayers in Mbarara. People would think this a very strange and foolish choice of disciples not calculated to win any influence with local and national leaders.

However, most people do not understand how the Lord accomplishes his purposes. For his disciples he was primarily looking for faith and commitment—Judas Iscariot excepted—and not superior education, intelligence or reputation. This does not imply that education is not important (after all, I am writing this as a teacher), but education or intelligence is not the deciding factor for a person’s fitness for ministry. Education is necessary—the disciples were “learners” who sat at Jesus’ feet—but it doesn’t have to be a formal education from a Bible institute or seminary. A humble disciple who immerses himself in the personal study of the Bible can excel the most educated theologian. A certain degree of intelligence is also necessary for “learning” to be possible, but Jesus obviously didn’t require the greatest of minds.

Neither does exceptional intelligence and education *disqualify* a person. Arguably the greatest apostle of them all was the Apostle Paul—chosen by Christ on the road to Damascus and “untimely born” (1 Cor. 15: 8)—who was a student of the renowned Gamaliel (Acts 5: 34; 22: 3) and was the quintessential (most important manifestation) theologian of the NT who penned almost *one-third* of the NT. He himself said of believers that there were “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” (1 Cor. 1: 26), but he did not say that there were *not any* in this category.

Matthew was a tax-collector who worked for the Roman government in collecting the taxes hated by all the Jews. Ironically, Simon the Zealot was part of the political movement who wished to overthrow the Roman government by any means necessary, including violence and conspiracy. The zealots refused to pay taxes to Caesar on the grounds that this violated their religion. Only if they exercised complete autonomy (independence) with respect to the Roman government would God inaugurate the Messianic age (J. H. Bratt, *The Zondervan Pictorial*



*Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 1036-1037). Thus, among the disciples there were two people, Matthew and Simon the Zealot, on philosophically opposing sides of the question of how the Jew should relate to the Roman government. Yet, the person of Christ and his teaching imposed themselves so forcefully upon these disciples that they could bury their differences in favor of the unifying truth of the gospel.

Added to their number were the two brothers, James and John—“Sons of Thunder” (Mk. 3: 17)—who didn’t quite understand that Jesus had not yet come for judgment but for salvation (Lk. 9: 51-56) or that his kingdom had nothing to do with making “big men” but giving up one’s life in self-service (Mk. 10: 35-38). Then there is the impetuous (impulsive) Peter who often spoke without thinking (Matt. 17: 4), acted without considering the consequences (Jn. 18: 10), or made promises he didn’t have the courage to keep (Jn. 13: 37; Mk. 14: 29). Philip and Andrew, for their part did not comprehend that if Jesus could turn water into wine—a miracle they no doubt had heard about since following Jesus—then he could also feed 5000 people with a little bit of food (Jn. 6: 5-9).

Forgetting the thief and traitor, Judas Iscariot, none of the eleven disciples would have been voted “Man of the Year” in the *Palestinian Times* magazine. A.M. Fairbairn’s assessment is accurate, “The marvel is not that fishermen of Galilee conquered the world, but that Jesus of Nazareth made them its conquerors. The wonder lies in the making of the men, not in their doings” (*Studies in the Life of Christ*, quoted in Harrison, p. 137). By all accounts they were quite ordinary men with multiple faults and weaknesses. But what else is new? They are ancient reflections of Jesus’ **present** disciples—weak, impulsive, sometimes over-confident, at other times fearful and timid, possessing average intelligence and education and often less than average. There are notable exceptions like Paul, men who are extremely gifted whom God has given to His church to teach others. God brings more glory to himself by building his kingdom with those who are not likely to succeed in the world’s eyes. A very fleeting glance at the book of *Acts* proves that big **people** are not needed, only a big **God** who transforms little people into something they would never be without him

Chamblin has noted from the Matthew 4 passage that the disciples “do not volunteer their services; he calls them” (*Matthew*, p. 31, unpublished class notes, emphasis his). The call to discipleship, therefore, is the sovereign call of God to those who would not otherwise come. ***This was a distinct departure from the common Jewish practice of the pupil seeking out the rabbi*** (Harrison, pp. 136-137). Furthermore, following Jesus was more fundamentally related to their commitment to Jesus as a **person** rather than commitment to his **teaching** which comes later (Chamblin, p. 31). The witness of their former teacher, John the Baptist, and the weight of Jesus’ person are the two factors which first attracted the disciples to him.

Calling them to be “fishers of men” is indicative of Jesus’ ability to **contextualize** his message and speak the language everyone could understand. To be caught like fish appears to have a negative meaning, but it becomes clear that the net of the gospel is being thrown into the sea of men to rescue them from the depths of sin and darkness. They are being caught in darkness in order to set them free into the light. The decisiveness of the disciples in leaving their nets and following Christ is indicated in the verb used (***aphiemi***; v. 20), which is expressive “not merely of departure [from their nets] but ***abandonment***” and the aorist tense of both verbs indicating definitive action (Chamblin, p. 31, emphasis his). (However, see the argument above that Luke

5: 1-11 may be a separate occurrence in which case the disciples may not have completely left their fishing at this time.) Two actions are indicated, both positive (“following”) and negative (“leaving”) (Chamblin, p. 31). As disciples of Christ, we do not have the liberty of clinging to the old life while embracing the new. There will be some things we will be able to keep legitimately, but others we may have to leave for the sake of Christ: jobs, hobbies, entertainments, possessions, even family members either physically or psychologically (Matt. 19: 27-29—where the verb *aphiemi* is also used in the aorist tense).

***C. Miracles in Capernaum: The Healing of the Demoniac in the Synagogue, Peter’s Mother-in-Law, and Other Sick and Demon-Possessed—Matt. 4: 23-25; 8: 14-17; Lk. 4: 31-44; Mk. 1: 21-39***

The Luke passage appears to have a close connection with the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Lk. 4: 38—yes, Peter the first “Pope” of the Roman Catholic Church (?) was married). Notice the text in v. 38, “And he arose and **left the synagogue, and entered Simon’s home.**” Further, the context of Mk. 1: 28-34 does not make sense without its connection with the calling of the disciples earlier, for v. 21 says, “And **they went into Capernaum.**” The pronoun “they” must have the disciples of vv. 16-20 as its antecedent. The incident of the demon-possessed man occurs in connection with Jesus entering the synagogue in Capernaum both in *Mark* and *Luke*. An examination of the *Mark* and *Luke* passages will reveal their similarity, especially the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (compare Mk. 1: 27-28 with Lk. 4: 36-37; Mk. 1: 29 with Lk. 4: 38; Mk. 1: 32 with Lk. 4: 40). Notice in both Mk. and Lk. that they leave the synagogue before coming into the home of Peter’s mother-in-law. While a strict chronology seems to be preserved in *Mark* and *Luke* between the events in the Capernaum synagogue and visiting the mother-in-law, there seems to be no close chronological connection between the healing of the centurion’s son and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Matt. 8: 5-17).

It is very likely that the events of Matt. 4: 23-25 are the events reported in Mk. 1: 28 and Lk. 4: 37. Matthew reports in that passage that Jesus is “going about in all Galilee” doing several things: teaching in their synagogues, preaching, healing all diseases, and delivering demon-possessed people. For further confirmation of this chronology, see Hendriksen (p. 387) who maintains that healing of the leper (Matt. 8: 2-4), the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (8: 14-17), and the healing of the paralytic (9: 2-13) all occur chronologically **before** the Sermon on the Mount while the healing of the centurion (8: 5-13), the test of discipleship incident and the calming of the sea (8: 18-27), and the healing of the Gadarene demoniac (8: 28-9: 1) occur **after** the Sermon on the Mount.

***1. Healing the Demoniac (Mk. 1: 21-29a; Lk. 4: 31-37)***

We will, therefore, pick up the story with the healing of the demoniac in the synagogue in Capernaum just after the calling of the first disciples. Jesus’ victory over demonic spirits was an important part of his earthly ministry (cf. Matt. 9:33; Matt. 17:18; Mk. 7:26; Lk. 4:33; Lk. 8:29; Lk. 9:42; Lk. 11:14). He came in order to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3: 8) which included liberating those who had in a peculiar, devastating way, come under his power. Demon-possession served God’s purposes as a vivid demonstration that **everyone** is under the power of Satan if he is not savingly joined to Jesus Christ. Were it not for God’s restraining

grace upon the powers of evil, every one of us would be totally overcome and debilitated by its power.

Casting out demons was tangible evidence that Christ had invaded the dominion of Satan and had begun the process of breaking his power on earth (Lk. 10: 18). We should observe that although the people were not clear about Jesus' identity, the demons were very clear—he was “the Holy One of God” (Lk. 4: 34; Mk. 1: 24). Jesus was not at all flattered that they acknowledged who he was, for he understood that the demons were not confessing him as Lord but attempting to gain mastery over him by declaring his name (Lane, p. 74; cf. Gen. 32: 29 which possibly is a mild rebuke to Jacob for asking the angel's name). Besides, he did not wish, nor need, to be heralded by the very demons he came to destroy. He therefore rebuked them, and told them to be quiet—“Shut up!” (Lk. 4: 35, 41).

To have allowed the defensive utterance of the demon to go unrebuked would have been to compromise the purpose for which Jesus came into the world, to confront Satan and strip him of his power. As such, this initial act of exorcism in the ministry of Jesus is programmatic [part of the program] of the sustained conflict with the demons which is a marked characteristic in the Marcan presentation of the gospel (Lane, p. 75).

The demons not only knew him, but they were also terrified of his purpose, “Have you come to destroy us?” (Mk. 1: 24; Lk. 4: 34) They also obeyed him, although unwillingly (Mk. 1: 26; Lk. 4: 35).

It is foolish for modern expositors to explain away demon possession as psychological neuroses (mental disturbances) or other diseases which ancient people naively identified as demons. Jesus' confrontations were with real demons, and anyone who refuses to acknowledge the existence of the devil and demons might as well refuse to believe in a supernatural God. Indeed, many who argue this way *don't* believe in a supernatural God who can work outside the boundaries of natural science. All the Biblical narratives make clear the distinction between Jesus' healing of *diseases* and his exorcism of *demonic spirits*. Diseases don't talk back, and they don't cringe at the presence of Christ. It should not be surprising that at this unique and climactic time in history—the coming of the Messiah—demonic activity would be at its highest pitch. We have no historical proof that demons have ever manifested themselves as aggressively at any other time in the history of the world (cf. Geldenhuys, p. 174, although I think he seriously overstates his case by understating demon possession in the present age).

Thus, at the very beginning of Mark's gospel, we discover that the defeat of the devil's kingdom is a fundamental part of Jesus' agenda. His kingdom will not be realized as long as Satan's kingdom is still standing. At the same time, we must not force a precise time-table upon his work, for the kingdom comes gradually in stages and not all at once. Though Satan is in some sense a defeated foe because of Christ's atoning work, he is not yet utterly and finally defeated but is fighting back like a mad dog on a very long chain (Rev. 20: 1-3). His complete destruction is something reserved for the second coming of Christ. In the meantime, Christ's has left his disciples on earth (the church) to fight the devil, and we are promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against us (Matt. 16: 18).

We should also observe at this point that one reason the people recognized Jesus as one who spoke with authority is that he also had power over demonic spirits (Lk. 4: 36-37; Mk. 1: 27-28). Apparently, no one else had this power or else Jesus would have been only one powerful teacher and exorcist among many. Jesus' power over the devil, as well as his ability to perform many other miracles, attracted attention to his teaching about the kingdom of God—his primary purpose in coming (Mk. 1: 38; Lk. 4: 43). If his *main* purpose had been to cast out demons and perform other miracles of healing, then Jesus would have spent much more time and energy doing so and less time teaching and preaching, but these tasks were only secondary to the *message* of the kingdom of God—deliverance from sin. There were conceivably many whom Jesus healed who eventually died and went to hell. They wanted only physical healing, or bread to eat, but not a relationship to Christ. Such was the short-sightedness of the nine lepers (Lk. 17: 12-19) and many of the multitude whom Jesus fed (Jn. 6: 26).

Christ's emphasis on teaching should not be interpreted as indifference to physical suffering, quite the contrary (Matt. 14: 14). He spent a great deal of his time healing the sick, and any Christian ministry which hopes to provide salt and light (Matt. 5: 13-14) must not be indifferent to physical needs. Works of charity and mercy accomplish the same purpose which they accomplished in the ministry of Jesus—they point to the truth of the gospel message. God created man body and soul; sin has affected both, and the good news is a message which brings healing to both. Christians are not like Buddhists who acquiesce to (accept) physical suffering fatalistically with no view to resolving it. Consequently, Buddhists are not known for disaster relief or the ministry of mercy while Christians were historically the first to establish hospitals.

At the same time, we must learn from Jesus' emphasis and not "get the cart before the horse". Proclaiming the gospel is the first priority which drives the ministry of mercy while showing compassion for the poor and sick gives credibility to the message. If we are not concerned for people, "how does the love of God abide in [us]?" (1 Jn. 3: 17 with Gal. 6: 10). But the ministry of mercy should not so dominate missions that we never get around to preaching the gospel which saves eternally and not just temporarily. The error of modern day liberal theology and "liberation theology"—which does not liberate (Michael Novak, *Will It Liberate: Questions about Liberation Theology*)—is that it is short-sighted. All of those whom Jesus fed and healed eventually died, and then the important thing was not the food or the healing, but whether they responded in faith. It is not a case of "either/or" but "both/and". A gospel which separates the body and the soul is a truncated (limited) gospel, and a "gospel" which does not preach Christ crucified as the supreme solution to the human problem is a heresy not worthy of the name.

## **2. Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law (Mk. 1: 29b-31; Lk. 4: 38-39)**

Once again, notice the close connection with this episode and the healing of the demoniac (v. 29). We could interpret this event as just another healing event in the ministry of Jesus, but it is included in all three Synoptic Gospels. We may ask why. Perhaps the writers' purpose was to show the blessings which come to whole families when they come in contact with the Savior. Jesus promised later that all who left fathers and mothers would be appropriately rewarded (Matt. 19: 27-29). Peter was now taking much time away from his occupation, and his future ministry with the Lord would require absence from his wife and family. Nevertheless, there were blessings which even now attended his commitment to the Lord; his relationship with

Christ resulted in the healing of his wife's mother. Martha, Mary, and their brother, Lazarus, would also later be on the receiving end of their relationship to Jesus when he raises Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11: 1-45).

It is interesting that in the Lk. account Jesus "rebuked" the fever as if it were evil personified. Jesus, above all people, realized that sickness, although not always caused by the personal sin of the sick person, was the result of sin in the world. Luke wishes to show us the relationship between sin that has "infected" the world and the evil consequences of sin. When Christ returns to restore the universe to God's intended purpose, death and the sickness that results in death will be rendered powerless (1 Cor. 15: 55-56), forever and finally "rebuked" by the Lord who is life indeed.

### **3. *Healing the masses (Mk.1: 32-34; Lk. 4: 40-44; Matt. 4: 23-25)***

Jesus continues his healing into the evening of the Sabbath (Lk. 4: 40; Mk. 1: 32), for he had healed the demoniac and Peter's mother-in-law on the Sabbath (Lk. 4: 31; Mk. 1: 21). Many were coming to him for healing for the news of the demoniac in the synagogue had spread "into all the surrounding district of Galilee" (Mk. 1: 28; Lk. 4: 37).

Casting out demons was a large part of the evening's work, demonstrating that demon-possession was very common *at this time*. When exorcised (cast out), the demons would declare that he was the Son of God (4: 41) but Jesus would not allow them to speak for long (1: 34). (See comments above). Later on he did not wish even for healed victims to tell others about him, but for a different reason we will discuss later.

### **4. *Rest followed by Continued Ministry in Other Cities in Galilee***

Jesus was truly human, and ministering to so many was very tiring. Sometimes he just had to get away privately before daylight and pray (Lk. 4: 42; Mk. 1: 35). As a man he also was not omnipresent (everywhere at all times) and had to choose strategically where he could be best used for the kingdom of God. If he stayed in Capernaum, he would have to omit important ministry in other parts of Galilee. For this reason, he chooses to go to other cities even though the crowds are still earnestly seeking him in Capernaum (1: 38; 4: 43). There were very many of these towns or cities which Jesus visited each having about 15,000 residents owing to the rich farmland (Lane, *Mark*, p. 83).

There is an apparent discrepancy between Mark, who says that Jesus continues his ministry in *Galilee* (1: 30); and Luke, who says that he continues preaching in *Judea* (4: 44.) The discrepancy is resolved by the fact that Mark is using the term "Judea" in the wider sense of the entire region of Palestine (Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 179, footnote).

#### ***(Excursus: Temporal Connections in the Synoptic Gospels)***

It may be helpful for us to notice the difference in how the gospel writers move from one event in the ministry of Jesus to another. For example in Lk. 4: 38, we find the following temporal connection: "And He arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's home." The synagogue referred to is the one in Capernaum (vv. 31-33). The same temporal connection occurs in Mk. 1: 29, "And

immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” The synagogue is the one in 1: 21.

Another temporal connection occurs in Mk. 1: 32, “And when evening had come....” What evening is he talking about? The evening of the Sabbath which he refers to in 1: 21. This same transition is found in Lk. 4: 40, “And while the sun was setting....”—that is, setting on the Sabbath day in v. 31. Notice also in Lk. 4: 42 we read, “And when day came....” In v. 40 the sun was setting, so we would naturally wish to interpret “when day came” as being the day after the setting of the sun in v. 40. In Mk. 1: 35 we read, “And in the early morning, while it was still dark....” which is the early daybreak after the evening of v. 32.

These temporal connections are not being pointed out to insult the reader’s intelligence as if they were hidden in the text, but for two reasons: First, such obvious statements are often missed when we are reading narrative portions of scripture, especially the gospels which are not written with a strict chronology of events. Second, they are pointed out precisely because they are obvious and serve as examples of transitional statements which allow us to keep the chronology of the text together *when the Biblical writer wishes us to keep it together*. Mark wanted us to know that the events of Mk. 1: 21-38 is a single chronological unit. Luke wanted us to know that the events of Lk. 4: 31-43 is a single chronological unit and may begin as far back as 4: 16 when he preaches in Nazareth. When we take note of the chronology—when it is given to us—then we can preach the passage more effectively by taking this particular context of the passage into consideration.

On the other hand, our wish for clear chronological order must be tempered (freed from excess) since we often don’t have clear temporal connections from the authors which allow us to discover the timing of the event. Renowned scholars differ in their analysis about the chronology of certain events. Robert H. Gundry and A. T. Robertson, on the one hand, differ from D.A. Carson, William Hendriksen, and Donald Guthrie on the other about the chronology of Matthew’s dinner (Matt. 9: 10-17). So what is the amateur theologian (like myself) supposed to do? We must do what we are supposed to do. We study the text ourselves and see which theory is the most plausible. When the chronology is not clear, it is not important because the Biblical writer didn’t make it clear to us. The author is, instead, drawing our attention to a particular *theme*. For example, Mark is deals with Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth and the sending out of the twelve thematically. Just as Jesus, the Son of God, is rejected by men, so all of Christ’s disciples, including us, will experience a certain amount of rejection (v. 11).

As we have observed already in our study, the gospel writers are generally not too concerned for strict chronology, but write their material thematically. Because of the limitations of time, we cannot discuss why each author arranges his material as he does, but at least the student should be aware that the Synoptists do not follow a strict chronological order precisely because each author has something special to emphasize. Had they all followed a chronological order, there would have been a measure of redundancy (unnecessary repetition) to the gospels, a redundancy which is avoided because of their thematic approach.

This is evident because the Holy Spirit does not give us a “Harmony of the Gospels”. Instead, he gives us the one gospel of Jesus Christ written from four different perspectives. Nevertheless, this thematic approach does not forbid us from attempting to understand the timing of the events. It is, after all, the word of God which deserves our most diligent inquiry into the minute details which are not easily discovered. In this study, we are not looking at each gospel account separately but as the “synoptic gospels” (“seen together”), thus, we must make some effort in understanding some of the chronology as well as some of the differences in the way they arranged and reported the material. In

a study which covers so much material in one semester, it is difficult to do justice to each separate gospel account as well as the Synoptics taken as a whole.

***D. The Healing of the Leper—Matt. 8: 2-4; Mk. 1: 40-45; Lk. 5: 12-16***

When we come to the healing of the leper, clear temporal connections are not found in *any* of the Synoptics. In Matt. 8: 1, we find Jesus coming down off the mountain from which he had preached the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), and it would appear from the text that the leper confronts him immediately after he gets through with this sermon. But in Mark, the leper approaches Jesus sometime after he leaves Capernaum and begins doing miracles in other cities in Galilee (vv. 21, 39; note the words, “somewhere else”). Thus, the transition from v. 38 to v. 39 is a “weak” transition from a chronological point of view. We can’t really tell when this event takes place from *Matthew* or *Mark*. Luke is not helpful to this end, either, since he places the calling of the disciples (5: 1-11) between Jesus’ work in Galilee (“Judea” or the greater Palestine area—see notes above) and the healing of the leper. Matthew and Mark are more in agreement as to the timing of the event.

The important thing is that Jesus heals a *leper*—one who was a rejected member of society, ostracized (cut off) from the mainstream of social life. A leper was ceremonially unclean and was forced by Levitical law to live alone outside the camp (Lev. 13: 46). When the Jews occupied the Land of Canaan and began living in cities, lepers were forbidden to live within walled cities (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 492). Legislation also required that the leper identify himself with torn clothes, unkempt or disheveled hair, and his mouth covered up. Whenever he entered the city for purchasing food or other supplies, he must further identify himself by crying out, “Unclean! Unclean!” *Leviticus* devotes two full chapters (13-14) to the uncleanness of the leprous condition, the word “clean” appearing 25 times and the word “unclean” appearing 30 times.

The conclusion could be reached that the horrifying symptoms of the disease were reason enough for his isolation. Hendriksen, following the research of Drs. L.S. Huizenga and E.R. Kellersberger (both medical missionaries), writes that the disease begins with pain in certain parts of the body followed by numbness (no feeling). The skin loses its original color and becomes thick and scaly. Progressively the thickened, scaly areas develop into sores and ulcers because of the lack of blood supply. Fingers and toes begin to drop off. [This is partly due to the lack of nervous sensation which alerts the body to pain. Lepers have been known to harm themselves repeatedly with burns since they cannot feel the heat before serious injury.] The victim’s facial appearance is eventually affected as the skin around the eyes and ears is infected causing deep furrows or creases in the facial features, resembling that of lions. If the physical deformities were not enough to repel even the most compassionate of people, they also emit a very unpleasant odor furthering their ostracism from society (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 388). Hair, eyebrows, teeth, and fingernails drop off. As the disease progresses the nose falls off, and the eyes, tongue, and palate (roof of the mouth) deteriorate (S. H. Kellogg, *Leviticus*, pp. 328, 339, quoting the observations of Dr. William Thompson, medical missionary in Jerusalem during the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Even verbal communication with others becomes difficult as the deteriorating palate causes the speech to take on a grating quality (Hendriksen, p. 388). “...finally, the wretched victim sinks into the earth and disappears” (Thompson, quoted by Kellogg, p. 339).

Considering its devastation to the body and the gradualness of its deathly progress, the loathsomeness of the condition has little or no parallel in medical history, and this is probably the reason for the sanctions of the Levitical legislation, not the necessities of sanitation and containment. Kellogg argues convincingly that the disease is quarantined because of its resemblance to the nature and ravages of sin. The disease is very gradual and progressive, typifying the progressive nature of sin which affects man's fallen nature more and more as the life of sin continues (2 Tim. 3: 13). Leprosy also affects the whole man and the whole life of man. No part of man remains untouched—appearance, seeing, smelling, tasting, thinking, and feeling. The victim can cut himself with a knife or burn himself with fire and feel no pain. Likewise, progressive sin affects one's sensitivity to evil, and as it progresses in the heart the sins which once caused guilt and emotional pain no longer cause any distress at all. The condition of leprosy in ancient culture was incurable and fatal, and the victim was completely at the mercy of God for relief. So it is with the condition of sin—incurable except for God's intervening grace and inevitably leading to death (Kellogg, pp. 337-339). Finally, as the loathsomeness of the disease isolates the victim from the love of even his own family and friends, placing him "outside the camp" and separate from the common life of Israel, sin isolates the unforgiven sinner from the goodness and love of God—an unending quarantine in hell.

As the ideal picture of the ravages of sin, leprosy was used of God to visibly demonstrate the loathsomeness of the human condition, ravaged by the progressive deterioration of sin—a living death. Even the Levitical legislation itself presented the disease in this light by requiring the victim, as it were, to assume all the ordinary signs of mourning for the dead—uncovered head, crying aloud in the streets, clothes torn, mouth covered (cf. Lev. 10: 1-6; Ezek. 24: 17). As Kellogg solemnly observes, "...he is to regard himself, and all others are to regard him, as a dead man. As it were, he is a continual mourner at his own funeral" (p. 333; cf. Edersheim, p. 491). If we are tempted to think God cruel for the Levitical legislation isolating lepers, we might think twice if we ever saw a victim in advanced stages. It was more merciful to have them isolated from the cruelty of others than to have them publicly humiliated.

Considering the OT legislation and the dread of this disease, it is not surprising that the healing of the leper occurs in all three of the synoptic gospels. The public ostracism of lepers had not decreased in Jesus' day, and the Rabbinical legislation *added* to the Levitical law had possibly made it even worse. The leper "would have fled from a Rabbi" (Edersheim, p. 495), but he prostrated himself before Jesus. He had evidently been observing this teacher and healer from Nazareth and did not see in him the stern coldness of the typical Rabbi. His hunch (guess) was correct, for Jesus was moved with compassion to relieve this man of distress. Anyone who touched a leper would become ceremonially unclean, but Jesus reverses the man's uncleanness with his own healing touch. The faith of the leper is never in question in the passage, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." His question was not whether Jesus "could" heal him but whether he "would" heal him. He humbly submitted himself to Jesus' sovereign decision. His faith was all the more remarkable for one who was "full of leprosy"—that is, was afflicted with the disease at an advanced stage and beyond hope for any cure.

Jesus touches him and heals him, then sends him off to the Levitical priest (Lev. 13: 48-14: 4). By sending him to the priest he demonstrates his full submission to the Law. Christ did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5: 17). There would come a day very soon that



the laws pertaining to ceremonial cleanness would be null and void because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, but until that day arrived, he fully supported the requirements of the ceremonial law.

On a personal note, are we not all (apart from grace) spiritual lepers whose uncleanness has banished us from the presence and fellowship of God? Like a leper, our flesh is consumed and destroyed by the ravages of sin, and in time will wither and die like grass, returning to the dust from which it is made. In Moses' words, "Thou dost turn man back into dust, and dost say, 'Return, O children of men.' For a thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or *as* a watch in the night. Thou hast swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; in the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes, and sprouts anew; toward evening it fades, and withers away. For we have been consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath we have been dismayed. Thou hast placed our iniquities before Thee, our secret *sins* in the light of Thy presence. For all our days have declined in Thy fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is *but* labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away. Who understands the power of Thine anger, and Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee?" (Ps. 90: 3-11).

The question remains about Jesus' ordering the man to silence. It is understandable that he would restrict the demons who have no part in his salvation (see comments above), but why would he tell this man, among others, not to tell anyone about what he had done for him. Hendriksen presents four possibilities including two which are accepted by most expositors (pp. 392-393): Jesus did not want his ministry of teaching and preaching to be hindered by excessive demand for healing by the multitudes, nor did he wish his Messianic reign to be viewed strictly in materialistic terms. His suspicions were well-founded, for after the feeding of the 5000, he must retreat to the mountain to prevent the people from making him king (Jn. 6: 15). According to the context of Mark, this is the best explanation, for when the healed leper failed to obey Jesus' orders by spreading the news of this miracle, "Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere" (v. 45; cf. Lk. 5: 15).

[We need not be concerned with the differences between the Evangelists (gospel writers) concerning the way the leper approached Jesus. Matthew says he bowed down to Jesus; Mark says he fell on his knees and Luke says he fell on his face. There is no mistake in reporting on the part of either Evangelist, for a person who falls on his face must first fall on his knees, and bowing can be the same as getting down on one's knees.]

### ***E. The Healing of the Paralytic—Matt. 9: 2-8; Mk. 2: 1-12; Lk. 5: 17-26***

Contextually, Matt. 9: 1 goes better with the healing of the two demon-possessed men in the Gadarenes (Matt. 8: 28-34). After healing these two men, Jesus is asked to leave, upon which he enters a boat and came back to Capernaum, his headquarters (Carson, pp. 220-221). Carson places the healing of the demon-possessed men later in the chronological order of events.

Because of the *temporal connections* of the Mark account, I'm inclined to believe that the healing of the paralytic takes place shortly after the healing of the leper—"And when He had

come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home” (v. 1). “Several days afterward” *may* refer to several days after the healing of the leper, but it depends how we read the text. The text could mean that only after several days of being back in Capernaum, it was heard that he was at home there. The historical context of Luke is much less clear—“And it came about one day”—and Matthew reports the event out of historical order in Matt. 9. Hendriksen concludes that “Matthew’s arrangement [of events] is topical rather than chronological....” (p. 416).

Luke gives the most detail recording that Pharisees and scribes (teachers of the Law) had come “from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem” (v. 17). Jesus’ reputation was spreading rapidly and they had come to “check him out”.

Edersheim has good insight into Mark’s historical arrangement of the three events: the healing of the leper, the healing of the paralytic, and the calling of Matthew.

The healing of leprosy was recorded as typical [i.e. of typological value]. With this agrees also what immediately follows. For, as Rabbinism stood confessedly powerless in the face of the living death of leprosy, so it had no word of forgiveness to speak to the conscience burdened with sin, nor yet word of welcome to the sinner. But this was the inmost meaning of the two events which the Gospel-history places next to the healing of the leper: the forgiveness of sins in the case of the paralytic, and the welcome to the chief of sinners in the call of Levi-Matthew.

The first thing which is brought to our attention is the perseverance of the four friends carrying the paralyzed man. They were not at all inclined to give up when the heavy crowd of people made access to Jesus seemingly impossible. (In this we are reminded of the blind man of Jericho who could not be quieted—Lk. 18: 35-43). They devised a new plan, to take the man up the side stairs on the outside of the house to the flat roof. Most houses were constructed this way, with a flat roof accessible by an outside stairway. Some houses had a separate guest room on top of the flat roof (cf. Lk. 22: 12; Acts 1: 13). Heedless of the damage they might do to the roof, the men cut a hole in the roof and let the paralytic down right in front of Jesus (Lk. 5: 18).

We might wonder why Jesus responds the way he does by saying, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” (Lk. 5: 20). (Matthew and Mark say, “My son”. We need not bother much with the discrepancy since each term is one of endearment. The divine infallibility and inspiration of the Bible does not require exact precision in the reporting of events. This is the only time in the gospels when Jesus makes this statement to someone he heals. The only statement close to this is when he heals the woman with a hemorrhage and says to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” (Mk. 5: 22). In that passage we again note the terms of endearment—“daughter”—followed by a more subtle reference to the forgiveness of sins—“go in peace”. Here the declaration of forgiveness is far more explicit and unparalleled in the NT which leads us to wonder why Jesus spoke this way. As God, Jesus could read men’s thoughts, and we are explicitly told by all three Evangelists that he was reading the thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees on this occasion. It is not explicitly stated that he was reading the paralytic’s thoughts, but if he was, can we infer (reason) from Jesus’ initial response that forgiveness was the primary thing the paralytic was thinking about? (cf. Hendriksen, p. 418).

This is also Edersheim's view who maintains that the Rabbinic, casuistic teaching (misleading inferences from scripture) was as follows: First the sufferings of the entire body would deliver a person from guilt even as the loss of an eye or tooth would deliver a slave from bondage (Ex. 21: 26-27). Secondly, just as the salt applied to the sacrifices would purify the sacrifices (Lev. 2: 13), so physical suffering would purify the soul. This teaching had apparently not given the man any comfort, reasoning from the fact that he was now seeking a more satisfying solution in the Man from Galilee. If anything, another Rabbinism (teaching) had convinced him that unless he was forgiven of his sins first, he could not be healed (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 504).

It is this last mentioned Rabbinic teaching which contributes mostly to Jesus' declaration, "Your sins are forgiven you". In the typical Rabbinic view, particular sins were the direct cause of illness (Jn. 9: 2), and only a cure would be sufficient evidence of forgiveness (Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class notes, p. 68, citing Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, p. 163).

Immediately Jesus meets with opposition; he is now claiming prerogatives which belong only to God, for only God can forgive sins. In Jesus' day, the Jews did not believe even the Messiah could forgive sins (Chamblin, p. 68, citing Gundry, p. 163). Apparently their understanding of the promised Messiah had already been clouded by the earthly kingship views spawned (given birth) during the Maccabean rebellion and the succession of priest-kings (cf. notes on Intertestamentary Period). Knowing what they are thinking, he does not resort to argument about who can forgive sins, for the scribes and Pharisees are correct in this respect—only God can forgive sins. He also knows that the scribes and Pharisees do not really have to be convinced of the *fact* of his miraculous powers, for they have already heard of them, and their very presence on this occasion is proof of this. Their problem is that they don't know how to *interpret* these powers. Besides, Jesus was never accustomed to performing miracles to satisfy one's idle curiosity (Lk. 23: 8-9).

The real question at issue was Jesus' authority and identity. What they lacked is the proper response to his divine person; they refused to believe that he had his authority from God. Jesus himself provoked the very question by first declaring forgiveness *before* he heals the man. He had drawn attention to his primary mission of removing the guilt of sin and making men right with God—something the scribes and Pharisees and the whole Rabbinical system had miserably failed to do (Edersheim, p. 505). Their inability to make the man walk was symbolic of their inability to lead him to God—they simply had no authority in either area.

It is much easier to *say* something than to *do* something. As we say in the States, "Talk is cheap." This is what the Pharisees are thinking in their hearts, and Jesus exposes their thinking with this statement, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk'?" Anyone can tell someone that their sins are forgiven since there is no way to prove whether forgiveness has taken place, but making a lame man walk is not so easy for the only proof is in the walking. But from Jesus' perspective, forgiving sins is much more difficult than making a paralytic walk. "Thus Jesus first went to the heart of the matter, 9: 2. Here, by addressing the larger need (forgiveness), he embraces the lesser (healing). Now the question of the authority to forgive sins is resolved. If he can make a lame man walk, he can also forgive sins; and of the two, the most important is his authority to forgive sins (v. 8)

(Chamblin, pp. 68-69). He is also the “Son of Man” which is a veiled reference to his identity as the Messiah in Dan. 7 (cf. Hendriksen for an extended discussion of “Son of Man” on Matt. 8: 20). If they care to receive it, he is also the fulfillment of the Messianic promises of restoration in Isa. 35: 6, “Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the Arabah” (Lane, p. 99).

Did the scribes and Pharisees “get it”—did they come to an understanding of his identity and authority? There is no evidence from the text or from later events that they did. That they were “glorifying God” does not mean that they had come to faith in Christ, but that they were at least admitting that Jesus had done something they had never seen before (Mk. 2: 12; Lane, p. 99).

Their amazement also brings to mind many questions about ubiquitous (everywhere) claims of miracle-working today. As mentioned earlier, Jesus’ ability to work miracles drew attention to his message of forgiveness, and this emphasis is clarified even more in the passages before us. If there had been other people living in Jesus’ day who could perform miracles, they too would have been able to say, “Your sins are forgiven you”. But there were no such people, and there have only been relatively few such people in very limited periods of Biblical history, none of whom could forgive sins except Jesus: Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus, and the apostles, including Paul. Even the greatest writing prophet of the OT, Isaiah, never performed any miracles. By divine inspiration Isaiah and other prophets were able to foresee the future of Israel, but they did not make axe heads float (2 Kings 6: 5-6) or raise the dead (2 Kings 4: 32-36). No doubt it will be argued that the gift of healing was bestowed on some in the church age (1 Cor. 12: 9) and that this gift continues in the church until the second coming of Christ, but where is the historical evidence for the widespread distribution of this gift immediately after the apostolic age, and where is the evidence today?

I am willing to believe some missionary stories of miraculous healing in places where there were no doctors and in which the Holy Spirit has been inclined to “jump start” the church (give the church a special beginning) with miraculous signs, as he did with both the Samaritans (Acts 8: 14-17) and the Gentiles (Acts 10: 1-47), including many of Paul’s churches (Gal. 3: 5). I am even willing to believe that such things *can* occur today. In this, I do not wish to limit the sovereign purposes of the Holy Spirit. However, evidence of widespread miraculous healing by many persons so endowed is, indeed, lacking. If such things are common today, or have been common in other periods in the past, why do we have so little solid, incontrovertible evidence (evidence incapable of being disproven)? Is the desire for “signs” merely indicative of our lack of confidence in the power of the preached word through the power of the Spirit, that we think we need more visible evidence than that of changed lives? Christ warned us of this, “Unless you *people* see signs and wonders, you *simply* will not believe” (Jn. 4: 48), but he also clearly predicted that even his resurrection from the dead would not be sufficient evidence to the sinner whose heart had not been renewed by the Spirit (Lk. 16: 27-31).

Besides the lessons noted above, there are personal lessons to learn from the paralytic, just as we have learned from the leper. A paralytic is a very helpless person who can’t fend for himself. Some paralytics can barely make any useful movements. But Jesus didn’t come to help people who didn’t need help; he came to help the helpless. The paralytic’s life is a metaphor (symbol) for all of us. He represents who we are before an almighty and holy God. We are paralytic,

unable to walk or even make any useful movement in compliance with the holy demands required of us in the Law of God. If we are to “walk in a manner worthy of [our] calling” in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1: 1), then Jesus must declare us forgiven.

***F. The Calling of Matthew—Matt. 9:9; Mk. 2: 14; Lk. 5: 27-28***

From the text of Matthew and Luke, the calling of Matthew appears to have taken place in close connection with the healing of the paralytic. Mark’s version appears confusing at first, for one moment Jesus is at the seashore and the next he is passing by Matthew’s tax office (or customs office), but it is very likely that Matthew’s customs office was on the seashore. According to Edersheim, Matthew was not the typical “tax-gatherer” but a customs official who had the authority of exacting taxes from ships coming into the harbor (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 515, 517). However, he is never called a “chief tax-collector”, a designation reserved in the gospels for Zaccheus; thus, Edersheim’s view may be questioned. The seaside location is supported by the text of Mark which says that Jesus was teaching the multitude on the seashore and “as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office...” (vv.13-14). Having his business located on the seashore may have afforded Matthew many opportunities to hear Jesus teach, especially since his call came later in Jesus’ Galilean ministry. Quite likely he was familiar with the ship owners of Capernaum and also with Peter, Andrew, James, and John—fishermen from whom he had probably exacted an unfair share of taxes (cf. Lane, p. 102). He may have even witnessed their call to be disciples (Edersheim, p. 518). Being a hated tax-collector, it is unlikely that he had been a disciple of John the Baptist, but when Jesus calls him he doesn’t hesitate—reason to believe he was well-acquainted with Jesus through frequent contact with his teaching, preaching, and healing ministry.

Following Edersheim’s suggestion (pp. 31-32 above), let us quickly put the calling of Matthew, a despised tax-collector, into thematic context. The scribes and Pharisees had been powerless in the face of leprosy, having nothing to offer for its cure or comfort. It was a living death which symbolized the ravages of sin, sin for which they likewise had no answers. The Rabbinical system also had no forgiveness and no word of encouragement for sinners. When sinners were looking for mercy, they instead showed them the Law and their traditions which must be obeyed first. Reversing the emphasis of Jesus, they desired sacrifice, but not compassion (Matt. 12: 7; Chamblin, p. 70). Their powerlessness in the face of sin is highlighted in the story of the paralytic whom they could no more forgive as they could help to walk. As a welcome contrast, Jesus could conquer leprosy and paralysis, as well as the sinful state of man which is the occasion for both conditions. Neither the leper nor the paralytic had to “pull themselves up by their own boot strings” to a certain level of performance and respectability to be “worthy” of Jesus’ help. They sought him precisely because they were helpless and had nothing to offer.

In both stories, we see Jesus meeting sinners (us included) where they are—hopeless and helpless. As spiritual lepers we are ravaged and destroyed by sin, and as paralytics we cannot “walk” in a manner worthy of the God who made us. To make us whole again Jesus himself must reach out and touch us; to make us walk he must speak the word of forgiveness to us.

Thus, the healing of the leper and the paralytic is the perfect context for the calling of Matthew the tax-collector—a “sinner” whose moral degradation and inability is symbolized in the

physical degradation and inability of the leper and paralytic. If the Pharisees were indifferent to the former two, they were aggressively opposed to the latter. It was a decision not politically calculated to win Jesus any influence with or kindness from the religious elite of his day. Theologically, it was brilliant, for in the call of Matthew—including in all three Synoptics—we are brought face to face with Jesus' agenda to seek and to save that which was lost. Customs officials were the most hated of all tax-collectors who were viewed as the personification of anti-nationalism (Jewish pride in their country and heritage) (Edersheim, p. 515). Customs duties of a particular district were generally leased out by the Roman government at a fixed amount of money which meant that the money collected over this sum was pure profit for the customs official. For this reason, customs officials were very wealthy although their wealth did not earn for them any respect or status in Jewish society—just the opposite. They were not allowed to be judges or even witnesses in court cases, and they were excommunicated from the synagogues (Lane, 101-102).

As a customs official, Matthew was charged with taxing all imports and exports and on all that was bought and sold, taxes which had the affect of increasing the price of consumer goods in the market places. The taxation on food added considerably to the oppression of the poor. Compounding this oppression were taxes levied against almost any conceivable item or activity—the number of axles and wheels on carts, pack animals, admission to roads, highways, markets or ships, passage across bridges, or even taxes on the pedestrians themselves. Travelers along the way were constantly harassed by being forced to unload their pack animals to have their cargoes assessed for taxes. The customs officials were also guilty of favoritism in the administration of their duties, charging more to those whom they disliked and less to whom they liked—in a word, *corruption*. Little wonder that the Rabbis considered the genuine repentance of a tax-collector, especially a customs official like Matthew, “next to impossible” (Edersheim p. 516, 517).

But the Pharisaical and Rabbinical bias against tax-collectors is precisely why Matthew is such a good choice for a disciple. In their view he was beyond the hope of repentance, but Jesus came to *grant* repentance for such people, not to those who believed that repentance was only a *theoretical* necessity for themselves but a *practical* necessity for everyone else.

### ***G. Early Sabbath Controversies—Matt. 12: 1-21; Mk. 2: 23-3: 6; Lk. 6: 1-11***

There is a break between the calling of Matthew in 9: 9 and the dinner which takes place from Matt. 9: 10 to 9: 17. Notice that in 9: 18 the synagogue official (Jairus) approaches Jesus “while He was saying these things to them”, that is, while he was talking about the two parables about the wineskins and the garments *at Matthew's dinner*. This *temporal connection* between Matt. 9: 17 and 9: 18 has not been recognized by some scholars who have connected Matthew's dinner temporally with the calling of Matthew, but you will notice from Matt. 9: 10, Mk. 2: 15, and Lk. 5: 29 that there are *no* strong temporal connections between the calling of Matthew and Matthew's dinner. I agree with Carson (p. 221), Hendriksen (p. 429), and Guthrie (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 558) against Gundry (*New Testament Survey*, p. 135) and Robertson (*Harmony of the Gospels*, p. 74, quoted in Hendriksen, p. 429) that the calling of Matthew is followed by a *significant break in time* and many other events which take place *before* Matthew's dinner. Remember, however, that all the Synoptic Gospels place the call

of Matthew and his dinner together for *thematic* reasons. Thus, we must conclude that our understanding of the text itself will be enhanced by reading the story in a thematic context and not in a chronological context.

By reading Matthew's dinner as a thematic parenthesis, we will now place the incident of the grainfields and the healing of the man with the withered hand just after the calling of Matthew. Although there are no clear temporal connections in Mark and Luke, they come in the same order in both gospels just after the calling of Matthew and Matthew's dinner (a parenthesis) and just before the choosing of the twelve disciples (Mk. 3: 13; Lk. 6: 12).

### ***1. Disciples in the Grainfields—Matt. 12: 1-8; Mk. 2: 23-28; Lk. 6: 1-5***

In the present case, the disciples were not doing anything condemned in the Law (Deut. 23: 25). To be sure, work was forbidden on the Sabbath day, including harvesting (Ex. 20: 8-11; Ex. 34: 21), but the Pharisees had allowed themselves the privilege of defining "work" along very narrow guidelines, naming 39 categories of work in the *Mishnah* (Lane, pp. 114-115). Was it really "work" the disciples were doing by gathering a little grain to satisfy their hunger? We might as well ask whether it is "work" to bring the fork up to one's mouth in the act of eating. The Pharisees had made the rules, and now they were "holding everyone's feet to the fire" in keeping their rules—rules which had nothing to do with God's rules.

However, it is interesting that Jesus does not challenge the Pharisaical additions to the Law on this occasion as he did on another occasion (Mk. 7: 9-13). If refuting their traditions had been important to him in this incident he would have done so as he did throughout the Sermon on the Mount ("You have heard that it was said, but I say to you..."). For the sake of the argument, Jesus does not attempt to prove the innocence of his disciples at this point. Rather, he counters by mentioning the historical precedent of *David* who ate the bread which was appointed only for the priests. Unlike what his disciples were doing, David's action was definitely a breach of Levitical law, something Jesus admits was "not lawful" (Mk. 2: 26). The analogy was fully appropriate, for on that occasion, David was providing for the needs of his followers even as Jesus was providing for the needs of his disciples. In pointing out this precedent, he is *not* arguing that ceremonial laws could be set aside for the *higher* purpose of saving a life, *nor* was he distinguishing between the relative value of the higher moral law (you shall not kill) and the lesser ceremonial laws—the traditional interpretation.

It is doubtful that Jesus is setting aside the Sabbath for a "higher" moral standard of saving a life. Did Yahweh ever do this in the OT? For that matter, did Yahweh ever distinguish between moral laws and ceremonial laws in the OT? The passage in 2 Chron. 36: 19-31 may be a possible example but in that episode the Israelites were ignorant from years of priestly neglect and therefore excused.) If Jesus were arguing this way, the Pharisees could have cited the examples of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10: 1-2), Uzzah (2 Sam. 6: 3-7), and the men of Beth-Shemesh (1 Sam. 6: 19), all of whom the Lord killed for violating ceremonial laws that are not even found in the Decalogue but only in Levitical law. Therefore, how could it be argued that God will set aside ceremonial laws in order to save a life when He, in fact, put people to death for violating these "ceremonial" laws?

David was not condemned for eating the consecrated bread even though, by Jesus' own testimony, his actions were "unlawful". Why was his life spared when poor Uzzah's was not? Was there a difference in the degree of his guilt compared to Uzzah's, or compared to that of Nadab and Abihu? Did God "turn his head", so to speak, and ignore David's sin just because he and his men were starving? All of this may be relevant to the case, but this does not seem to be the direction Jesus is taking his argument. David was excused for violating the ceremonial law—and adultery—not because he was innocent, but because he was David, someone very special in God's redemptive plan. (The word "innocent" in v. 7 does not refer to David but to the disciples.)

In Matt. 12: 5-6, Jesus argues that the priests legitimately "break the Sabbath and are innocent" because the obligations of the temple require them to work. Thus, the temple requirements "shielded the priests from guilt" (D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 282; Chamblin, p. 87). Now something greater than the temple is here, and that something is Christ himself. The argument is *a fortiori* (from lesser to greater). If the temple is greater than the Sabbath since temple work had to be done on the Sabbath, then Christ, who is greater than the temple must also be greater than the Sabbath. Although Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, he *did* come to *fulfill* it which means that his interpretation and application of the Law is the final word on the subject ("But I say to you"). He did not come simply to be a "rubber stamp" of Moses as if Moses was the last word on the Law. If David could be acquitted of his guilt simply because of his typical relationship to Christ, then, arguing again from the lesser to the greater, Christ's disciples could be acquitted because of *their* relationship to Christ who is the "Son of Man" (a veiled reference to the Messiah of Dan. 7) and the Lord of the Sabbath (v. 8) who has the authority to declare what is legitimate and illegitimate on the Sabbath (Chamblin, p. 87; Carson, p. 282). As the Jews in Hosea's day had valued ritual above the knowledge of God, the Pharisees were making the same mistake now (v. 7; cf. Hosea 6: 6). Rather than responding to Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath, they were despising Jesus in favor of the Sabbath, thus giving more value to the type than the antitype.

The additional argument supplied by Jesus in Mk. 2: 27 supports the idea that Jesus' teaching here is far more radical than it would first seem—"The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." The traditional interpretation of this verse has been that the Sabbath was designed for man's benefit in giving him physical rest from his labors, not for adding burdens. This explanation is true so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. If it had only been for the material benefit of man's physical rest, then such stringent punishments would not have been imposed for breaking it. In the words of Calvin,

...if there had not been some peculiar excellency in the Sabbath, it might have appeared to be an act of atrocious injustice to command a man to be put to death for cutting wood upon it....Wherefore it must be concluded that the substance of the Sabbath, which Paul declares to be in Christ [Col. 2: 17], must have been no ordinary thing (*Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses in the Form of a Harmony*, Vol. 2, p. 435, quoted by Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 152).

The Sabbath was given to the nation not *primarily* for providing *physical* rest but as an instructional tool for bringing them to the rest of *salvation*. Man could not be right with God through his own self-efforts but by receiving his mercy and grace as a gift. Thus, by working on the Sabbath, the sinner indicated his *disdain for God's gift of salvation*. Salvation rest in God's



grace and forgiveness is clearly the intent of the Sabbath taught in Heb. 4, and because Israel did not enter this rest, they were lost. By rejecting the Sabbath, they were also rejecting salvation by grace. Accordingly the writer of Hebrews warns his audience, “Since therefore it remains for some to enter it [the Sabbath rest], and those who formerly had good news preached to them [the Israelites] failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that.” (Heb. 4: 6-8; cf. Ps. 95 in its entirety). The writer of Hebrews is warning his audience not to drift back into the same mistake as the Israelites in seeking salvation in human effort—the keeping of the Law and its rituals. The Pharisees in this episode, like the Israelites of old, were failing to enter the rest of the Sabbath through their rejection of Christ who is the embodiment of Sabbath rest. Instead, they are putting their trust in their work of Sabbath-keeping. The Sabbath was, indeed, made for man because it pointed him to redemptive rest in Christ.

## **2. Man with the Withered Hand—Matt. 12: 9-13; Mk. 3: 1-5; Lk. 6: 6-10**

Sabbath controversy continues with the incident of the man with the withered hand. All three Synoptic evangelists group this event thematically with the “grainfield” incident which also occurred on the Sabbath. ***Once again the authority of Jesus is the primary theme which is highlighted by the Sabbath question.*** It is possible that the man with the withered hand had been purposely planted there by the Pharisees to test Jesus. Whether this was the case or not, his presence is convenient for the Pharisees who wish to test Jesus (Matt. 12: 10—“in order that they might accuse Him”; cf. Mk. 3: 2b; Lk. 6: 7). Once again Jesus uses an *a fortiori* argument (arguing from the lesser to the greater). Any of the Pharisees would rescue one of their own animals out of a pit on the Sabbath. How much more then, is it appropriate to relieve a human being of suffering on the Sabbath?

[His statement has much relevance for the doctrine of man. Man is made in the image of God and, therefore, has “more value” than an animal (Matt. 12: 12; cf. Matt. 6: 26). Atheistic evolutionists would dispute this claim, but this is because they ignore the word of God in favor of their allegiance to secular humanism.]

Mark adds, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill” (cf. Lk. 6: 9). The intention of the Pharisees on this particular Sabbath was to gain enough evidence against Jesus to order his execution; thus their intention was to kill, not to do good (Carson, p. 284). Their strictness for law-keeping (particularly for keeping their man-made rules about the Sabbath) had hardened their hearts against any compassion for needy people. They had not cared at all that the disciples were hungry (Matt. 12: 7), and they did not care about this man’s withered hand. What they cared about was their own religious authority in forcing people to keep the traditions of the elders. They could see clearly that Jesus was a serious threat to their authority and that they must continue to build a case against him. The desire for power had completely destroyed any desire for truth—a common error of many ecclesiastical leaders even in evangelical churches.

Jesus' anger (noted only in Mk. 3: 5) is kindled not so much by their desire to kill *him* but in their callousness toward human suffering, for Mark also tells us that he was "grieved at their hardness of heart. While Jesus is angry and grieved at their unkindness and unbelief, the Pharisees are "filled with rage" that Jesus had challenged their authority in interpreting the law (Lk. 6: 11).

### ***3. The plot to kill Jesus followed by His withdrawal—Matt. 12: 14-21; Mk. 3: 6-12; Lk. 6: 11***

This last episode was all they needed to convince them that he must be eliminated, a priority so great that a coalition (a temporary alliance) was formed between the opposing parties of the Pharisees and the "Herodians" (Mk. 3: 6). The Herodians were sympathizers and supporters of Herod's regime which in turn depended on the Roman control of Palestine (Lane, p. 125), control which was hated by the Pharisees. To accomplish the common purpose of killing Jesus, no philosophical or political compromise was too great.

Contrary to the machismo (aggressive masculinity) which some well-meaning missionaries assert in placing themselves in danger unnecessarily, Jesus took note of the threats against his life and "withdrew from there". The time for him to lay down his life was not yet complete, and he would preserve it without a show of miraculous force. When the time did come to lay down his life, he would set his face to go to Jerusalem (Lk. 9: 51). The Apostle Paul would follow his Savior's lead, sometimes running for his life (Acts 9: 23-25) and at others purposely putting himself in harm's way to accomplish his mission (Acts 21: 10-13). The difference between the two situations is not always black and white, and it takes wisdom to know what to do in any particular situation. We may never deny our allegiance to Christ (Matt. 10: 33), but this loyalty does not require us to take unnecessary risks. Generally, it is better to flee danger and live to preach the gospel another day (Matt. 10: 23).

In spite of the threats against his life, Jesus remains the "suffering servant" of Isa. 42 who does not cry out in the streets or raise an army against those who are plotting against his life (Matt. 12: 18-21). Matthew makes every effort to prove that Jesus is not coming as a military Messiah, but one who is ready at the appropriate time to lay down his life (Carson, p. 285).

### ***H. The Calling of the Twelve Disciples—Mk. 3: 13-19; Lk. 6: 12-16***

Jesus has already chosen some of his disciples: Peter and Andrew, James and John, possibly Philip and Nathanael (Bartholemew) and Matthew. We don't know exactly when the formal choosing of the twelve takes place, but when it does Jesus spends a whole night in prayer before the selection. In every way he demonstrates his dependence upon his Father who guides him through the Holy Spirit. He is also the perfect example of what our lives should be, wholly dependent upon the will and guidance of the Father through the Spirit. Luke 6: 13 indicates that he had been surrounded by a larger group of disciples out of which he chooses twelve whom he now calls "apostles" (from *apostello*—to send away; hence "those who are sent away"). The number of the disciples is not coincidental, but deliberate. The twelve represent the twelve tribes of Israel and mark a new beginning for the eschatological people of God (Lane, p. 133). There is continuity between the people of God in the Old Covenant and the people of God in the New Covenant. God has always had but one redemptive plan for Jew and Gentile (Rom. 1: 16), not

two. It has never been his plan to prepare for himself an earthly people, the Jews, and a heavenly people, the Gentiles. He only has one program of redemption which has encompassed both Jew and Gentile from its very inception. Thus, the twelve disciples are but one symbol of this singularity of God's purpose for a redeemed people.

### ***I. The First Great Discourse in Matthew (The Sermon on the Mount)—Matt. 5-7; Lk. 6: 17-49***

Mark does not record the Sermon on the Mount. Because of the differences in the accounts, some expositors have determined that they are two different sermons. For example, Luke says that Jesus descended with his disciples and “stood on a level place” (v. 17), while Matthew says that Jesus went up on a mountain (5: 1). The problem is solved very simply if we allow that on the mountain there was a level place from which Jesus could teach. It is doubtful that they are two different sermons, but there are different emphases by Matthew and Luke. Three groups of people are taught: the apostles, a large multitude of regular followers called “disciples”, and a “great throng of people”. This is not made clear in Matthew who gives the impression that the sermon could have been preached only to the “disciples”, whether the broader group or to the twelve. However, the content of the sermon makes amply clear that the multitudes of people are present. The timing of the sermon is most likely immediately after his choosing of the twelve apostles (Geldenhuys, p. 209). This context fits well with the Second Great Discourse which occurs immediately after the commissioning of the twelve for missionary service (Matt. 10).

#### ***1. The Structure of the Sermon***

The structure of the gospel according to *Matthew* is a restatement of the history of Israel (Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, Chapter 17, “*Fulfillment of the Law in the Gospel According to Matthew*”). We can see this development in the following ways: (1) The genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham; (2) the supernatural birth of Jesus corresponding to the miraculous birth of Isaac to Abraham; (3) the attempt on Jesus' life corresponding to Pharaoh's murder of male Israelite infants; (4) the flight to Egypt and his return to the land promised to the fathers corresponding to Israel's move to Egypt and the exodus [Jesus, like Moses, is the new deliverer.]; (5) Jesus is led up into the wilderness for forty days to be tested, even as Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness; contrary to the Israelites who wanted to live by bread alone, Jesus quotes the Law; (6) Jesus heals diseases among the people corresponding to God's deliverance of Israel from the diseases of Egypt—Dt. 7: 15, (7) Jesus is the great Law-giver and a prophet, the one Moses promised the people in Dt. 18: 18-19.

While Matt. 1-4 concentrates on the narrative portions of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), Matt. 5-7 concentrate on the teaching of Jesus as the new Law-giver corresponding to Moses (Poythress, p. 255). Even the setting of the Sermon on the Mount (a mountain) draws the reader's attention, especially a Jewish reader, to the resemblance of Moses' receiving the Law on Mount Horeb. Chamblin has noted that just before Jesus began to teach, he “sat down” (5: 1), an act which Matthew used to remind his readers that Jesus was “sitting in Moses' seat” (Matt. 23: 2; Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class notes, p. 34). As the legitimate interpreter of the Mosaic Law, Jesus' action is set in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who twisted the Mosaic legislation with the traditions of men.

The Beatitudes themselves (vv. 3-12) remind us of the covenant ceremony of Deuteronomy 27-28 during which the curses and blessings of the covenant were pronounced upon the Israelites from Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim respectively (Poythress, p. 256). The Beatitudes, therefore, must be seen within the broader context of covenant obedience or disobedience to the law of God which will either be blessed or cursed. With the blessings of the Beatitudes, there is also implied the curses for those whose lives do not conform to the Beatitudes. For example, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (v. 8), implies the opposite, that those who are not pure in heart will *not* see God. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is not intended merely for the more spiritual people who are interested in obedience, but for everyone making a claim to membership in the kingdom. For those who claimed then—and for those who claim now—that Christ was putting an end to the Law, he makes it clear that he did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill the Law through his perfect obedience—both active and passive. Unless one’s *practical* righteousness—for this is the righteousness of which he speaks—exceeds the practical righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven (v. 20). The righteousness required of kingdom citizens must “surpass” the false self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees who measured themselves, not by the perfect righteousness found in the Law, but by convenient interpretations of the Law which suited their own ends.

Therefore, those who teach that the law of God is no longer relevant for the “New Testament Christian” must explain why the whole structure of Matt. 1-7 in general and the Sermon on the Mount in particular recapitulates the history of Israel and God’s covenant lawsuit against Israel. God chose Israel to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19: 6) to proclaim the glory of God to the nations. This same purpose is reiterated (repeated) in the NT (1 Pet. 2: 9) and rings out loud and clear throughout the Sermon on the Mount. Israel as a nation failed miserably in this high calling, but God’s original purpose will not be frustrated. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to satisfy the curses of the Law for disobedience but also to ensure the blessings of the new covenant through his perfect obedience. Such obedience is *imputed* to believers legally by faith in Jesus Christ, but it is also *produced practically* in the lives of believers who walk by faith and dependence upon the Holy Spirit who is working in them (Phil. 2: 12-13). *Thus, it is not the law that has ensured the obedience of God’s people, but grace operating within us.*

## 2. The Purpose of the Sermon

As Moses prepared the Israelites, the redeemed community, how to live in the Theocracy of the Old Covenant, so Jesus prepares believers how to live in the kingdom of God or the New Covenant which he is inaugurating with his own blood (Chamblin, p. 34). Classical dispensationalists have limited the application of the sermon to believers living in the thousand-year Millennial kingdom (according to their interpretation of Rev. 20) when Christ will physically rule the world from his throne in Jerusalem. As interpreted, the sermon has little evangelistic value in pointing the unbeliever to a saving relationship with Christ. John F. Walvoord, one the leading proponents of dispensationalism in the last century and once president of Dallas Theological Seminary, the leading dispensational seminary in the US, even goes so far to say that there is no presentation of the gospel in the sermon.

That the Sermon on the Mount presents ethical content all agree. That it delineates the gospel that Jesus Christ died and rose again, that it presents justification by faith, or is suitable to point an unbeliever to salvation in Christ is plainly not the intent of this message....The Sermon on the Mount, as a whole, is not church truth

precisely....It falls short of presenting the complete rule of life expounded at a greater length in the epistles, and it is not intended to delineate justification by faith or the gospel of salvation (*Matthew—Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 44-45).

At the same time, Walvoord does not relegate (assign to an inferior position) the sermon to irrelevance until the Millennium.

A careful reading of what Christ said makes it obvious, however, that the principles of the kingdom are far more than merely rules for a future millennium (p. 45).

Reformed theologians generally reject a literal interpretation of the Millennial kingdom and claim that the church age and the Millennial kingdom coincide (occur at the same time) and that we are now living in the Millennial kingdom in which the gospel is triumphant throughout the world. This obviously puts a different slant on how one interprets Jesus' ethical instructions throughout the sermon. Jesus intended these truths to be applied by his disciples both then and now. The sermon has eternal relevance both during the gospel era and for all time. Throughout the sermon the righteousness of the kingdom is held out as the standard of conduct for all who would claim citizenship in the kingdom of God. False righteousness—the external righteousness of the Pharisees—would not suffice (5: 20), but only the inward righteousness which Christ promulgated (officially published) as the new Moses. He is *the* prophet promised by Moses, the prophet who speaks in the name of the Lord, the prophet who *is* Lord and whom everyone must heed in everything he says (Deut. 18: 18-19).

At the same time, *the sermon should not be interpreted as a new way of earning salvation any more than the Law of Moses could impart salvation (Gal. 3: 21)*. Our inability to keep the law for salvation is the reason Christ came to die. Rather, the sermon is an expression of the holiness of God which must be—and will be—expressed in practical ways in the lives of those who are saved by grace—those who are “poor in spirit” and “mourn” over their sinfulness. Even a casual examination of the Sermon on the Mount reveals our inability to live this way apart from the saving operation of supernatural grace. It is important, then, that we take note of where Christ begins the sermon, “with gospel, not law. Jesus is pronouncing  *blessings*, not issuing orders....He speaks of those who are such persons; he does not command listeners to become such persons....This provides a vital foundation for the subsequent teaching (5: 17-48) about law-keeping. The  *gifts* of love come before the  *demands* of love” (Chamblin, p. 34; emphasis his).

Furthermore, we must understand the relationship between obedience and fellowship with Christ. For some time before the Sermon on the Mount, Christ had gathered together a group of disciples with whom he had formed an intimate community. From that broader group he had also chosen a small band of twelve apostles who were privileged to enjoy an even closer fellowship with Christ. The multitudes which were listening to the sermon had not been part of this closer fellowship; nevertheless, they knew this to be Jesus' method of communicating the truths of the kingdom of God. Edersheim summarizes this method.

Christ came to found a Kingdom, not a School; to institute a fellowship, not to propound a system. *To the first disciples all doctrinal teaching sprang out of fellowship with Him*. They saw Him, and therefore believed; they believed, and therefore learned the truths connected with Him, and springing out of Him. So to speak, the seed of truth which fell on their hearts was carried thither from the flower of His Person and Life (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 528, emphasis mine).

Thus, Jesus was not expounding the Beatitudes or the moral principles of the law as a method of salvation or as something achievable. The transformation of character envisioned in the sermon is accomplished only through a relationship to Him as the Messiah without which the disciple is left equally as helpless as the Israelite at Mt. Sinai (cf. Heb. 12: 18-24).

Yet, Christ does make ***demands*** in this sermon, not ***suggestions*** which are optional for obedience. Although there are no curses in the first part of the sermon, but only ***blessings***, the ***curses*** for disobedience are not the less evident later in the sermon (vv. 21-48). In Luke's version, the four blessings of Lk. 6: 20-23 are followed immediately by the four "woes" of vv. 24-26 which are analogous to the curses of the covenant in Deuteronomy. There is no wall of division in the NT between the Law and the Gospel as it is taught by Christ and the Apostles. They teach emphatically that we cannot be saved by the Law—otherwise Christ's coming would not have been necessary (Gal. 3: 21)—yet we are not saved so that we can live lawlessly (Rom. 6: 1-2), "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who ***do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit***" (Rom. 8: 3-4). Jesus said in no uncertain terms, "And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Lk. 6: 46) as well as, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (Jn. 14: 15). And is this not the same theology as Jesus' brother James who insisted, "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ***Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself***" (James 2: 14-17). This same theology permeates the Sermon on the Mount—not a theology of salvation by works, but a theology of a salvation "***that works***", a salvation that changes lives.

This brings us to the major purpose of the sermon expressed briefly above. The sermon establishes Jesus' role as the new law-giver and the inaugurator of the new covenant. It also gives us practical ethical instruction for living in the kingdom of God. We are not waiting for this kingdom to come in the form of an earthly millennium; we are presently living in this kingdom—one which is invisible to unbelievers (Jn. 3: 3). In order to make this ***invisible*** kingdom of God ***visible***, we are instructed to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world". How do we do this? We do this not primarily by ***talking*** about the kingdom of God—though, this too is necessary—but by ***living out*** the kingdom as a visible sermon.

The reason Christianity is not credible to so many unbelievers is that ***professing*** Christians speak only in words but not actions. Their message of salvation through belief in Jesus Christ does not speak to the unbelieving world because the salvation preached is not changing lives or culture. For the gospel to be effective in any culture (whether Africa or the US), the salt has to be tasty and the light has to shine in the open so that men may glorify our Father who is in heaven. Otherwise, God is "blasphemed among the nations" (Rom. 2: 24) for the hypocrisy of those who hold on to a form of Christianity but have denied its power (2 Tim. 3: 1-5). Thus to claim, as Walvoord does, that the Sermon on the Mount is not "suitable to point an unbeliever to salvation in Christ" is unworthy of the Sermon on the Mount.

### 3. *The Error of Literalism in Interpreting the Sermon*

Perhaps the errors which have abounded can be partly attributed to the wooden literalism which has attended its interpretation. For example, Carson has noted the error of the Anabaptist—Mennonite tradition (*Matthew*, p. 127).

The resulting philosophy of pacifism in the context of a power-loving world demands the conclusion that Christians should not seek to be involved in affairs of state. This tradition rightly perceives the separate status of the believing community, which must not be confused with the world (e.g. 7: 13-14, 21-23). But it is insensitive to the place of this sermon in the progress of redemption and absolutizes some of its teaching in a way incompatible with its context and with other Scripture (see on 5: 38-42; 6: 5-8).

In other words, is Jesus commanding believers to allow someone, anyone, to slap us at any time without any resistance on our part? What if this person does this every day? Or what if he is no longer satisfied with a slap on the cheek, but wishes to further satisfy his sadistic tendencies by bludgeoning you with his fists until you are black, blue, bloody and unconscious? And what if he is no longer satisfied with abusing you, but turns in wrath to your wife or children? Do you stand by and watch? We all know that such bullies exist (although Matthew does not have bullies in mind), and few proponents of a literal *interpretation* of Jesus' words would be willing to go this far in a literal *application*.

To take another example that Carson has mentioned, if someone sued you in court (5: 40), would you “roll over and play dead” by literally allowing him to take not only your coat, but everything you own? The passage does not imply that our compliance (agreement) with his avarice (greed) should terminate with the coat—that is, unless our wooden literalism limits our liability to articles of clothing. It implies that we should not “resist him who is evil” (v. 39) even to the point of giving up what is lawfully ours *in certain circumstances*. The difficulty in interpreting the passage is in determining *what* those circumstances are. Should we indiscriminately loan to people with a poor record of repayment (v. 42)? We would soon be begging if this requirement has no qualification.

Finally, consider the ultimate sacrifice Jesus is commanding, “And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (5: 29). Need I ask whether you have sinned with your eyes? And have any of you readers lost an eye on this account? Or a hand (v. 30)? If you have (and I sincerely doubt that there are any eye-pluckers or hand-choppers out there), you have also found out by now that one eye or one hand can make you stumble equally as well as two. Obviously then, we need to be careful about wooden, literal interpretations of everything in the Sermon on the Mount as well as the error of absolutizing his commands for all circumstances and contexts.

### 4. *Jesus as the New Law-Giver*

Based on what has been said thus far, the reader could get the impression that I advocate the Sermon on the Mount as nothing more than a “rubber stamp” or imitation of Moses. Such is not the case as will be proven later on. That Jesus corrected the Pharisaical perversions of the Law

of Moses is evident, and some expositors major on this point; but he did far more than correct Pharisaical perversions. He carefully promulgated (officially announced) the deeper, more spiritual meaning of the Law. For example, he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (5: 28). Did Moses ever say or even imply that one had committed adultery by lusting after a woman who was not his wife? Adultery was punishable by death in the OT, but was anyone ever put to death for lusting? Yet, before God’s eternal court, lusting for a married woman who is not *your* wife is adultery.

Reformed scholars have often interpreted the Ten Commandments in such a way that renders the Sermon on the Mount unnecessary—as if the deeper meaning of the law explained in the Sermon on the Mount should have been easily understood by the OT saints. I disagree. Just as we have progressive revelation with the actual coming of Christ in history, in the Sermon on the Mount we have progressive revelation of the law of God which was not available to the Israelites. The motive of love to God and to one’s neighbor was imbedded in the Law, a fact which is evident from Deut. 6: 5 and Lev. 19: 18. Further, the law against coveting is entirely internal rather than external. Nevertheless, while the Law of Moses concentrated on the external, more obvious violations of the moral law of God, Christ concentrated on the internal violations of the law and the attitude of the heart (Poythress, p. 258).

Furthermore, in the entire exposition of the moral requirements of kingdom, Christ did not rely on the Rabbinic tradition or even on the authority of Moses himself, but entirely on his own authority. John G. Reisinger has pointed out that Christ is not just another Rabbi interpreting the Mosaic Law. Had he only been appealing to the logical implications of the Mosaic Law, then any other Rabbi in Israel could have done the same thing he did.

All Christ would be doing is appealing to logic as the foundation of His statement and accusing the Pharisees of ignorance for not applying the correct reasoning to the stated truth in the commandment. Christ would be merely the latest and greatest Rabbi giving the *true* interpretation of Moses. In no sense could he have been speaking with the authority of a new Lawgiver if this view is correct. Christ would be merely an *interpreter* of truth but in no sense a *giver of new truth*. He would be pointing us to Moses, and not to Himself, as our final authority (*But I Say Unto You...*, p. 17, emphasis his).

Although he often refutes the mishandling of the law by the Pharisees, he sometimes quotes the law exactly as it is in the OT (using the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT). For example, Matt. 5: 21, 27, 31, and 38 are direct quotations from the Law, but Jesus makes his own authoritative qualifications of each one of them. Even in the one quotation where Jesus quotes an obvious Rabbinical addition to the law (5: 43), He goes beyond the Mosaic regulations. The Mosaic Law never said to “hate your enemy”, but it also never said to “love your enemy”. We have clear commands in the OT for Israel to destroy their enemies because they are also the enemies of God (Num. 31: 1-20; Deut. 20: 10-20). The requirement of mass destruction of God’s enemies—the Canaanites—would certainly be interpreted by the common Israelite as a requirement to *hate* God’s enemies (Poythress, p. 261). (It would be very difficult to love someone while you are putting a sword through his heart.)

The imprecatory Psalms make it clear that believers are required to hate the enemies of God—“Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against



Thee?” (Ps. 139: 21). This is not a hatred of unbelievers for *personal* reasons, but a holy zeal for the honor of God which is trampled under foot by unbelievers. But it is clear from Matt. 5: 44-46 that there is another truth to be held along side of this one. God also *loves* his enemies by giving them the necessary sun and rain for their crops, and providing for the evil person as well as the good. In order to imitate His behavior and demonstrate that we are his true sons, we must do the same by actually loving our enemies and praying even for those who actively persecute us. The gospel of Jesus Christ presents a new alternative to Holy War and the physical destruction of God’s enemies. Through the love of Jesus Christ shown to one’s enemies, they can be *spiritually* destroyed and restored—not *physically* annihilated—by regeneration, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ (cf. my *Hermeneutics*, “*Imprecatory Psalms*”). Their “old man” can be crucified with Christ and the “new man” can be raised up to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6: 4-5). Before conversion, all of us were God’s enemies—“children of wrath” (Eph. 2: 3)—but since God was rich in mercy (2: 4) he sent Christ at the “right time” to die for the ungodly (Rom. 5: 6).

Thus, we can see how Christ completely reinterprets the OT law of Holy War against unbelievers by substituting a new kind of Holy War—the “war” of love toward one’s enemies through kindness and the preaching of the gospel. This “war” takes a new kind of territory—one’s heart and not his land. The “sword of the Spirit” is now substituted for the metal sword. This is just one illustration of how Christ exercises his authority to proclaim a *new* law (Jn. 13: 34) which could never have been inferred from the Mosaic regulation which was based on *incomplete revelation*. He did not come merely to *repeat* Moses, but to go *beyond* Moses in the exposition of the moral law of God without at any time contradicting Moses. The adversative statement, “But I say unto you”, does not always have to be interpreted as a correction to Rabbinic perversions of Mosaic Law—the traditional interpretation. As I have shown, most of the time Jesus merely quotes the Law itself. Rather, the adversative (“but”) should be understood as *additional* revelation of the meaning and application of the law or the *intensification* of the Law’s requirements (Poythress, p. 258).

Furthermore, Christ left it to his apostles to continue the exposition of the moral law on the basis of revelation which was not complete until his sacrificial atonement on the cross. This becomes clear when Paul says in Eph. 5: 25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” The weight of this commandment cannot be expressed in “You shall not commit adultery.” While it is true that if a man loves his wife he will not commit adultery, there is far more to loving one’s wife than being sexually faithful. Paul’s words do not merely have the intent of suggestion or good advice, but the force of law equal to that of the Ten Commandments. His understanding of the moral law relating to marriage was based on the progressive revelation of the atoning work of Christ not fully understood by Moses. And this is not the only evidence of a progressive understanding of the moral law revealed in Paul’s letters. When confronting the two alienated women in Philippi (4: 2), Paul did not tell them not to kill one another, nor even to love their neighbor as they did themselves, but to consider Christ who did not consider his own interests ahead of ours but willingly laid aside his prerogatives as God to die on a cross for our sins (Phil. 2: 1-11; cf. 4: 2). The practice of such self-sacrifice would more than solve the strained relationship between these two women.

### 5. *Citizens of the Kingdom—their Character*

### *a. The Beatitudes in Matthew*

As mentioned above, the Beatitudes are reminiscent of the blessings for obedience pronounced in the covenant ceremony of Deut. 27-28. It is also not coincidental that the number of the blessings—ten if you count v. 12—corresponds to the Ten Commandments of Ex. 20 (Edersheim, Vol. 1, p. 529). As obedience to the Law of Moses would bring blessings to Israel (Deut. 28: 2), so obedience to the conditions presented in the Beatitudes would bring blessing to anyone who would heed them. But while the blessings enumerated in Deut. 28: 3-13 are material in nature, save one (v. 9), only one of the blessings in the Beatitudes is material (v. 5). This difference signals a distinctive departure from the typical Messianic expectations of the Jewish people who were seeking merely a return to the “good old days” of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms when their enemies had been subdued and material prosperity abounded (2 Sam. 7: 1; 1 Kings. 10: 21). The primary blessings of the kingdom are spiritual—entrance into the kingdom, righteousness, mercy, seeing God, sonship. Without these spiritual blessings there can be no true enjoyment of the material new earth (v. 5) in which righteousness will dwell (2 Pet. 3: 13).

Jesus does not use the expression, “messianic kingdom” in any of his discourses since the Jewish concept of the Messianic kingdom had been progressively distorted to signify a merely earthly Messiah with political power. He shunned any attempt of the masses to promote him as such a king, the very reason he ordered those he healed to keep quiet about his miraculous powers. At the very outset of the sermon, Jesus makes it very clear that the blessings of the kingdom of heaven will not be bestowed according to usual expectations. The kingdom of heaven will belong to the “poor in spirit”, not the self-assertive; to those who “mourn” over their sin, not the religiously self-satisfied; to those who are “gentle”, not the aggressive, etc. Thus, Jesus’ teaching is in full agreement with that of John the Baptist who preached that the people should repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matt. 3: 2). The Beatitudes must not be seen as personal character which must be achieved to enter the kingdom. A careful examination of the Beatitudes makes clear that such characteristics are not achievable by sinful people. Furthermore, Jesus does not say, “Blessed are they who *become* poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” He says, “Blessed *are* the poor in spirit...” The Beatitudes are characteristics of those who are *made* this way by grace. They are not characteristics we can *earn* through hard work.

They are, nevertheless, *conditions* for entrance just as keeping the Mosaic Law was the condition of Israel remaining in the Promised Land. If we inherit the earth, we must be meek or gentle. To be comforted, we must mourn over our sin. The condition for seeing God is to be pure in heart. Only if we are merciful will we receive mercy. But these *conditions* basically amount to two things—repentance and faith—both of which are gifts of God (Acts 11: 18; 2 Tim. 2: 25; Eph. 2: 8; Acts 16: 14). Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the church, said, “Lord, give me what you command, and command what you will.” He understood that we have no obedience to give to God unless He first gives us this ability by grace. Salvation by grace does not make the gospel “unconditional”; it simply guarantees that these conditions will be met in the provision of Jesus Christ.

Such “*conditions*” for entrance into the kingdom must have come as “good news” to the poor and oppressed—those who had no power of influence or money. On the other hand, they must have been a slap in the face to others who did not see themselves as helpless—the religious leaders who didn’t think they were sinners (Lk. 18: 11; Matt. 9: 11), the zealots who believed they could bring in the kingdom by violence and deception, the rich who thought they could buy their way into the kingdom (Mk. 12: 41). To be purposely repetitive, none of the conditions of the covenant mentioned have anything to do with personal merit or ability; they are inward graces produced by God alone. Luke even emphasizes the physical poverty of his audience by omitting the words “in spirit” (6: 20), not to imply that material poverty alone makes one eligible for kingdom blessings, but to emphasize the blessedness which can come when one’s material poverty contributes to his realization of spiritual poverty (cf. Geldenhuys, p. 210). If material poverty alone made one eligible for the kingdom blessings, then poverty would not have been brought upon Israel as a curse for disobedience (Deut. 28).

To be *poor in spirit* is to recognize that we are spiritually bankrupt and have nothing whatever to offer God in exchange for our souls. This was logically a good place to begin the sermon for this was the very heart of the matter in ancient Israel and continues to be so today. After two thousand of years of Jewish failure, the people were still presumptuously “putting the cart before the horse”. The Law was being taught as the moral will of God for his people *but not* as a means for comprehending the absolute necessity of grace. Rabbinical tradition, ignoring man’s inward pollution, taught the Law as the means of salvation. It is true enough that the Law itself promised life for those who kept it perfectly (Lev. 18: 5; 25: 18; Deut. 30: 15-16; Neh. 9: 29; Ezek. 18: 19), and even Jesus used this promise to challenge the self-righteousness of the ruler and the lawyer (Lk. 10: 25-28; 18: 18-22). The problem is that no one *could* keep it perfectly, a reality that the scribes and Pharisees chose to ignore or did not recognize.

Sooner or later, any doctrine of man which assumes his ability to keep the Law of God flawlessly must necessarily dilute (water down) its requirements to manageable standards. (If God tells us to jump three feet off the ground, and we can only manage two and a half with our best effort, pretty soon we will convince ourselves that God really only meant two and a half.) These manageable standards normally include mere external requirements which fail to touch the crux (decisive issue) of the matter—the inward corruption of the heart. Hatred is not such a damnable offense as long as we don’t kill anyone. Lusting after another man’s wife is excusable as long as we don’t actually go to bed together. Such was the common opinion, and the Sermon on the Mount was a corrective to the least minimum standard approach to personal righteousness which could not give one entrance into the kingdom of heaven (5: 20).

The *blessings* of the kingdom also go against the natural inclinations of the human heart and are opposed to our normal expectations. No one seriously believes that the whole earth will one day belong to the meek or humble, no one except those who know Jesus who described Himself in those terms (Matt. 11: 29; *praus*—same word for “meek” in Matt. 5: 5). Fifteen hundred years before Christ, Moses was the meekest man on earth (Num. 12: 3, where *praus* is used in the LXX, the Greek translation of the OT). Obviously then, being “meek” does not mean being “weak”; it simply means that the meek person is gentle and does not push himself to the front at the expense of others—like so many political leaders—but lives for the sake of others. Moses could have lived in the lap of Egyptian luxury, but he was willing to forego those privileges in

order to identify with his enslaved people as their deliverer (Heb. 11: 24-25). Jesus was God, but he was willing to temporarily set aside his rights and privileges as God to take the form of a servant in order to lift others up to God. Humility was not a virtue in the ancient world because it was not distinguished from forced servitude (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures, Bible Works*; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 133). Through His example of servant-leadership, Jesus lived out the true definition of humility and meekness. Not being under any external constraint to be meek and humble, he chose voluntarily to humble himself to the point of death.

**Mourning** over sin and unrighteousness goes together with **hungering and thirsting for righteousness** (v. 6). Carson has pointed out that Jesus is not talking here about imputed righteousness which comes from faith in Christ, but **personal** righteousness which is the consequence of imputed righteousness (*Matthew*, p. 134). This interpretation is consistent with what Jesus says in 5: 20. There is both a personal and social dimension to righteousness included in the Beatitude (Hendriksen, p. 270). Personally, the true citizen of the kingdom mourns over his own shortcomings. It grieves him that he is a sinner and that his sin is the occasion of so much sorrow in God the Father (Gen. 6: 6). The greatest joy of the Christian is to please his Father, and when he sees himself fall so far short of this ideal, he is sorry that he has caused his Father such pain. But our mourning should not be limited to personal failures alone. “Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth.” It is a mark of impiety to be satisfied with personal righteousness alone when the world at large is polluted with relentless lawlessness. Daniel mourned over the sins of the whole exiled nation (Dan. 9: 1-20; Hendriksen, p. 270). Isaiah, like Daniel, recognized that he was a sinful man living among sinful people. His reaction to the vision of God upon His throne was one of horror, not self-satisfaction—“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa. 6: 5).

It is equally impious to be concerned for social justice and righteousness without any concern for personal righteousness. The world does not lack for social activists who self-righteously condemn systemic (pertaining to a system) evils plaguing political and social bureaucracies but at the same time excuse personal corruption in themselves. Many former American presidents, including one recent one, have fit this category. It’s a case of the “pot calling the kettle black” when, in fact, both are black. What is good for the whole society is also good for the individual. The Apostle Paul warns us of philanthropy devoid of the love of Christ—“And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned [i.e. sacrificed for others], but do not have love, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor. 13: 3).

Likewise hungering and thirsting for righteousness is both personal and social. We long to be holy ourselves, but we also long for the kingdom of God to come and his will to be done **on earth as it is in heaven** among all its inhabitants (Matt. 6: 10). We will not be “satisfied” as believers until “the earth [is] filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2: 14). We are promised that in due time this desire **will** be satisfied (Matt. 6: 6). Those who hunger for personal righteousness and social righteousness and justice will one day see the kingdom of God come in its full manifestation of power and glory. We will enjoy “a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3: 13).

**Mercy** is at the heart of the gospel, and only those who demonstrate this mercy to others will ultimately receive it. On the surface it sounds as if showing mercy is the cause of receiving it.

Actually, the opposite is true. Those who have received the mercy of God will inevitably show mercy to others. The kindness of God to us results in our kindness to others as a general rule of life. When we realize how much we have been forgiven, we will be ready and willing to forgive others of their short-comings toward us. We will exhibit sinful exceptions to this rule, but if our normal disposition toward others lacks the spirit of mercy and forgiveness, it just proves that we have never been forgiven ourselves. God's forgiveness will change us—no exceptions. Christ illustrates this principle in Matt. 18: 21-35 in the parable of the unforgiving servant. The servant who owed a huge sum of money to his king was forgiven, but he refused to forgive his fellow slave who owed him only a small sum of money. When the king found out about how unforgiving he was, he changed his mind and punished this slave. The argument in the parable is from the lesser to the greater. If we are not willing to forgive the *few* sins of others, God will refuse to forgive our *many* sins. Jesus interprets the parable for us in v. 35, "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." Again, we must read "between the lines" of this parable lest we come to the conclusion that mercy and forgiveness is a work of merit. The order is as follows: God shows mercy to us first, and his mercy transforms us into merciful people. If we ourselves are not merciful, then we have never received God's mercy.

But mercy is not limited to forgiveness, but involves relieving the suffering of others. Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines it as "pity plus action" toward those who have no claim to our mercy (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 1, p. 99). Said another way, "Mercy relieves the consequences of sin in the lives of others (both sinners and those who are sinned against)" (Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*, p. 31). The parable of the Good Samaritan is given to us as an illustration not only of loving one's neighbor but of defining who our neighbor is. The context of the passage begins in Lk. 10: 25 when Jesus is approached by a lawyer (an expert in the Mosaic Law) who asked him how to inherit eternal life. Jesus' answer to him was essentially, "Keep the Law" (cf. vv. 26, 28). We must not accuse Jesus either of legalism or deception, for this is essentially what the Law said (see comments above). The lawyer understandably felt cornered, and "wishing to justify himself" he said, "And who is my neighbor?" If he could essentially narrow down the definition of "neighbor" to a person that he himself loved, he might be able to say that he had loved his neighbor. After this, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan who not only had *pity* on the person beside the road, but *took action* to relieve his suffering. Not only this, but the Good Samaritan had no concern for the identity of the victim—whether he was Jew, Gentile, or a half-breed like himself. It is possible that the priest and Levite might have pitied the man, but they clearly showed no real concern for him. As they passed by in silence, they may have even mumbled something about how dreadfully sinful thieves could be or something about the need for more jobs or law enforcement in Jericho, but none of this social concern was much good to the thief. "Mercy is getting down on your hands and knees and doing what you can to restore dignity to someone whose life has been broken by sin (whether his own or that of someone else)" (Ferguson, p. 31).

To be *pure in heart* is the opposite of hypocrisy. It pertains not only to moral purity but also the commitment of worship (not just on Sundays) in which one gives himself whole-heartedly and single-mindedly to God. There must be no vacillation or hesitation in one's allegiance to Christ's kingdom. In light of the history of the Jewish nation, who could never make up their minds whom they would serve (Josh. 24: 15; 1 Kings 18: 21), purity of heart needed special

emphasis. In the present context of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees, the need for purity in opposition to hypocrisy would come up again and again. The word "hypocrites" (*hypocritai*) is used sixteen times in the Synoptics (13 times in Matthew alone) almost without exception with reference to the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus pronounces seven woes upon the scribes and Pharisees in Matt. 23: 13-29—"scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites". While presenting themselves to the public as examples of piety and devotion, inside they were like "dead men's bones", full of uncleanness (Matt. 23: 27-28). This was so partly because their *motives* were impure. Their piety was not directed to promote the kingdom of **God**, but to promote their own reputation among men, to build their personal religious kingdoms over men's consciences which they wished to subdue by their own traditions.

Clearly then, this purity cannot be measured by what *others think* of us, but only by what **God knows** about us. John Blanchard, author of *Right with God*, has put it this way, "You are what you are, alone, on your knees before God." We *are* nothing more than what God **knows** that we are. Pretense of godliness before men is futile. The question is this: Does God know me to be a person of unmixed dedication and devotion to him? We are not speaking here of sinless perfection, something we will never attain to in this life. The question is one of honest commitment to the claims of God upon my life personally and His claims upon the world generally. Is He Lord (Master) of my life, or is the world lord? Do I have my eye on Christ sitting at the right hand of God? Do I think consistently about the new heavens and new earth (*phroneite*—"keep thinking about"; A.T. Robertson' *Word Pictures, Bible Works*) (Col. 3: 1-2)? Do I consider the old person I once was and the old life I once lived as dead and buried so that my reason for living is wrapped up ("hidden") in Christ? (Col. 3: 3-5) To be pure in heart, essentially, is to desire one thing—fellowship with Christ (Phil. 3: 7-10). This does not imply that we cannot enjoy anything else in this life, which would be unbiblical asceticism, but that our enjoyment of anything else—the love of family, friends, and even a good meal—cannot be disconnected from our enjoyment of Christ (1 Cor. 10: 31).

Christians who are like this have been accused by others of being *so heavenly minded* that they are *no earthly good*. It is just the opposite. Christians who have trained their affections in one direction—the kingdom of God—have done more good *on earth* than all others. These are the people who have started hospitals and schools for the poor (William Carey), who have been politically active in the abolition of slavery (William Wilberforce), who have developed ministries for feeding displaced refugees in Africa and other countries (Franklin Graham). No, only those who are not heavenly minded are no earthly good, for their affections and energies are focused on their own personal kingdoms and the selfish enjoyment of pleasure ("whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things"—Col. 3: 9). Christians are not innocent in this matter, for our affections and energies are often divided between Christ and the world seriously limiting our usefulness to Christ. We must remember that Paul wrote *Colossians* "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae" who had need of these admonitions (1: 2), and that Jesus was delivering the Sermon on the Mount not only to the multitudes, but to his disciples, including the twelve apostles (Lk. 6: 17).

Purity will be illustrated later in many ways throughout the sermon, especially as the cure for anxiety (6: 25-34). We should not be anxious for what we shall eat, drink, or wear. That which

we seek and long for should be the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If we do this, everything else will fall into place.

Jesus offers no immediate success (no “pie in the sky”) to those who cherish the ideals of this kingdom. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, etc., will be persecuted by those who do not share these ideals (vv. 10-12). So much, then, for the empty promises of some preachers who assure us that if we trust Christ as our Savior, all of our problems will disappear. Jesus promises just the opposite—that coming to Him in faith will actually *create* new problems. Those who exhibit the Beatitudes of the kingdom will be like aliens in a foreign land—misunderstood and sometimes hated for being different (Matt. 10: 34-36; Jn. 15: 18). They will also be falsely accused for some of their beliefs (v. 11). The Christians in the Roman Empire were accused of being cannibals because they “ate” the body of Christ and “drank” his blood. They were charged with treason because they would not say, “Caesar is Lord”. Christians in the US who speak out against homosexuality are called “homophobes” (those who fear homosexuals) and are accused of hate crimes against them when, in reality, it is not the person who is hated but only the lifestyle. Many Christian ministries in the US have been started to help people who are struggling against the bondage of homosexuality. Speaking of yet another issue, I remember one day twenty-four years ago picketing in front of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama when one of the clinic workers came out of the clinic and scolded me, “You people are sick.” Christians are also accused of being self-righteous Pharisees, when the truth is that Christians are the only ones claiming to be deficient in personal righteousness. This is why we claim that Christ had to die, because our righteousness was not good enough to save us.

In spite of the world’s misunderstanding and sometimes, hatred, Christians are to be peacemakers (v. 9). The primary focus of this Beatitude is the “cessation of hostilities between man and God” (Ferguson, p. 8). Certainly other hostilities are included as well, the hostilities between man and man, but the first one is primary. Men are at war with each other because they are at war with God in whose image we are made. Christ came as an ambassador of God to proclaim peace to those who would lay down their weapons and surrender to his lordship over their lives. He is “the prince of peace” (Isa. 9: 6) who has also committed to His servants this ministry of reconciliation. We, too, become the designated ambassadors of Christ pleading with men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5: 18-20), for making peace is there only hope.

Thus considered, it is obvious that the peace in view here is not “peace at any price” as if our ultimate goal is just to get along with everyone like “one big happy family”. We cannot live for Christ and his kingdom without offending some people, even if we are trying very hard not to be offensive. The message of the gospel is intrinsically offensive to fallen man who is committed to his own self-sufficiency. Christ assures us of this (vv. 10-12). But insofar as possible, we must live peacefully among men without violating our own conscience before God (Acts 24: 16) and be patient with them in hopes that God will bring them to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2: 24-25). We don’t have to look for opposition; it will come to us naturally as we attempt to live for Christ by exhibiting the characteristics of the kingdom in the Beatitudes. When it does come, we need to have a ready answer for why we *believe* and *act* as we do (1 Pet. 3: 15), hoping that a gentle answer will not only turn away wrath (Prov. 15: 1), but will bring others to a knowledge of the truth.

If such “peace-making” behavior could be consistently lived out by believers—and it often isn’t—it is likely that some of the persecution which comes our way could be avoided. Speaking from personal experience, I have often been my own worst enemy because of my high-strung disposition and desire to win an argument. I have won a few battles, but lost many wars. Some of our suffering is our own doing and not “for the sake of righteousness” (v. 10). Yet, we must not shoulder the whole responsibility lest we be overwhelmed by a sense of our own failure in personal relationships with unbelievers. Very often, persecution can be avoided only if we remain sinfully silent, and many Christians remain sinfully silent to maintain the “peace”—a false peace. In many parts of the world, Christians are being slandered, imprisoned, and put to death simply because they are Christians. Men love darkness rather than light and do not relish (desire) being exposed by the light (Jn. 3: 19).

When we are persecuted, there must be no retreat into self-pity, but rejoicing (cf. Acts 5: 41). If our persecution has come from obedience and for “the sake of righteousness”, we are in good company with the OT prophets who were persecuted and put to death for speaking the truth (v. 12).

### ***b. The Beatitudes in Luke***

Before continuing with *Matthew*, it is necessary that we notice the differences in *Luke*. I have already pointed out the difference in the first Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”, instead of “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*...” Material poverty can be a blessing *if* it makes us aware of our helplessness before God and leads us to repentance and faith. Poverty apart from repentance and faith is a curse. *Luke* continues to “materialize” the Beatitudes in vv. 21-23, and there must be some reason the Holy Spirit inspired him to do this.

The Gospel of *Luke*, when compared with the other Synoptics and *John*, appears to highlight the importance of the gospel being presented to the poor. The sacrifice associated with purification given by Joseph and Mary for Jesus in Luke 2: 22-24 was a sacrifice appropriate for poor people. Christ did not appear in human history as a wealthy nobleman representing only a minute percentage of the world’s population, but as one who shared the poverty of the vast majority. Jesus’ mission is presented in Luke (more so than in Matthew 11: 5) as the fulfillment of the Day of Jubilee which included the preaching of the gospel to the poor, the release of slaves who had become slaves through poverty, and the liberation of those who were oppressed (Luke 4: 18-21). The parable of the rich man and Lazarus the poor man; the healing of the ten leprosy men (who by virtue of their sickness were no doubt poor); and the story of Zaccheus who agreed to give half his possessions to the poor, are found only in Luke. Spiros Zodhiates, executive editor of the *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, says in his introduction to the Gospel of Luke, “Special emphasis is placed upon the kindness of Jesus toward women, the poor, the outcasts, the weak, and those who were suffering in different ways.”

His identification with the poor continues in the remaining Beatitudes of Luke’s gospel. Those who are hungry *now* should rejoice, for in the new heavens and earth they will be satisfied with whatever they need materially. Their physical hunger, like their material poverty, has made them spiritually receptive to the good news of the gospel, and even though they are in much want



now, they are really blessed because their physical hunger is only for a short time compared to eternity. There are many who weep now because of many afflictions—hunger, disease, injustice, a sense of powerlessness, a seemingly hopeless future for them and their children—all of which could be helped by those with the material means to do so. These will one day laugh with joy when God wipes every tear away (Is. 25: 8; Rev. 7: 17). The afflictions of this sinful world will be the closest thing to hell they will ever experience. That Jesus is speaking to the **believing** poor, and not simply the poor, is evident from v. 22 when he tells them that they are blessed when they are hated, ostracized, and insulted “**for the sake of the Son of Man**”. Indeed, we may expect such people to be the most grateful recipients of the kingdom of God, and for this reason, the epicenter of Christianity is shifting from the developed world to the developing world, Africa in particular. However, much work needs to be done in teaching the implications of the Christian faith for mature and responsible discipleship, lest when prosperity does come, it will hinder the church rather than help it. The remaining woes of vv. 24-26 are warnings of the dangers of wealth.

Wealth can be a blessing or a curse (Deut. 28: 1-14; Deut. 8: 11-14) depending on how look at it and use it. The woes presented in vv. 24-26 are not to the rich per se, but to the **unbelieving** rich. Their wealth has created a wall of resistance to the gospel of grace. Those who are rich in this world, unless they repent, will one day be poor and destitute. They have their reward in the here and now, and this world will be the closest thing to heaven they will ever receive. Those who eat the delicacies of this world will one day be hungry, like the prodigal son who lost his money and became so hungry he longed for pig’s food. Unlike the prodigal son, by the time they realize their terrible mistake, the time of repentance will be long gone (Lk. 16: 22-26). Their laughing and merriment will be turned to mourning, and while they now receive the respect and adulation of the world because of their material success—money buys many friends and admirers—they do not and will not have the approbation (approval) of God, the only approbation that really counts. Such is the terrible end for the unbelieving rich who “received [their] good things” (Lk. 16: 25) in this life, but are now stripped naked of everything they cherished.

This somber (depressing) picture of the rich is not meant to lessen the equally somber picture of everyone (poor or middle-class) who departs this world without the riches of Christ. Again, *Luke* is presenting us with a contrast not found as vividly in *Matthew* and *Mark*. There are those in this world who seem to have everything, but have nothing; and then there are those who seem to have nothing, but in Christ Jesus they have everything. Hallelujah!

### **6. Citizens of the Kingdom—Their Influence in the World: Salt and Light**

Only after examining the Beatitudes can we understand what Jesus means by being salt and light. The Beatitudes define for us the characteristics of the salt and light—the metaphorical designation of believers living in a fallen world. Notice that Jesus does not say that we **will be** salt and light, but that we **are** salt and light by virtue of who we are. Nevertheless, there is an implicit condition in the verse. Salt that has become “tasteless” is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot. The **true believer** is the salt of the earth and the light of the world by virtue of the kind of person he has become by grace. But who is a true believer? A true believer is one who exhibits the characteristics of salt and light described in the Beatitudes—not perfectly, mind you, but consistently.

The general characteristic of both salt and light is that each is distinct from everything else. Tell someone to close his eyes and then give him a pinch of salt to eat. Then ask him to tell you what he just ate. No matter where you are in the world, in any culture from the most developed to the least developed, you will get the right answer—"salt" (in many different languages). Salt has a taste distinguishable from anything else. This is also true of the believer. His life is distinguishable from others who are not believers. The same distinction belongs to light. Go into a dark room and turn on the light. All of a sudden things which were invisible become visible. Light is easily distinguishable from darkness.

### *a. Salt*

Salt is often used as a preservative for food; therefore, being the salt of the earth has often been described as the preservative function of believers in a world spoiled and rotting because of sin. Jesus does not seem to appeal to the preserving quality of salt in this passage, for he says that salt that has become "tasteless" is good for nothing (v. 13). However, salt that has lost its function as seasoning has also lost its quality as a preservative. Both functions, and perhaps others, are probably in view (cf. Ferguson pp. 56-62).

As a preservative, salt has historically been rubbed into meat to keep it from spoiling. Before refrigeration became available in the US, my grandparents would reserve an entire day during the dead of winter for slaughtering hogs. The cold air (much colder than anything you have experienced in Uganda) would keep the meat icy cold until salt could be rubbed into the meat for long-term preservation. After that, the meat could be stored indefinitely for later consumption. Christians are like this in society. The world is full of deceit, immorality, covetousness, and violence; it is really not worth preserving. There was a time long ago during the days of Noah when the world of men became so hopelessly ruined that nothing, not even the righteousness of Noah, could avert (turn away) the anger of God from destroying it (Gen. 6). Were it not for God's promise not to destroy the world again with a flood, He would doubtless have repeated the deluge many times over. Had there been only ten good people in Sodom and Gomorrah, God's wrath against Sodom and Gomorrah would have been turned away (Gen. 18: 32). Only ten would have been sufficient "salt" to preserve the twin cities. In the same way, God has his people penetrating the world in every sphere making it a better place, and by their good deeds they avert (turn away) the wrath of God from destroying the world—at least for the time being.

Where would the world be today without the influence of genuine Christianity—their integrity and honesty in the market place, their care of the poor and the oppressed, their labors to educate the underprivileged, their creation of modern science and technology—including medical science, their insistence for justice and truth in the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of government. Where genuine (as opposed to false) Christians are lacking in any of these areas, the differences are *noticeable* even if not *noted* (acknowledged). In any country in the world where the Christian world-view has been deeply rooted (even if faded with time) there is more justice, mercy, and dignity afforded the common individual than in countries having any other world-view—Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. This is because Christians in every area of society, even in government, *preserve* the dignity of humanity which is in the image of God.

But Christians also provide the proper *seasoning* for any society or environment. Very often, the presence of virtuous women at a party will temper the swearing and off-color jesting of men. And when the Christian pastor visits the newcomer in the neighborhood, the “girly” magazines are put away and the language is cleaned up—however so briefly. Christians, including Christian men, should have this effect upon people. Those who in the company of other unbelievers are unhindered in their immoral and coarse behavior become more hesitant, and sometimes ashamed, to “air their dirty laundry” in the company of those who fear God. This does not at all imply that the Christian is a “party pooper” who never has any fun and wishes others to be as miserable as he is—a common misconception. Christians have the potential of having more joy in life than anyone else. The fruit of the Spirit is first of all, love, followed by joy (Gal. 5: 22), a joy which is not limited to bearing burdens patiently, but is often expressed in colorful, tasteful humor. Martin Luther, the fearful, morbid Catholic monk who took the medieval church by storm with his doctrinal teaching of justification by faith alone, developed a very lively humor after his conversion. Now he had something to laugh about. The funniest people I know are Christians who enjoy having a good time. Above all people, we have a life worth celebrating!

Even a few believers can have a very positive effect on many people. A little salt can go a long way toward seasoning a whole meal. The purpose of the salt is to *flavor* the meal, not to *dominate* it so you can’t taste anything else. Our speech, Paul says, should be seasoned with salt, “so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (Col. 4: 6; cf. Eph. 4: 29; Ferguson, pp. 59-60). Our words have the most potential in providing the saltiness which the world needs, provided they are matched with our deeds. But both in speech and actions too much can be—well—too much. We don’t have to be talkative, but engaging. We have to be efficient with our words so that they are not counted but weighed by the kilogram. Our purpose is not to draw attention to ourselves but to Christ.

But what happens when the salt has lost its flavor? The sodium chloride we know today as salt is a stable compound which cannot lose its “saltiness”, but “Morton’s Salt” (US brand) was not the salt Jesus was referring to. The salt of the ancient world was taken from the salt marshes, lagoons, or even scraped from rocks in the Dead Sea area. It was not pure sodium chloride but was mixed with many impurities which diminished its quality and usefulness over time (Hendriksen, p. 283; Carson, p. 138). When the salt had lost its usefulness as a preservative or as seasoning, it was spread on the flat roofs of houses to harden the soil and prevent leaks. Since flat roofs were common places for the entertainment of children or guests, the worthless salt was “trampled”, quiet literally, “under foot by men” (Carson, p. 138).

What analogy is Jesus making here? Is he teaching that person can lose his salvation as salt can lose its saltiness? This is not the intention of the passage, which if taken out of context like so many other passages, can be used to “prove”, erroneously (mistakenly), that *the salvation bestowed as a gift of grace can be lost for lack of works*—an inherently contradictory statement. We can see striking parallels between this passage and so many others which teach the necessity of perseverance—persistent belief which produces the fruit of righteousness. What constitutes a true believer? Is it his credible profession of faith? Obviously not, otherwise Jesus never would have said, “Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ‘And then I will

declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, ***you who practice lawlessness***’” (Matt. 7: 22-23). Judas Iscariot doubtless professed loyalty to Christ at one time, and of him Jesus lamented, “The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man ***if he had not been born***” (Matt. 26: 24). On Judgment Day other professing Christians will argue with Jesus saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25: 44b-46).

So then, while a credible profession of faith in Christ is all that can be required for church membership, it is not the final test by which a person is judged, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his ***deeds*** in the body, according to what he ***has done***, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5: 10), a verse which is in perfect agreement with the judgment of Matt. 25 (cf. Rom. 8: 13; 2 Cor. 11: 15; 2 Tim. 4: 14; Tit. 1: 16). So then, must we conclude that we are saved by “deeds” rather than by faith in Christ? The consistent teaching of the Scriptures is that we are saved ***by faith, not by works***. Explicitly Paul tells Titus, “He saved us, ***not*** on the basis of ***deeds*** which we have done in righteousness, but according to His ***mercy***, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3: 5). Nevertheless, the deeds we have done, or not done, are accurate indicators of the ***genuineness*** of our faith or the lack thereof. “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes*, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7: 16-20).

Jesus said, “But the one who ***endures*** to the end, he shall be saved” (Matt. 24: 13; cf. 2 Tim. 2: 12). Thus, if our faith falters and does not endure, it is proved to be false. This is the whole point of the parable of the sower, in which the same seed of the gospel is sown in different kinds of soil, but produces fruit in none but the good soil (Matt. 13: 1-9, 18-23). We should not be surprised, then, that many who initially show interest, even enthusiasm, in the gospel will fall by the wayside. Jesus has warned us in advance that this would happen.

But we also know from Scripture that the true believer will assuredly endure to the end—“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10: 13). “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand” (Jn. 10: 27-29). Peter tells us that we “are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1: 5) and by Paul that he is “confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1: 6).

Such assurances mean nothing if the true child of God can lose his salvation. Why then, the warnings of Matt. 5: 13 and Heb. 6? They are just a few of the means of grace by which we may

examine our progress in the gospel. Are we growing in grace and in the knowledge of God? Is Christ more wonderful to us now than years ago when we first received him as our Savior? Is my life demonstrating the fruits of righteousness?

Do we still exhibit the flavor of salt defined for us in the Beatitudes? Do we still mourn over sin in our lives and in the lives of others? Are we merciful? Are we pure in heart? Do we find ourselves being sometimes opposed or ridiculed because we stand for what is right, or do we simply go along with the mainstream of modern society? If we are no longer “tasty”, then we are not salt, nor have we ever been. (The metaphor of 5: 13 should not be pressed too far in its details.) The solemn testimony of Scripture is that there are some people who have given strong evidence of true faith, but who have finally fallen into unbelief never to rise again (Heb. 6: 4-8). The description given of false professors in *Hebrews* certainly gives us pause. How can such things be said of people who have *never* been saved? But such a description is given, nevertheless; and these false professors are clearly distinguished from true believers (vv. 9-12) whose “*work*” and “*love*” toward others in *past ministry* is evident, as well as their *present ministry* to the saints demonstrating their perseverance in the faith. The writer desires that each one reading his letter “show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who *through faith and patience* inherit the promises” (vv. 11b-12).

It appears from 5: 13 that the salt that has become tasteless may be compared to the false believer in Heb. 6 who can never be renewed again to repentance. Jesus’ asks, “...how will it be made salty again?”—a rhetorical statement demanding a negative answer. Commenting on this statement, Hendriksen says,

The implication is clear. Just as salt having lost its flavor cannot be restored, so also those who were trained in the knowledge of the truth but who then resolutely set themselves against the exhortations of the Holy Spirit and become hardened in their opposition are not renewed unto repentance (Matt. 12: 32; Heb. 6: 4-6) (*Matthew*, p. 283).

### ***b. Light***

As in v. 13 Jesus once again uses the indicative mood—“you are”. True believers *are*, not *will be* or *may be* the light of the world. Just as salt makes food taste better and preserves it, light has a benevolent effect, the chief of which is illumination. Just imagine a world without light. Most of the work done in the world today cannot be done in the darkness, and even in highly developed nations where much of the work can be accomplished with artificial light, food cannot be grown without the sun. The world as we know it cannot exist without natural light. But aside from these global considerations, consider the value of light even for the simple day to day activities. Men stumble in the darkness. We can’t even take care of the simple duties of domestic life—cooking, cleaning, etc.—apart from light. I have two nephews who were born with retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic eye disease which affects the retina. At one point in life they were able to see light, but even this ability has been lost, leaving them now blind. They are very adaptable, both of them having earned college degrees, one a doctorate in anthropology, the other a bachelors in computer science. How they completed all their complicated studies without sight is something which remains a mystery to me, but they did. Their achievements are quite commendable considering the obstacles both of them faced throughout life. They have learned

to do everything they need to do on a domestic level to fend for themselves, including one I can't do—cook—but only with the stubborn determination to be independent.

Light, which is so taken for granted by all of us who have sight, is an amazing thing. Small wonder that Jesus called himself “the light of the world” (Jn. 8: 12). The New Jerusalem is described in the book of *Revelation* as having no need of the sun or moon “for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21: 23). This should not surprise us for the world itself was illumined by the glory of God before the creation of the sun on the fourth day (Gen. 1: 14-19). As Christians, our light is like the light of the moon. The moon does not create its own light but reflects the light of the sun. Believers reflect the light of Christ who shines in us through His Spirit. **We** are the light of the world only because **He** is the light of the world first.

As a city set on top of a hill cannot be hidden, so believers who exhibit the Beatitudes cannot be hidden—even without drawing attention to themselves. As salt is distinctive from everything else we eat, light is distinctive from darkness. The way we speak, the way we work, the way we relate to people, including our wives, husbands, and children should illuminate the confused, sinful thinking and behavior of the world. But we should not limit this light-bearing to the simplistic idea of being “nice” people, although being nice is necessary (1 Pet. 3: 15). It includes our Christian philosophy of life or world-view which challenges the prevailing world-view of the unbelieving world. Schizophrenia is a mental disorder in which the victim is generally disconnected from reality, unable to distinguish between what is real and what is unreal. The intellectual schizophrenia (cf. R.J. Rushdoony, *Intellectual Schizophrenia*) of the modern world demonstrates this disconnection with the oddest sort of reasoning. I mentioned earlier that I once picketed in front of an abortion clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, actually two clinics within two minutes of one another. And we weren't actually picketing, but were attempting—unsuccessfully for the most part—to persuade young pregnant women to reconsider killing their unborn children. On one of my shifts I happened to notice a bumper sticker on one of the cars belonging to a staff worker at the clinic. The bumper sticker read, “Wear fake furs; animals have feelings, too.” I had to laugh even though it wasn't really funny. Here is a man, or woman, who kills unborn children for a living who uses her car bumper as a pulpit for preaching against the evils of killing minks for furs—minks who would never have drawn the first breath if women didn't like fur coats. This is “intellectual schizophrenia”, or we could call it “moral schizophrenia”, the inability to understand one's own disconnect from reality.

Christians are called upon to illumine the darkness of the unbelieving mind and heart. This is not an option, nor even a command, but something we do because of who we are—light. A city set on a hill “**cannot** be hidden.” Even if somewhat tucked away on the hill in daylight, as soon as night came and the lanterns were lit, a traveler would be able to see it from a distance (Ferguson, p. 63). Air travel at night gives one a bird's eye view of small cities which would have gone unnoticed during the day. As the jumbo jet loses altitude on its approach for landing, they dot the landscape like lights on a Christmas tree. In ancient Palestine, the cities even shone during the sunlit hours, their buildings commonly being constructed of white limestone which reflects the sun (Carson, p. 139). Using another metaphor, no one in his right mind lights an oil lamp and then covers it up with a basket. What's the point? A lamp is for the purpose of bearing light, and a Christian's purpose is to illuminate the deeds of darkness by bearing the light of the gospel

and the full teaching of Scripture. This light-bearing, as I have mentioned, is one of both **word and deed**. Good words without deeds are not credible. “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 Jn. 3: 8)—translated, “Talk is cheap.” Jesus not only **told** us that He loved us, but He **laid down his life** for us; therefore, says John, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 Jn. 3: 16).

This self-sacrificing love was very evident to unbelievers during the difficult persecutions of the Roman Empire. Tertullian, one of the church “fathers”, wrote in his *Apology* about 200 AD,

But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. “See,” they say, “how they [the Christians] love one another,” for they themselves [the non-Christians] are animated by mutual hatred; “see how they are ready even to die for one another,” for they themselves will rather be put to death” (*Apology* XXXIX, quoted by Hendriksen, p. 286).

Nor was the love of Christians limited to other Christians. Roman citizens would commonly expose their unwanted newborn children to the dogs which roamed the streets at night looking for food. Perhaps the child was another unwanted female, or perhaps a male with unacceptable defects. The ravenous packs of wild dogs would accommodate the Roman infanticide with minimum inconvenience to the parents. Christians were aware of this practice and would hide under the aqueducts at night waiting for these hapless (unfortunate) infants to be abandoned. Hearing their cries, they rescued them and adopted them into their own families. Many a child in the US and in other abortion-crazy societies have been thus rescued from heartless—or possibly confused—parents who desired their own convenience to the life of their child. This is just one obvious way that Christians are to bear the light in a dark and cruel world.

But if words without deeds are not **credible**, neither are deeds without words **useful**. There are many philanthropists (people who love humanity) in the world today who donate money for the hungry and sickly poor of this world who are not Christians. They do it for one reason or another, but not so that men will glorify God. We must in some appropriate and discrete way disclose the reason why we do what we do, or why we think the way we think. Otherwise, our light is covered under a bushel basket, and unbelievers do not get the benefit of our presence. This doesn’t mean that every time we do something or say something “good” we must publish our faith, but it does mean that we must at some point in time make known to our acquaintances, co-workers, family and friends, our allegiance to Christ and his kingdom. He is the reason we act and think the way we do. The Christian is to “let” his light shine; he doesn’t have to draw attention to himself by “making” his light shine. He has no desire get any credit, for his sole purpose is that men glorify his Father in heaven (v. 16).

## **7. Citizens of the Kingdom—Their Righteousness: The Christian’s Relationship to the Law**

Beginning in v. 17, Jesus takes a new direction. Why does Jesus say this? Remember that Matthew places the sermon earlier in his gospel than its actual occurrence. If the chronology outlined above is correct, then Jesus had already encountered significant resistance from the Pharisees and scribes, particularly on the issue of the Sabbath. Apparently, they had misinterpreted Him to mean that He was doing away with the Law, an accusation later leveled at the Apostle Paul (Acts 21: 21; Hendriksen, p. 288). Jesus answers this accusation with a resounding negative. He has not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill. What

does he mean? The answer to this question involves complicated biblical-theological issues which are still debated by evangelical scholars from many different theological perspectives. We do not have time to cover the divergent interpretations, and I would not presume to clear up the problems. However, I will offer a very simplified version (I hope) of what I consider to be the best interpretation. For a detailed treatment of the text, see D.A. Carson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Matthew*; Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*; and Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus.

The “Law and the Prophets” are synonymous with the whole OT which means that Jesus did not come to abolish the OT or its authority. By saying “the Law *or* the Prophets” Jesus emphasizes both parts of the OT in their distinctive functions in revealing who he was. He did not come to abolish *either* one, but to fulfill *both*. Through his person and actions he fulfilled the Prophets, and through his teaching he fulfilled the law (Carson, p. 144). We cannot restrict his meaning to the Mosaic Law even though it certainly includes the Mosaic Law. The Law and the Prophets is a broader designation including the entire *canon* of the OT Scriptures. Rather than abolish the OT, He came to fulfill it. By “fulfill” (*pleroo*) he did not mean that He came to *keep* the Law—although this is true enough—but to “fill up” or “complete” the Law in terms of its revelatory content, leaving nothing incomplete or unfulfilled which was predicted or promised.

The OT revelation (“the Law and the Prophets”) is not complete in itself. To understand Moses and the prophets correctly, is to recognize that the Age of the Law has been superseded by the Age of Messiah (cf. 11: 12-13). Far from abolishing a building partially constructed, Jesus brings it to completion. By inaugurating the kingdom, Jesus brings the OT to its *appointed goal* (Chamblin, p. 38-39; emphasis his).

Poythress argues similarly when he says,

The coming of the kingdom of heaven means a fundamental advance in the working out of God's purposes. God's promises of His reign and His salvation, as given in the Old Testament, are being accomplished. What the law foreshadowed and embodied in symbols and shadows is now *coming into realization*. What was earthly and preliminary in the function of the law is now *fulfilled in heavenly realities*. Jesus' teaching represents not simply the reiteration of the law but a step forward, bringing the purposes of the law into realization. The law is to be written on the hearts of His disciples (see Jeremiah 31: 31-34). Jesus does not assert merely a static continuation of the force of the law, but rather a dynamic advance—in fact, the *definitive fulfillment* (p. 265; emphasis mine).

...The law also undergoes *transformation*. The final revelation of God is surely in harmony and resonance with the old; indeed, it involves the coming of the old into the *destiny to which it pointed*. But also this new and climactic revelation bursts the bounds of what anyone could have reckoned from the old (p. 265; emphasis mine).

Some form of the word *pleroo* is also used in Matt. 1: 22; 2: 15, 23; 3: 15; 4: 14; 8: 17; 12: 17; 13: 35; 21: 4 with the same idea of bringing to completion something promised or predicted in the OT. Thus, the use of the term in Matt. 5: 17 pertains to the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures—“specific predictions, typological fulfillments, and even the entire eschatological hope epitomized [summarized] in the OT by God's covenant with his people...” (Carson, p. 143). Chamblin concurs with this interpretation by saying, “Jesus *realizes* the law. By his teachings and his actions, he perfectly expresses all aspects of the covenantal relationship to which God summoned his people through Moses (and the prophets)...in Jesus an OT design is for the first time realized in an actual building” (p. 39; emphasis his; cf. Poythress, p. 265). Thus, the Law and the Prophets point to Jesus Christ, and he is their fulfillment. “The antithesis is not between



‘abolish’ and ‘keep’ but between ‘abolish’ and fulfill’....Therefore, we give *pleroo* (‘fulfill’) exactly the same meaning as in the formula quotations, which in the prologue (Matt. 1-2) have already laid great stress on the prophetic nature of the OT and the way it points to Jesus (Carson, p. 143-144).

Some of the difficulty of this passage is that there are, in fact, OT laws which were made obsolete with the sacrificial atonement of Christ. The most notable of these are the animal sacrifices and the whole Levitical priesthood which have been set aside forever. In fact, the writer of Hebrews refers to all of these sweeping changes as the discontinuation of the Old Covenant, “When He said, ‘A new *covenant*,’ He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear” (Heb. 8: 13). For this reason, some expositors have restricted Jesus’ declaration of Matt. 5: 17 to the “moral” law of the OT. Thus interpreted, he did not come to abolish the moral law but to fulfill it (Hendriksen, p. 292). The ceremonial and civil laws of the nation, on the other hand, do not fall within Jesus’ purview (range of consideration) in v. 17.

The problem with this interpretation is that the partitioning of the OT law into ceremonial, civil, and moral laws is not found in the OT or the NT. For example, in Lev. 19: 18, we find the command to love one’s neighbor as himself followed in v. 19 by the restriction against breeding two different kinds of cattle together or sowing two different kinds of seed in a field or wearing a garment with two different kinds of material. This commandment, in turn, is followed immediately in v. 20 by a law against fornication with a female slave. Such mixing of ceremonial requirements with moral requirements is found throughout the case laws of the OT. The distinction between ceremonial laws and moral laws is obvious to us today who have the benefit of further revelation, but was not even considered by the ancient Israelite. What pertained to “clean” and “unclean” were binding upon the conscience and, therefore, moral. It took considerable time—not to speak of further revelation (Acts 10)—for Jesus’ disciples to understand such distinctions. The ceremonial laws were intended to build a wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles, thus insuring the continuation of a “holy nation”. Even Peter did not fully comprehend that in Christ such distinctions were forever removed and that all people, regardless of race, were invited into the kingdom. And even after the incident with Cornelius (Acts 10), he was a bit fuzzy on the application (Gal. 2: 1-10).

Carson points out that although the “tripartite” division of the OT laws into ceremonial, civil, and moral, is an old one, it cannot be derived from the NT (p. 143; cf. Douglas J. Moo, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, Wayne G. Stryker, ed., p. 352). We are then left with a bit of a puzzle concerning what Jesus meant when he proclaimed that even the “least” of the commandments (e.g. wearing clothing with two kinds of material) could not be annulled without serious consequences (v. 19). We are not helped by the qualification of time, “until all is accomplished” (v. 18). Using this qualification, some expositors have limited the duration of these “least” requirements until the accomplishment of the atonement of Christ, after which they will become null and void. Jesus’ meaning, according to this interpretation, is that everything about the OT will be binding until his atoning work is completed, after which these “smallest letters and strokes” will no longer be valid. But this ignores the other temporal qualification—“until heaven and earth pass away”. It is highly questionable that Jesus would extend the authority of the whole law with its “least” commandments until the passing away of heaven and

earth when he knew that “all would be accomplished” within the next two years of his ministry. This would make the first temporal limitation (the passing away of heaven and earth) rather pointless.

The solution is found in the fact that the coming of Christ fulfills all the OT revelation but does not abolish the OT *canon*. The OT Scriptures continue to have value as the word of God, but their interpretation and application must be guided and circumscribed (confined) by the revelation of Christ to whom they point (Carson, p. 144). For example, the Christian is not allowed today to offer sacrifices for the atonement of his sin; this would be an abomination in view of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. However, since the Levitical sacrifices give us valuable insight into the atonement of Christ not provided in the NT, the book of *Leviticus* has continuing validity for Christians today. We should read it carefully and apply the lessons learned from diverse Levitical sacrifices to fully comprehend and appreciate the significance of Christ’s atonement. Consequently, it would be sinful for us (Matt. 5: 19) to encourage Christians to rip the book of *Leviticus* out of their Bibles on the grounds that the Levitical system is obsolete. (What Christian pastor or teacher would suggest such a thing!) This would be similar to saying that we no longer need the book of *Genesis* because the promise of land to Abraham will be fulfilled in the new heavens and new earth—symbolized in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22).

It would be equally sinful for us to encourage Christians to ignore all the case laws of *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy* simply because Christians are not living in the OT Theocracy. Many of these laws can still be applied to concrete situations today. The law about covering pits (Ex. 21: 33-34) may sound a bit archaic and out of touch for city dwellers in New York, but its concern for one’s property has very tangible relevance for rural parts of Africa in which large open pits (sometimes 10 feet deep) are commonly dug for burning trash. Going a bit further, when this law is contextualized (seen in context) for modern society, it is shown to have continuing validity for city dwellers whose unenclosed swimming pools could cause the drowning death of young children. (For an intense study of the OT case laws and their relevance to modern society, see Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*). Furthermore, how could such a law as this be in any sense annulled by the completed sacrifice of Christ? Would it not rather fit into the same category as “You shall not commit murder” or “You shall not steal”, commandments which no one in any theological camp would argue to be discontinued in light of Christ’s atoning death? Even though the application of many of these laws must be contextualized for modern life, they are still as valuable to us today as they were to the ancient Israelites; they do not constitute mere historical curiosities to entertain the modern Christian.

All the commandments of the law are binding on Christians (5: 19), but the *way* in which they are binding is determined by the *authority* of Christ and the *fulfillment* that takes place in His work....The way in which each law is fulfilled in Christ determines the way in which it is to be observed now. Since the law foreshadows the righteousness of Christ and the kingdom of heaven, the practice of the law in the deepest sense takes the form of *replicating the character and grace of Christ in our lives and imitating our heavenly Father* (Poythress, pp. 268-269; emphasis mine).

Interpreting the OT on the basis of the completed work of Christ may have the *practical* effect of abolishing some of its laws (e.g. animal sacrifices), since there is no practical way to obey such laws except by placing one’s full trust in Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient sacrifice. Or it may

have the effect of modifying other laws (e.g. Sabbath observance, since Jesus himself is the eternal salvation rest to which the Sabbath points; Heb. 4: 1-11). Other laws will essentially be left unchanged since the atonement does not alter them in any way (e.g. murder and adultery). However, since the church is no longer confined to the theocracy and since Jesus has redefined the kingdom of God in spiritual terms (“not of this world”—Jn. 18: 36) the penalties for certain crimes must be modified to fit the context of a spiritual kingdom (e.g. excommunication rather than execution—1 Cor. 5). But no matter what direction we take hermeneutically, we are never warranted to abolish the OT revelation itself, including its laws. Just as the prophets and the OT law pointed to Christ before his first advent, they continue to point to Christ after his first advent (cf. Poythress, p. 268, quoting Carson).

### ***8. The Righteousness of the Kingdom in Personal Relationships—5: 21-48***

There are six sections in this passage all beginning with some form of “You have heard that it was said...” followed by “But I say unto you...” For this reason the six sections are sometimes called the six antitheses (Carson, p. 147; Chamblin, p. 40). They are analogous to the different case laws found in Ex. 21-24. In all of these antitheses, Jesus warns of evil motives which lead to the overt (external) sin. Anger can lead to murder; therefore, anger is a form of murder (vv. 21-22). Lust can lead to adultery; therefore, lust is a form of adultery (vv. 27-28). Pride and hate can lead to divorce on grounds other than sexual immorality; therefore, pride and hate can be the cause of adultery (vv. 31-32). The desire to deceive can be the root cause of false vows which no one intends to keep; therefore, the desire to deceive is a form of lying (vv. 33-37). The desire for vengeance can be a mask for exacting justice (vv. 38-42). Loving one’s friends does not make up for hating one’s enemies (vv. 43-47). Along with the emphasis on motives, Jesus intensifies the punishments attending these laws. The punishment for literal murder in the OT legislation was death, but the punishment for unforgiven anger is hell (v. 22). The same punishment was given for adultery, but it would be better to tear out your right eye or cut off your right hand (possibly a euphemism for the sexual organ) if they cause you to lust, since lust will also be punished by the fires of hell (v. 28-29). Therefore, the temporal, external punishments of the Law foreshadow the eternal punishments which are executed by the Divine Judge (Poythress, p. 259).

#### ***a. Murder and Anger—vv. 21-26***

Murder grows from the root of anger; therefore, the citizen of the kingdom should learn to deal with his anger to avoid breaking the fundamental principle of the sixth commandment. Our worship of God is not genuine if we are harboring hatred for our brother. Rather than going through the motions of being religious, it would be preferable to leave the worship service, find our grieved brother and be reconciled to him. Jesus calls upon us to be zealous in our relationships with others, that we allow no root of bitterness to grow either in ourselves or in others (Heb. 12: 14-15). In this instance the liability is placed upon the one who believes that his brother has something against *him*. The passage does not specify whether the grievance is legitimate or not; this is not the point. The point is that there is a grievance, and it does not matter whether the grievance is based on fact or fiction. As a fellow brother, it is necessary that I approach this person and attempt reconciliation. This does not imply an admission of guilt where no guilt exists, but I must do whatever I can to remove the grievance which may lead to

hatred. If I am wrong, I can admit that I am wrong and ask forgiveness. If I am not wrong, I at least can attempt to understand why he is angry with me. I cannot change his behavior toward me, but I must do what I can to help this person whose life can be damaged by pent up (internalized) anger.

What happens when I am the one grieved and angry with my brother? In this case Matt. 18: 15-20 applies. But we must be careful of not making mountains out of ant hills. We will deal with this situation later in our study of this passage

Verses 25-26 go one step farther by describing a situation in which the grievance has escalated to a possible court case. Jesus' recommendation is to settle out of court lest you find later that you lose the case and go to prison. However, the primary message here is not how to stay out of court, but rather to demonstrate how dangerous unresolved hatred really is. If the believer refuses to heed Jesus' teaching in vv. 23-24 by being reconciled to his brother, he should realize that lack of reconciliation has serious consequences. The consequences *on earth* can be litigation (legal proceedings) and even imprisonment, but the consequences *after death* are far more serious. Unresolved hatred which has never been repented of can lead to eternal punishment in hell before a relentless and unforgiving judge, God himself. Therefore, Jesus is going beyond the mere external legislation against murder and showing that God is very concerned about underlying spirit of murder, unresolved anger. We should not conclude from this that anger is as evil as literal murder. The sin of anger, itself punishable by hell itself, is compounded and aggravated by the sin of murder. Unbelievers will be punished in hell according to their deeds (Rom. 2:6; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Matt. 25: 31-46), and actual murder is one more evil deed in addition to the sin of anger.

## ***b. Adultery—vv. 27-32***

### ***(1) Lust***

Likewise, actual adultery is worse than mental lust, but each one if unforgiven is punishable in hell. If I lust for a woman who is not my wife, I have already committed adultery with her in my heart. If I continue to cherish the activity of lusting for other women and do not take radical steps to avoid it, this indicates a lack of repentance—and therefore lack of salvation—which can lead me to hell. Once again, Jesus corrects the externalism of the Pharisees who considered adultery only an external act. The internal sin leading to adultery must also be dealt with, and if lust can be put to death (Rom. 8: 13; Col. 3: 5) at the root, then the “tree” of adultery will never grow up. It is clear from vv. 29-30 that Jesus is commanding us to deal *ruthlessly* and *brutally* with the sin of lust. No half-way, insincere measures will do. If the right eye causes you to lust, pluck it out, and if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.

Reference to the right eye is understandable since lust for men begins with the eyes, but what about the hand? Two interpretations are possible. One is that adultery is viewed as theft, the stealing of another person's spouse (Carson, p. 151). The right hand is considered the instrument of theft as it reaches out and embraces the spouse of another. Another explanation is that “right hand” should be understood as a euphemism (a nice way of saying something) for the male sexual organ. The church father, Origen (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD), understood it this way and took Jesus'

words literally by castrating himself (Chamblin, p. 42; Carson, p. 151). ***Literal obedience, however, misses the point.*** One can still lust with the left eye, and he can steal another man's wife with the left hand. As vv. 25-26 emphasize the eternal seriousness of unresolved anger, so vv. 29-30 emphasize the eternal seriousness of lust. Unresolved lust can lead a person to hell, and must be dealt with brutality, a brutality which can only be described as radical amputation. Hendriksen captures the intended meaning:

More in detail, it would seem that the following lessons are taught here:

- a. The present is not our only life. We are destined for eternity. Note: "...than that your whole body be thrown into—or go down into—hell."
- b. Nothing, no matter how precious it may seem to us at the moment—think of the ***right*** eye and the ***right*** hand—should be allowed to doom our glorious destiny.
- c. Sin, being a very destructive force, must not be pampered. It must be "put to death" (Col. 3: 5). Temptation should be flung aside ***immediately*** and ***decisively***. Dillydallying is deadly. Halfway measures work havoc. ***The surgery must be radical.*** Right at this very moment and without any vacillation the obscene book should be burned, the scandalous picture destroyed, the soul-destroying film condemned, the sinister yet very intimate social tie broken, and the baneful habit discarded. In the struggle against sin the believer must fight hard. Shadow boxing will never do (1 Cor. 9: 27).

Of course, these destructive, and in that sense negative, actions will never succeed apart from the powerful sanctifying and transforming operation of God's Spirit in heart and life (*Matthew*, p. 303; emphasis his).

Although we should not take Jesus' instructions literally—since this is not how he intended them—we should recognize that it would ***literally*** be better to lose one eye or hand and enter heaven than to go into hell with both eyes and both hands. This is quite literally true even though the real problem must be dealt with on a spiritual level. Anything which is an obstacle to inheriting eternal life must be put to death spiritually. The measures we take to putting sin to death will be different for each individual, but they must be decisive.

## (2) ***Unlawful Divorce***

Unlawful divorce can also lead to adultery. In this section, Jesus quotes from Deut. 24: 1-4 which prescribed the procedure for divorce. We don't have time here to deal with the complicated issues of this passage. For further reading, see John Murray, *Divorce*, and Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*. To quickly summarize, two schools of thought existed in Jesus' day—the Shammai school and the Hillel school. The first of these interpreted the law of divorce more conservatively to mean that it was legitimate only on the grounds of sexual immorality. The more liberal Hillel school allowed divorce for more frivolous reasons including burning the husbands' food (Chamblin, p. 41; Carson, p. 411). It would appear from the Mosaic legislation that the Shammai school was too strict and the Hillel school too lenient. Moses permitted divorce for reasons ***other than*** adultery because of the hardness of men's hearts. The "indecency" (Deut. 24: 1) found in her must have been something other than adultery since adultery was punishable by death (Lev. 20: 10). There would be no need for divorcing a dead woman who had been executed for adultery. On the other hand, the Hillel school had exercised liberality to an extreme, allowing divorce for all kinds of ridiculous reasons.

The Mosaic legislation was not designed to make divorce ***easy*** for hard-hearted men, but to give them reason for ***hesitation*** if they chose to divorce their wives without sufficient reason. If they went ahead and divorced their wives for "some indecency", and if she married another man, her

former husband could never marry her again even if she was divorced by her latter husband or if her latter husband died. There could be no going back to this relationship, so it was advisable for the husband to carefully consider whether he would go through with it. Therefore, the Mosaic Law actually restricted divorce without forbidding it. Keep in mind that divorce would have been unnecessary in the case of adultery, since the guilty party would be executed. At the first advent of Christ, the penalty for adultery in Palestine was no longer execution, and the guilty party could be divorced. The righteousness of this solution is evident from Matt. 1: 19, “And Joseph her husband, *being a righteous man*, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly.” Therefore, divorce for the reason of adultery was not only legally permissible but “righteous” in the sight of God.

Jesus confirms the righteousness of divorce for reason of adultery (*porneia*—which includes any sexual immorality) by the exceptional clause, “except for the cause of unchastity” (v. 32). We have to take the exceptional clause seriously as not only setting forth the legitimate grounds for divorce but also the legitimate grounds for remarriage in case of divorce (for a detailed treatment of this argument, see John Murray, *Divorce*). *If*, indeed, the wife is divorced for reasons other than sexual immorality (*porneia*), and if she marries another man, *then* she will be guilty of adultery, as well as the man who marries her. The phrase, “makes her commit adultery” most likely means that the husband divorcing his wife for reasons other than adultery puts his divorced wife in the difficult predicament of surviving alone in a difficult world, in which case she may marry another man in order to survive (Ferguson, p. 91). For this reason, Hendriksen prefers to interpret the verse, “exposes her to adultery” because the husband puts her in a very tempting situation to remarry *illegitimately*. On the other hand, if the divorce was for reason of adultery, and if the divorced woman remarries, she has *not* committed adultery, nor has the man who marries her. Sexual immorality is a legitimate reason for divorce which breaks the covenantal bond of marriage.

Time will not permit a discussion of all the complicated scenarios concerning divorce and remarriage. What should interest us at this point is that Jesus’ statement in v. 32 is not specifically found in the Mosaic legislation. The warning of adultery to the woman divorced for illegitimate reasons may be logically deduced from the prohibition of remarriage to the former husband because of being “defiled” (Deut. 24: 4), but the sin of making her commit adultery is not specifically stated in the OT passage. Jesus makes it clear that the defilement of Deut. 24: 4 is adultery (Adams, pp. 66-68). However, it is seriously questionable that this would have been deduced from the Mosaic legislation alone, and if one wishes to prove that this “defilement” was in fact, understood as adultery in the OT, then he proves too much. He proves that not all adultery in the OT was punishable by death—namely, adultery committed through remarriage.

There seems to be little question that Jesus is here going beyond (adding to) the Mosaic legislation regulating divorce to include adultery occasioned by illegitimate divorce, something not specifically spelled out in the OT. (For further reading, see John G. Reisinger, *But I Say Unto You....*, pp. 55-73, in which Reisinger challenges the typical reformed opinion that the standard of ethical behavior in the Old Covenant is exactly the same as that in the New Covenant).

A parallel passage on divorce is found in Matt. 19: 1-12. On that occasion (which is not the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus is teaching in Judea (v. 1) and is approached by the Pharisees (v. 3) with the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?” On this occasion Jesus appeals to Gen. 1: 27; 5: 2; and 2: 23-24. The clause, “for any cause at all” refers to the spurious and frivolous reasons which many Jewish men were using to justify divorce based on the liberal interpretations of the Hillel school. Jesus’ appeal to the Genesis account, and his qualification of the Mosaic legislation—“Because of your hardness of heart”—indicates that he was now **abrogating divorce for reason of “indecentry”** (Carson, p. 417). By his own testimony, there was but one reason for divorce—sexual immorality (another is given by Paul in 1 Cor. 7). Again, it is necessary to stress that the “indecentry” of Deut. 24: 1 could not have been adultery in which case the woman would have been put to death. Poythress notes a difference between Matt. 5: 31-32 and Matt. 19: 4-6 in the following statement:

Jesus corrects this abuse [the abuse of the Pharisees who permitted loose divorce], but *goes beyond the direct teaching of Moses* by indicating that divorce is morally evil. His teachings are in harmony with Genesis 2: 23-24, as we are reminded in Matt. 19: 4-6. ***But in the context of Matt. 5: 31-32 His teaching on divorce rests on His own authority rather than merely on an appeal to Genesis*** (p. 259; emphasis mine).

As I see it, the difference is only minor. In either passage, he is abrogating the legitimacy of divorce for **any other reason** than sexual immorality and thereby demonstrating his authority to advance the ethical standard beyond the Mosaic legislation. While it is true that Moses also wrote Gen. 2, it seems clear that the fuller revelation of what Moses wrote is not found in the Mosaic Law but in Christ alone. Furthermore, in Matt. 19 Jesus makes it clear that the guilt of adultery attaches not only to the woman who remarries after an unlawful divorce and her new husband (5: 32), but also her former husband who remarries (19: 9). Thus, all the parties are implicated in adultery—the divorced woman, her new husband, her former husband and his new wife. This was admittedly “bad news” for the Pharisees whose fondness for divorce had become openly scandalous (Carson, p. 411).

### **c. Vows—vv. 33-37**

Just as the skillful Pharisees had become adept at violating their marriage vows, they were equally skillful in violating other vows. If one wished to get around an obligation to fulfill a vow, he simply did his “homework” before making the vow. Instead of making his vow in the name of the Lord (Lev. 19: 12), he would swear by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, by his head, the temple, the altar in the temple, or something else (cf. Matt. 23: 16-22). Jesus exposes this hypocrisy by saying that God owns all things. Heaven is the throne of God, heaven His footstool, Jerusalem his city, man—including his head—is his creation. God’s absolute ownership implies that all oaths have some reference to God, and therefore it is futile to hide behind technicalities in order to default on your vows. While there are special situations where oaths are necessary (Gal. 1: 20; 2 Cor. 1: 23), in normal conversation and speech they should not necessary—one’s word should be enough.

Taking an oath in court, although avoided by some Christians, would be one of those special occasions in which an oath is necessary. Even God himself guaranteed the promise to Abraham with an oath (Heb. 6: 13-18; cf. Gen. 12: 1-18).

***d. Retaliation Versus Loving our Enemies—vv. 38-48***

The “lex talionis” was given for the purpose of guiding judges in legal court cases and limiting personal retaliation (Poythress, p. 260; Hendriksen, p. 310; Ex. 21: 24, 25; Lev. 24: 20; Deut. 19: 21; quoted in Hendriksen, p. 310). They were not designed for the purpose of taking personal vengeance upon one’s enemies, but the Pharisees had used this law contrary to its intention as a justification for personal vengeance and retribution (cf. Lev. 19: 18; Prov. 20: 22; 24: 29; quoted in Hendriksen, p. 310).

The passage has no relationship whatever to the question of pacifism—the belief that I should never defend myself if attacked by another. (See comments above under 3: “The Error of Literalism in Interpreting the Sermon,” p. 38).

The Bible clearly teaches that murder is sin, and if I allow myself to be physically abused or murdered by another, I have become complicit in his crime. We could go further with this by asking whether I have an obligation to defend someone else who is being attacked. If I am walking along the way and I encounter a woman being raped, what do I do? The consistent ***pacifist*** must continue his journey without helping the woman; the consistent ***Christian*** looks for a big stick to fight off the attacker (Deut. 22: 23-27). Should we have a police force which is commissioned to protect its citizens against evil doers (Rom. 13: 1-4), or an army to defend the country from foreign invaders? It is obvious that pure pacifism is impossible, and if so, we should seriously question any interpretation of Scripture which supports it. Law and order both domestically and globally is based on the inherent rights of a person to defend himself and others against unlawful aggressors (Ex. 22: 2-3).

Slapping someone on the cheek with the back of the hand was not a violent crime, but a public insult punishable by a fine equal to a year’s wages. The act is still considered a serious offense in the Near East (Ferguson, p. 100). Jesus is not merely forbidding personal retaliation; otherwise, he would have instructed his audience to take the offense to the courts and let the ***judges*** slap the offender back (Poythress, p. 260). Rather, he is presenting a new paradigm for accepting personal (non-violent) injury or insults. We are taught in this passage to be free from the mentality of entitlement—the demand for my “rights”. This is what consumes the world. “I demand that everyone respect my rights!” Sooner or later, of course, our “rights” impinge (place limits on) upon the rights of others. If everyone is demanding their rights, there will always be a severe shortage of those who are obligated to provide these rights. It will become a “dog-eat-dog” society, the survival of the fittest. Is this not where we are now in the world apart from the common grace of God which restrains man’s incessant (unceasing) self-interests?

The Christian, on the other hand, should recognize who he is—a citizen of the kingdom of God. His security and self-worth do not lie in the respect he receives, or fails to receive, from others; it is totally defined by his relationship to Christ and his kingdom. God knows him by name and loves him, and this should be sufficient for him. It also frees him up to love his offenders, for the fundamental reason they act this way is that they also hate Christ. Love for one’s enemies is the true context of this passage (vv. 44-47). If we only love those who love us, how are we any different from unbelievers who love their own? Therefore, if I love the man who insults me, and desire his salvation, I will be willing to accept an insult (even a very painful slap in the face) as a



demonstration of this love and of the fact that I belong to a different kingdom than he—a kingdom not of this world, otherwise I would be fighting back for my rights (Jn. 18: 36; Matt. 26: 51-52).

The same paradigm applies to lawsuits. Once again, the proper context needs to be kept in mind, lest we reduce the scenario to the absurd. Is Jesus suggesting that we allow the complete confiscation of our property by unjust lawsuits? Hardly. But there are times in which it is appropriate simply to accept the loss and move on, especially if the only alternative is going to civil courts against one's brother in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 6: 1-8). What those circumstances are in Matt. 5 may be very difficult to determine. Rushdoony and North have suggested that Jesus' instructions in vv. 38-42 apply only to Christians living under *oppressive alien powers*. In such politically impotent (powerless) situations, the best course of action is to accept physical and judicial injustice in order to avoid further injustice. Resistance to the evil person who has the power of the sword is futile anyway; thus, by giving in to the injustice the Christian avoids additional abuse and is able to live in peace with his oppressors. One can think of millions of Christians today living under governments which are hostile to the Christian faith. Christ, therefore, is "warning against revolutionary resistance" (R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 121).

North argues that the willingness to give the coat (the outer garment) as well as the tunic is a bribe given to oppressive powers

which will encourage the offending party to leave the Christian and the church in peace. It enables the Christian to escape the full force of the wrath that, in principle, a consistent pagan would impose on Christians....The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is grounded on the principle that a godly bribe (of goods and services) is sometimes the best way for Christians to buy temporary peace and freedom for themselves and the church, assuming the enemies of God have overwhelming temporal power (Gary North, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 846).

Otherwise, argues North, we are on a level playing field which allows Christians to respond differently.

Remove his [the unbeliever's] power, and the battered Christian should either bust him in the chops or haul him before the magistrate, and possibly both.

It is only in a period of civil impotence that Christians are under the rule to "resist not evil" (Matt. 5: 39). When Christians are given power in civil affairs, the situation is different, and another rule is imposed: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James. 4: 7)....We pay the bribe until the day that God's adversaries lose power, but not one day longer (R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 846).

This is, indeed, a novel approach to the Sermon on the Mount, and it should not be cavalierly (casually) cast aside. The historical context of turning the other cheek and allowing someone to take both shirt and coat is most assuredly the Roman domination of Palestine. Roman soldiers were allowed to force anyone to carry their baggage one mile (v. 41). Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Christ's cross (Mk. 15: 21). There were many other injustices not mentioned in the sermon which oppressed the subjugated Jews in Palestine. Understanding Jesus' demands to apply only in very limited contexts would certainly remove many of the difficulties of interpretation and application. From the safety of our study, we may piously agree to Jesus' demands of turning the other cheek and allowing our hard-earned possessions to be confiscated

by oppressive injustice, but would we submit to these demands in practical situations *if we had the legal means of resistance?* The practical obedience of these verses seem unrealistic.

But we must question whether this interpretation captures the force of Jesus' instructions. Are Christians only to act this way under political duress? Certainly the diverse situations Christians face are complex, and every individual case must be separately analyzed as to how to apply Jesus' words without the error of being simplistic, but the underlying attitude of the heart and the pure motives encouraged in the sermon are applicable under every circumstance. To understand these admittedly difficult commands, we must go back to the Beatitudes which are not enjoined merely upon an oppressed people, but are characteristics of kingdom citizens at all times—good times and bad. Furthermore, let us not forget the most important context which should govern our interpretation—love for our enemies (vv. 43-48). When should I love my enemy, when it is politically expedient, or at all times? The answer is obvious, and this love will have more impact upon my enemy when I am not *forced* to be submissive. The actions enjoined upon us in vv. 38-42 are not convenient bribes to save our own skin, but actions which spring from genuine love for our enemies and a desire to see them brought into the kingdom. Without this love, how are we different from unbelievers—and how would Jesus' audience be different from their Roman oppressors, with whom they undoubtedly identified as their “enemies” (vv. 43-44)? Consider too, that the Jewish people had other enemies besides the alien Romans. Their rich Jewish brothers were also their oppressors and often far more burdensome (Matt. 23: 4; James 2: 6).

Although Jesus is telling us to do something contrary to our own nature, he is not telling us to do something contrary to the nature of God (v. 45). God gives good things to the good and the evil alike, to those who love Him and to those who hate Him. If we are not willing to do the same, how can we claim to be different from others who only do good to those who do good to them? Here again we return to the characteristics of kingdom citizens at the beginning of the Sermon. Christians are those who are “merciful” and those who are “peacemakers” between men and God. Mercy is highlighted when offered to someone who deserves the very opposite—like, for example, the Apostle Paul, who persecuted the church. Where would the church be today had God not shown mercy to Paul? The only way we can draw men into the kingdom is to be distinctively different from the world—to be salt and light.

If the application of this passage seems impossible, it is because it *is* impossible apart from supernatural grace. The same grace that produces poverty of spirit, purity of heart, mercy, etc. must also be in abundance to help us do things we could not do left to ourselves. I don't know about you, but it is not my natural disposition to be kind to obstinate people, let alone people who are openly hostile to me. But we are to be “perfect” even as our heavenly Father is perfect (v. 48)—not sinlessly perfect, which would go without saying in reference to God—but “all-inclusive” or complete in our love for others, an interpretation which fits the context (Chamblin, p. 42).

## ***9. The Righteousness of the Kingdom in Giving and Prayer—6: 1-15***

### ***a. Sincerity in Giving***

Jesus focuses upon two good things which are often used for self-promotion. The sinful human heart loves recognition by others, and what better way to be recognized in the spiritual community than personal giving and public prayer (Mk. 12: 38-43)? But, as always, it is the motive that counts. Why do we give, and why do we pray? Do we give so that others can praise us as generous people? Everyone would enjoy the reputation of being generous, for who wants to be recognized as an avaricious (greedy) scrooge?

It is possible (against Carson, p. 164) that Jesus uses a touch of humor in this passage, speaking as if the hypocrites were literally blowing trumpets to attract attention to their giving—what we call in the US “tooting your own horn.” It was not uncommon for Him to use humor, and He does so in this very sermon—did you ever see anyone with a log in his eye (Matt. 7: 3)? Without implying that the Pharisees were literally blowing trumpets, Jesus was possibly referring to the blowing of trumpets before the time of sacrifice (Chamblin, p. 44). Their “trumpets”, however, were not horns but clever little ways to draw attention to themselves.

Jesus has already brought up the subject of rewards (v. 46). He now returns to this subject. If we give alms only to be noticed by men, this, and only this, is the reward we will receive—“they have their reward in full” (v. 2). On the other hand, alms given in secret will be rewarded in heaven (v. 1, 4). Let us be clear on this point, for there are many well-meaning Christians who think that it is beneath the dignity of our faith to expect any reward for things we have done on earth. We should do it for the glory of Christ alone; anything more is considered an impure motive. But this is not the teaching of scripture in general or of Christ in particular (Mk. 9: 41; Matt. 5: 12; 25: 34-40; Ps. 1: 1-3; 58: 11; 19: 11; 1 Cor. 3: 8, 14; 9: 17; 15: 58; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Gal. 6: 9; Heb. 6: 10; 10: 35). Looking for heavenly rewards—separate from the reward of heaven itself—is an act of faith in the express promises of God. What gives God more glory than for us to truly believe and act upon what he has said? Paul explicitly teaches that the faithful teacher who builds on the one foundation with “gold, silver, precious stones” (i.e. with sound doctrine) will receive a reward when his teaching survives the testing of fire. On the contrary, the unfaithful preacher who is generally evangelical but compromises his teaching with “wood, hay, straw” (i.e. false doctrine) will “be saved yet so as through fire” (1 Cor. 3: 10-15). Obviously then, there are other rewards besides entrance into heaven—rewards for faithful service. These are incentives for our obedience, and if we believe these promises, God is glorified. Like eternal life, they are rewards based on grace not merit, for only as grace permeates our life and work can we do anything pleasing to God.

If we have our eyes only on the praise of men, we will forfeit the praise of the heavenly Father. For this reason we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. It is possible that Jesus was speaking more literally than metaphorically. When we offer gifts to others, we should not make a show of it by offering it with both hands, but rather with one hand very discretely and secretively passing the gift to the recipient (Chamblin, p. 43, citing Gundry, p. 102). Another possibility is given by Hendriksen who interprets the phrase as total lack of knowledge. I prefer to think that Jesus is referring to the normal way we use our hands. When we are going about our daily routine, we are constantly using our hands, but we are seldom conscious of this activity. We grab, squeeze, release, etc. without much thought. In other words, our giving should be totally unself-conscious. We should not keep records of good deeds constantly reminding ourselves what good people we are. At the final judgment, those who did

good deeds to others had not kept a record of their works and were quite surprised when Christ rehearsed their history of well-doing (Matt. 25: 34-40). As for our part, we should have the attitude of unworthy slaves who have only done what we ought to have done, and a lot less (Lk. 17: 10).

This begs another question. Should all our giving be anonymous (without providing the recipient our names)? Notice what the verse says, “But when you give alms, do not let *your* left hand know what *your* right hand is doing.” The real issue is *my own* self-consciousness, not the consciousness of *another*. I could be just as self-conscious of an anonymous gift as one which is not anonymous. The error of advertising is evident—I should not announce my giving to others for the purpose of receiving the praise of men. But this does not always require anonymity (being nameless) to the one who receives the gift. As I write, my wife, Fran, and I have thirty-five individual supporters who contribute monthly or yearly to our ministry here in Uganda. Without them and the twenty-six churches who support us, we could not be here. We know all of them by name, which means that none of them are anonymous donors. Had they wished, they could have given money to our ministry without us knowing their names, but if we didn’t know them, we would be deprived of the privilege of thanking them personally for their support. Knowing them puts a face on their contribution, and gives us the encouragement that Christians are concerned about missions and believe in our work here. This is far removed from practicing one’s righteousness before men. Had they wanted to advertise their giving, they would be telling everyone in their church that they support our ministry. As it is, probably very few people besides us even know that they are giving to our ministry.

I only point this out because I had the very discouraging experience one time of giving to someone who did not appreciate the fact that I had revealed my identity to him. He insinuated this by saying that he had received a great deal of help from others “who did not let their left hand know what their right hand was doing.” Again, the real issue is the motive. Did I want to get credit for giving, or did I simply wish him to know that I loved him? He should have, at least, given me the benefit of the doubt.

### ***b. Sincerity in Prayer***

We could apply the same arguments to the subject of prayer. Is Jesus forbidding public prayer since this might be seen as practicing our righteousness before men? Is he forbidding long prayers? This is far from his purpose. He is only forbidding the improper use of prayer—the promotion of self in the eyes of others, and the use of prayer to manipulate God. God does not require eloquence or length in our prayers, only sincerity. What are we trying to accomplish in our prayers? Are we humbly communicating our praise, repentance, needs, and petitions to God as those who are dependent upon Him, or are we attempting to prove our spirituality and piety to others? We cannot do both at the same time. The first type of prayer is answered, but the second is not (Lk. 18: 9-14).

We may just as easily violate the spirit of Jesus’ instructions by praying privately and then making our habits of private prayer known to others. There are many subtle ways of promoting ourselves, and sometimes we do it under the guise (false pretense) of “encouraging” others in their faith and practice—“I pray an hour a day; therefore, imitate my prayer life.” It isn’t wrong

to encourage others in their walk with Christ, but we must be careful that the way we do this doesn't come off as an advertisement of our spirituality.

When we pray sincerely, we will be rewarded by our heavenly Father. This does not simply mean that we will gain the requests we prayed for, if they are in accordance with His will, but that the prayer itself becomes a means of deepening our communion with God.

What reward could there be? And how does God show his approval? By means of the very communion that is taking place—by its becoming an ever deeper and more intimate communion, until there is a closeness of fellowship far beyond what the person could have envisaged at the outset. (For comparison, consider that the proper reward for being in love is not inheriting a fortune from your beloved's parents, but marriage; and that the proper reward for writing a book is the book itself, not the royalty that one receives.) Is it not here that we find the best explanation for the words of Mt. 7: 7-11? Does not the assurance that an answer to prayer is forthcoming, arise out of the intimacy of communion, in which one becomes increasingly sensitive to the voice of the heavenly Father? (Chamblin, pp. 44-45)

Meaningless repetition (“babble”) was the practice of the pagans who thought that by repetition of the names of the gods they would eventually summon the correct one to give them their request (Chamblin, p. 45; cf. Acts 17: 23 in which the Athenians were attempting to “cover all their bases”—baseball metaphor for covering every possibility—by making a monument to the “unknown god”; for meaningless repetition, cf. 1 Kings 18: 26). By mentioning this practice, however, Jesus obviously wished to condemn this practice among the Jews, for they were his primary audience (Carson, p. 166). God does not answer his children's prayers because they pile word on top of word, but because they are His children. Since He already knows what we need (v. 8), we only have to ask Him for what we need; we don't have to manipulate Him. He cannot be manipulated by our prayers to do something against His own will or which contradicts His superior wisdom. He truly knows what we really *need*, which often does not correspond to what we *want*. If we had the perfect mind of Christ, we would receive every request we pray for, since we would interpret our needs according to perfect wisdom. Since we don't have this ability, we pray, “Not our will, but yours be done”, the same prayer even Jesus prayed when his perfect humanity cringed at the thought of being separated from the Father at Calvary.

Although our heavenly Father knows our every need, we are still instructed to pray for those needs. This is not a contradiction or a mere formality. God does not work in our lives by magic but by means—persistent prayer being one of those means (Lk. 18: 1-8). Through prayer we participate with God's work in our lives and in the lives of others. Prayer also serves the purpose of reminding us where our blessings come from. We do not worship a deistic God who is remote and detached from His creatures or His creation, but a God who is connected with His creation through providence and especially with His children through the Holy Spirit—a God who is “there” (cf. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*).

### ***c. A Guide for Prayer—the Lord's Prayer—Matt. 6: 9-13***

The brevity of this prayer is not intended as a prohibition of longer prayers, but gives us a general framework to go by. Neither must we think that a prayer this short, prayed in earnest, is unworthy of a prayer. This is the prayer our Lord taught us to pray, not as a liturgical requirement, but as a simple guideline for ordering our prayers.

It begins at the beginning—with God. The *first three petitions* are all about the sovereign claims of God upon this world which take priority over our needs (cf. Chamblin, p. 50). This priority becomes clearer to us as we grow in grace; God does not exist for our purpose, but we for His purpose. Nevertheless, as we come to know God better, we find that *our* well-being is dependent on *His* will being done both in our lives and in the lives of others. “*Blessed* are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *shall be satisfied*.”

God is our Father and our first desire is that His name be hallowed (from *hagiazō*; set apart or consecrated)—*the first petition*. We desire that God be known as the only true God and to be worshipped, and honored among the nations. This is the only time the name of God is mentioned in the prayer.

It is possible to use the name (or a name) of God excessively, as though the more often I employ the word “Lord” or “Jesus” in my prayer, the more likely it is that he will hear me. Is there not a warning here against our using prayers (and in particular a rather nervous and anxious repetition of the name or names of God) as a means of winning his favor—a usage reminiscent of the pagan’s prayers? God is our Father; and who talks to his own father or to a friend by constantly repeating his name? (Chamblin, p. 50).

The *second petition* is similar to the command of Matt. 6: 33 and is coordinate to the first petition. God’s name will not be fully hallowed until His kingdom comes in its full splendor—its full consummation—in which case His *preceptive* will (His prescribed moral will) revealed in the Old and New Testaments will be done on earth as it is in heaven. God’s *decreed* will is always being done. He is the sovereign Lord who “does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’” (Dan. 4: 35) No one can prevent God from doing what He wills to be done, but this not what Jesus is talking about. Jesus teaches us to pray that the whole universe of men will yield voluntary and loving obedience to God’s moral standards of righteousness. Therefore, this is a prayer for the consummate (complete and perfect in every way) *eschatological* kingdom of God *on earth*. The angels *in heaven* are gloriously pleased to obey God’s every command. The new heavens and earth will be such a place in which believers will find their greatest joy in fully obeying their Lord. We have a foretaste of this kingdom in the church, but the church has not yet been fully glorified and every Christian still lacks full commitment and obedience to Christ. This will all be corrected at the return of Christ and the restoration of all things (Rom. 8: 18-22).

But we are not simply to wait patiently for this consummation. We are instructed here to pray for this kingdom to come progressively in the here and now of human experience *until* the consummation at the end of the world. Jesus is not suggesting that we “polish the brass on a sinking ship (the world)” as it were. Every good work we do for Christ and His kingdom is significant and will have an impact on this world for good (1 Cor. 15: 58). Therefore, the command to pray for this kingdom implies, in turn, that we are actively involved in bringing it about (Chamblin, p. 52). “Seeking the kingdom” does not imply idle wishful-ness or escapism; rather, it implies a full commitment to the claims of God’s kingdom being realized on earth. To the extent that we are able, we should be “seeking” ways to make lasting improvements in the world, not only by preaching the gospel but by practically applying the gospel to the deepest, darkest, dirtiest corners of man’s sinful existence. This would include feeding the hungry in the name of Christ, healing the sick in the name of Christ, educating the masses in the name of

Christ, governing countries in the name of Christ, or selling bananas in the market place in the name of Christ—that is, doing everything we do for the glory of God and in obedience to the standards of righteousness which should govern our every activity. There is no “square inch of ground [on earth] about which God does not say, ‘It is mine!’” (Abraham Kuyper). Isaac Watts makes the same claim eloquently in his hymn, “Joy to the World”—“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.” And where is the curse of God upon man and upon the earth found? Everywhere. On every square inch (or on every square millimeter) the earth suffers from God’s curse. And where does God wish the blessings of Christ to flow to bring healing to the earth? On every square millimeter. Nothing less will do, for God owns the earth and will not allocate even one square millimeter to Satan’s eternal use.

After the claims of God are appropriately prayed for, Christ then directs us to pray for our personal petitions. But even our personal petitions should be informed by the awareness of our corporate unity with the body of Christ. “Our Father”—not “my Father”; “us”—not “me”. When we lay out our petitions we must not forget that these are also the petitions of the whole church who needs God’s providential care. We must be concerned for others within the community of the King who are also working for the consummation of His kingdom on earth. In order to be effective as His people, *all* of us, not just *me*, need daily bread, forgiveness from God and the ability to forgive others, spiritual power to resist temptations, and the deliverance from “the evil one” who often renders us unable to accomplish, or distracted from, the good works by which His kingdom is realized on earth.

“Give us *this* day”—the *fourth petition*—reminds us of our continuing need for dependence upon God lest through abundance we forget that each day is full of need—not just *my* need but the need of all believers everywhere. God does not promise us a year’s supply of material needs, as much as many wealthy Christians would wish—“Give us *this* day our pension plan for retirement.” God doesn’t promise fully funded pensions (or even partially funded ones) and therefore He does not instruct us to pray for such; He only promises that He will supply our material need until our work on earth is done, after which we will have no material need. None of us know how long we will live; thus, we ask for the needs of *this day* in order to accomplish our work *today*. Tomorrow may never come for us in *this* world, so why worry about tomorrow? (Matt. 6: 34) Daily dependence, however, does not eliminate the need for planning; planning and dependence are not mutually exclusive. Conversely, careful planning should presume independence.

The *sixth petition*, “Lead us not into temptation” presents a bit of a problem. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the Holy Spirit *leads* Jesus into the wilderness *to be tempted* by the devil (Matt. 4: 1; Lk. 4: 1-2). How then can we pray a petition like this knowing full well that there will be times in our lives in which God will allow us to be tempted? Furthermore, we are instructed by James “to count it all joy” when we “encounter various temptations” (James 2: 2; *pairasmos*—the same word used in the Lord’s Prayer). The solution is not an easy one, but we must make an attempt. In *James*, the word “temptations” can be translated “trials”. It matters little how it is translated since James says uncategorically (without qualifications) that God never tempts anyone (1: 13). However, if we believe that God is in control and not the devil, we have to believe that God allows *Satan* to tempt us just as He allowed Satan to tempt Job (Job 1) and

Jesus (Matt. 4). When Satan is allowed to tempt us, this same temptation becomes a *trial* to us, a form of *testing* which has the divine purpose of producing endurance (James 1: 3). What Satan is allowed to use as a *temptation* to lead us into sin, God uses as a *test* to produce endurance. Sometimes we fail the test, but at other times we pass the test and learn obedience from it; and even our failures are used by God for our ultimate good, that we may be conformed to his image (Rom. 8: 28-29).

This line of reasoning leads me to the conclusion that the sixth petition is not a request to be free from all *temptations* (plural), for many of the trials which build endurance come precisely from many temptations. Were it not for trials, we would never grow in our faith. What we are taught to pray is that God would not allow us to be led into *temptation* (singular), or *the temptation* (although the article “the” is not in the Greek) which would make ultimate shipwreck of our faith. This interpretation is supported by the coordinate clause, “but deliver us from evil [or the evil one, the devil]”. We are asking God to spare us from the ultimate temptation of apostasy—falling away from the faith—which would land us in the clutches of Satan forever separated from the Lord. Of course, this ultimate temptation could take the form of a series of many temptations and failures which little by little eat away at our faith.

But how can such a thing happen? Did not Jesus assure us that we are in His hands and that no man can snatch us out of His hand (Jn. 10: 28)? Quite true, but we are constantly given warnings and admonitions in Scripture as the *very means* by which this promise would be realized (cf. 2 Pet. 1: 2-11; Heb. 6: 1-11; Matt. 24: 13; 1 Cor. 9: 24-27; to mention only a few). The apostasy of people who from all outward appearances are Christians, but inwardly are false professors, is not hypothetical, but real (Judas Iscariot, Demas—Col. 4: 14; 2 Tim. 4: 10). Prayer is but one of the means of grace—including the faithful study of the Scriptures, public worship, and fellowship with the saints—appointed for us to avoid temptation and apostasy. Negligence of the means of grace *invites* temptations, and *persistent* negligence invites the temptation of apostasy. Jesus is not presenting us with a superfluous (unnecessary) deterrent to apostasy, as if to say, “It is impossible for any of you who are listening to this sermon to fall away from the faith, but just the same, pray that it won’t happen.” Presented in this manner, who would take the petition, “Lead us not into temptation”, seriously? But Jesus was talking to many “disciples” on this occasion, some of whom would one day turn away from His teaching and follow Him no more (Jn. 6: 66). This prayer was one of the means given to this audience to prevent this from happening. For those who were His “sheep”, His voice was heard (Jn. 10: 27) and “acted upon” and the message was the means of their salvation. They were like the wise man who built his house on the rock (Matt. 7: 24). Those who were not His sheep did not effectually hear His voice (Jn. 10: 26) and did not act upon His words. They were like the foolish man who built his house on the sand (Matt. 7: 26).

The admonitions in Scripture are not presented from the perspective of God’s omniscience. When this sermon was preached, Jesus did not dismiss from the multitude everyone who was not the “elect”. While speaking to them as saints, He knew that many of them would eventually fall away into unbelief. Likewise, when the Apostles greeted the churches in their epistles, they greeted them as “saints” while never assuming that this designation was true of every one of them. “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2: 19), but we have no such omniscience.



The only way we can be confident of someone's faith, or even of our own faith, is that we are presently walking in the light of this faith (1 Jn. 1: 6-7). Anything less is presumption.

In no way does the need to pray for deliverance from the evil one detract from the doctrine of eternal security, which most reformed scholars prefer to call the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Once again, God uses *means* to attain the *end* of our salvation—one of those means being our own prayers for deliverance. Another means is the intercession of Christ. Before informing Peter that he would deny Him three times, Christ said to him, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; **but I have prayed for you**, that your faith may not fail" (Lk. 22: 31-32). Not only do we have our own prayers as a protection against ultimate apostasy, we also have the prayers of Christ Himself.

The *fifth petition* is related to vv. 14-15, so we have saved it for last. Luke 11: 4 appears to present the act of forgiving others as the *condition* of being forgiven, as does Matt. 18: 21-35 (see explanation above, p. 67). This condition appears to apply here as well for both vv. 14 and 15 are spoken as conditional, if—then statements. The same explanation applies here as in Matt. 18. A person who is truly forgiven is a forgiving person. One who is not a forgiving person is not himself forgiven. Notice that the reality of this forgiving spirit on the part of true believers is presented in v. 12, "And forgive us our debts, as we also **have forgiven** our debtors." The verb "have forgiven" is actually aorist indicative and could be translated "as we also **forgave** our debtors". Thus, Jesus is describing merciful, forgiving people who are now requesting forgiveness even as they have already forgiven others, not those who are seeking forgiveness on the *basis* of the merit of forgiveness. Conversely, those who refuse to forgive others have not been forgiven.

#### *d. Sincerity in Fasting—vv. 16-18*

The same genuineness which is required in giving and prayer is also required in fasting. The hypocrites put on a theatrical performance in their fasting—neglecting their appearance and putting on sad faces. This reminds me of some Christians I have met in the past that, in my estimation, were too serious for their own good or for anyone else's good. I would not question their faith because of this, but I got the distinct impression that they were trying to impress others with their sanctimoniousness (pious pretentiousness). True holiness is not sadness, and Christians don't have to be serious all the time. Life can be hard for the Christian, but it is good because God has a great ending in store for all of us! Jesus here condemns any sort of "putting on airs"—insincere expressions or demeanor which are designed to convince people that we are far more spiritually than we really are. Let's face it—none of us are very much.

When you fast, don't tell someone about it. Shave (or put on your makeup), dress neatly, straighten your tie, and go about your business as usual so that you don't draw any attention to yourself (cf. Ferguson, p. 112). If we are concerned about Daniel putting on sackcloth and ashes (Dan. 9: 3), we must remember that he possibly did this in private, but he wrote about it for the public good of the nation of Israel. The public piety of an OT prophet, as a representative of the nation, is not the same thing as that of an ordinary Christian who has no public statement to make.

Once again, God will “repay” the person who fasts sincerely. Is fasting different from prayer? Obviously so, since fasting is mentioned separately. Perhaps we can say that prayer can take place without fasting, but fasting does not generally take place without prayer. Fasting may be a way of intensifying our prayer. If we are hungry we remember to pray, and perhaps to pray for a specific need (cf. Dan. 9: 3—the sins of the nation of Israel; Matt. 17: 21—casting out demons [but this verse is not included in some ancient manuscripts]). More importantly, our voluntary hunger is a means of personal sacrifice which says in effect, “Lord, I really need for you to answer this prayer!” Does our earnestness in prayer really make a difference? After all, the Lord already knows what we need anyway, so why go to the trouble of fasting? The same objection could be made to prayer which, as we have said, is one of the means by which God accomplishes His work in us and in the world. We may also consider why Jesus instructed us to be *persistent* in our prayers if *non-persistent* prayers were equally effective (Lk. 18: 1-8). Persistent prayer is a sign of faith (v. 1, 8). It is instructive, as well as convicting, that Jesus *assumes* the activity of fasting along with the activities of giving and prayer (Chamblin, p. 46). Perhaps we should more seriously consider the need for fasting along with prayer as a means of grace. Second, we have evidence from *Acts* that the first Christians fasted on occasions of special importance, like the sending out of missionaries or the election of elders (Acts 13: 2; 14: 23). Sincere fasting, then, has value and holds the promise of reward.

### ***10. Hearts for the Kingdom—the Cure for Confusion and Anxiety—Matt. 6: 19-34***

#### ***a. The Confusion of Treasures***

God never told us not to pursue treasures. In fact Jesus gives us two parables in which the kingdom of heaven is compared to a field containing treasure and to a pearl of great value (Matt. 13: 44-46). In Matt. 6: 20, we are specifically commanded (present imperative) to “lay up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven”. What we are commanded *not to do* (also present imperative) is to attempt to make this present world “heaven on earth” by depositing our treasures in a vanishing world of pension funds, bank accounts, and earthly possessions. Now, this is not a blanket condemnation of any of these things. I have a pension plan myself, but I am not counting on it for my present happiness or my future security. (If I was, I would be in trouble.) This, I believe, is what Jesus means. Don’t set your heart on worldly possessions as the basis of your security and happiness.

Why should we count on earthly wealth, anyway? Surplus clothing which is not worn, but laid up in storage, becomes moth-eaten. Storage grain is eaten by rats and insects (“rust”, *brosis* can be a reference to being eaten; Chamblin, p. 48; Carson, 177). Visible wealth also attracts thieves who in ancient times could easily dig through the mud-brick walls of houses similar to some of the mud-brick houses in Uganda. Thieves can also be more sophisticated as in the Enron and World-Com scandals of recent years in the US. Slick CFO’s (Chief Financial Officers) and high dollar accountants were able to steal billions of dollars from investors, some of whom lost their life savings. Much earlier in US history, the wealth quickly acquired in the stock market boom during the 1920’s was lost suddenly in the stock market crash of 1929. Surely the biblical sage (wise man) of *Proverbs* is correct when he says, “Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For *wealth* certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens” (Prov. 23: 4-5).

There is no security in anything in this life. But even if you could fight off the thieves, insects, crooked CFO's and accountants, what would you have at death, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mk. 8: 36)? Jesus has two words for investors who are rich in the world's goods but poor in their love for God and His kingdom, "You fool!" (Lk. 12: 15-21). The last verse in this passage provides the divine commentary on Matt. 5: 19-21, "So is the man who stores up treasure for *himself*, and is not rich toward God." There is nothing wrong with having these things, but we must hold them as trustees, not owners, who may be called upon at any time to spend them for the kingdom of God. When we do use them for His kingdom, they are never really "spent", but "stored up" in heaven. He not only uses the money to promote His work, but the return interest is 100% deposited in the "New Heavens and Earth Bank, Inc." where nothing can touch it, not even the government. That's an investment which no wise investor would refuse—provided he really believed it.

Sadly, few investors really believe Him, for most are "socking" their money away in other less lucrative investments with the hope that one day they can retire at 60 to 65 years old and spend the rest of their lives playing golf or doing pretty much nothing (cf. John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*). I now hear that a half a million dollars saved by age 65 is considered a "bare minimum" if one expects to "retire". But this begs the question: Why not keep working at 65 until you *expire* rather than *retire*, and then you would be able to use some of that money *now* for worthwhile purposes like missions and mercy ministries—more worthwhile than scuba diving in Hawaii and fishing in Mexico? Or perhaps you could save that money now so that you can spend the rest of your life helping others without the necessity of getting paid for it. This, too, is a worthwhile "retirement". (In case you're wondering, the scriptural doctrine of "retirement" is found in *Hezekiah 3: 7*.)

Lest we absolutize the passage to mean that all financial planning is condemned, we need to balance the picture with other Biblical teaching—the commendation of hard work and planning for the future (Prov. 6: 6-11), saving up for one's children and grandchildren (Prov. 13: 22), providing for one's family (1 Tim. 5: 8) (cf. Carson, p. 177). But none of this has to be intrinsically selfish. Such planning does not have to be in the same category as that of the rich fool who wished to "kick back" and take his ease without lifting a finger to help anyone else. But even providing for one's family can be taken to an extreme. How much do we have to leave our families, and how much is required to make them "secure"? Are we required to make them secure (my children would have a laugh at this one)? Isn't their security wrapped up in Christ, as well, who will see to it that they have what they need (6: 31-32)? We should beware of leaving our children too much lest they depend on it or spend it frivolously. How do you know whether they will have the wisdom to spend it wisely (Eccles. 2: 18-19)?

Of course, "treasure" is not limited to material wealth, but can be almost anything—education, status, sex, etc.—anything upon which we set our hearts (v. 21). For this reason, Christ says, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." This is the key issue. What do we think about most of the time—new boat, new car, bigger home, a Ph.D., a night out with my girl, what to do with all our time after we "retire"? This kind of thinking is deadly; it can set the wrong direction for your entire life, and many people will be forced to look back one day and confess, "What was it all for?" Jesus warns us of wrong perspectives in vv. 22-23. If the eye is

clear (*haplos*—healthy or single) the whole body will be full of light. A good eye, or a clear eye, has good focus and does not see **double**, but if the eye is “bad” (a possible interpretation of *poneros*), then one’s vision is blurred. If you are seeing double all the time, you can’t navigate through life very well, and your **whole body** is continually stumbling over things. This is what happens to someone with the wrong perspective on life—a perspective which treasures the things of this world more than Christ. He is constantly “seeing double” and stumbling over anything and everything, perhaps going around in circles or going nowhere in particular. Using another analogy, if one sees double, he can’t focus on one thing at time. He has no worthwhile aim in life, a fact which sends him constantly in the wrong spiritual direction chasing one thing and then another. The light (a metaphor for the understanding) which is in him (His whole body; i.e. his whole life) is not really light but only darkness. Thus, his life is full of darkness and confusion. Physical blindness is a terrible handicap, but spiritual blindness is much worse, darkening the whole life.

This is contrasted with the healthy, single eye which is clearly focused on one thing primarily—the kingdom of God. Everything else is secondary and useful to this primary aim—including marriage—or should we say, **especially** marriage since our life partner will either help keep us focused or will blur our vision. Though invisible to most people, the light of the kingdom enters the healthy eye and fills the whole body full of light (understanding) enabling him to steer a straight course through life full of purpose. What Jesus is speaking of here is known by many Christians as one’s “world-view”. How do we see and interpret the world and life in the world? Our understanding of everything is determined by our world-view which is either Christian or non-Christian. For all believers, this world-view is a mixture of Christian versus non-Christian thinking, and the more mature we are, the less we see life with an unbiblical, non-Christian world-view. Paul comments on this process by saying, “*We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor. 10: 5).

### ***b. The Confusion of Masters***

Differing treasures will produce differing masters. If my treasure is in heaven, the kingdom of God, then my Master will be God. If my treasure is this world and the things of this world, then **my treasure will become my master**. The word for “master” is *kurios* or “lord”; and the word for “serve” is *douleuo*, to serve as a slave. It is significant that Matthew chose *doulos* rather than *diakonos*, a slave who could work for more than one master (Chamblin, p. 49). A *doulos* (bondslave), on the other hand, was the sole property of one master. Since he owned no property, he was totally dependent on the good graces of his master who provided for his needs. There was, therefore, a **measure of security** in being a slave which is why slaves of good masters sometimes chose to remain slaves—doubtless an OT type of being the slave of Christ (Ex. 21: 3-6; cf. Col. 4: 12).

Double ownership is impossible for the *doulos*, but any attempt to serve two masters would be futile anyway. Sooner or later, his devotion to one master would crowd out any loyalty to the other (v. 24). This is the nature of masters. They demand so much of our time, talent, and energies that it is practically impossible to serve two at the same time. Inevitably, one of them will get the “crumbs left over after the meal is eaten”. Jesus is no different from other masters;

He demands our total allegiance. The difference is that being a slave of Christ gives us true liberty to be what He as our Co-Creator (Heb. 1: 2a) has designed us to be (1 Cor. 7: 22). Being a slave of Christ we are *free to serve others* without in turn becoming the slaves of men (Gal. 1: 10; cf. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, Chap. 6, “*Freedom in Slavery*”). Mammon (or money), on the contrary, is a cruel master which allows no such liberty. If we love money we cannot make those necessary sacrifices for the kingdom of God which would diminish our security in dollars. Slavery to money is primarily slavery to the security which money gives us. This seems to be clear from the connection between v. 24 and v. 25—having money as a master and its consequence, anxiety. People who are slaves of money may even give to the church or the poor, but their giving will not be sacrificial giving. They will not have to give up anything they want, much less anything they need, because of their giving. They will give only from their surplus (Mk. 12: 41-44).

### *c. The Cure for Anxiety*

The transitional statement, “For this reason” (v. 25), indicates that Jesus’ warning about anxiety relates to the subjects of treasures and masters in vv. 19-24. Anxiety springs, first of all, from the wrong focus in life which was mentioned in v. 23—the “bad eye” which does not see things clearly. If our treasures are limited to this earth, then there is no security when they are gone. Nor is there any security when they are diminishing—the cause of anxiety among the wealthy who have suffered a recent stock market setback. When life revolves around earthly comforts, the thought of losing those comforts brings anxiety even when one is rich. “For this reason” primarily is a reference to having God as our true master. The slave had no property and depended on his master for everything, even food and clothing. Since God is the true master of the believer, we don’t have to worry about where the next meal is coming from. Ultimately, our care is *His* responsibility, not ours. I heard a friend say one time, “I’m only required to work; I’m not required to *make a living*.” That’s God’s responsibility.”

Most of the people in Jesus’ audience were poor, and yet He does not excuse even them from the sin of anxiety. Anxiety over the future and faith in our Father’s care are opposites. Either we believe God will take care of our needs or we don’t. But rather than scolding us for unbelief, Jesus reasons with us. He argues *a fortiori*, from the lesser to the greater. If God takes care of animals, which are obviously—evolutionists aside—not worth as much to Him as His own children, then He will take care of His children also. If He clothes plants (lilies), He will also clothe His children. Animals and plants serve as object lessons of the benevolent providence of God who provides for all in due season (Ps. 104: 24-27). Birds don’t sow, reap, or gather food into barns like men do, nevertheless, God feeds them (v. 26). This is not a denial of the need for work or planning (Have you ever seen an idle bird?), but a denial of the need for worrying (Have you ever seen a bird worry?). Besides, what will worry and anxiety accomplish? Will it add years to a person’s life? Quite the contrary, medical research proves that anxiety will shorten a person’s life.

The Gentiles (unbelievers) earnestly seek security in the abundance of the earth (vv. 31-32), *for this world is all they have*. It should not be so among those who will inherit the kingdom of God. What we see now is only a faint shadow of what will be a reality later (2 Cor. 4: 18). Rather than seeking our security on earth, we should be seeking—and working for—the

advancement of the kingdom of God throughout the world, progress which includes the manifestation of His righteousness—“Thy kingdom come, Thy **will be done, on earth**, as it is in heaven”. If this is our priority, God will see to it that we have everything we truly need to carry out our mission and purpose on earth. His provisions will include everything that is truly necessary, not everything we want; but as we grow in grace, we will discover that our **wants** and our **needs** are becoming more closely equated—we are learning to want only that which we need. The lesson of King Solomon and lilies is that our lives are adorned primarily by the simple gifts of His grace (e.g. faith and contentment) which shine far more brightly than any worldly adornments. This is also a lesson my African brothers and sisters can teach their wealthier counterparts in the West.

If the kingdom of God is our goal in life, anxiety is eliminated (even though all of us have frequent relapses in our thinking). God is orchestrating every event in this world—including every single thing which happens to us (Rom. 8: 28-30)—for the purpose of consummating His kingdom which He is generously sharing with us (Lk. 12: 32). I don’t have to worry about His kingdom coming to pass. My worry arises only when I believe that **my kingdom** is not coming to pass—my hopes, my plans, and my ambitions. This is the age-old temptation of Satan who is constantly tempting man to be his own God and to have his own kingdom independent of God (Gen. 3: 5). But if we trust God, we believe that His kingdom includes everything which brings us fulfillment and joy. His kingdom citizens are “blessed” with “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ” (Eph. 1: 3). Worrying about tomorrow is counterproductive to the work we should be doing today (v. 34).

### ***11. Judging Others—Matt. 7: 1-6***

This is one of the most popular passages in the Bible, and it can be quoted by almost anyone, even those who never read the Bible. Few, however, understand its meaning. Most people believe that Jesus is forbidding all judging. That is, we should never judge anyone for what they believe or for what they do, lest we be judged ourselves for what we believe and do. Those who hold this view rarely understand the logical implications of their thinking. If they are correct, then there can be no moral absolutes whatsoever—contrary to the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. This essentially makes Jesus guilty throughout the sermon of the very thing He condemns—judging the sins of others.

The key to the passage is found in the word “hypocrite” in v. 5. Hypocrites judge and condemn others for the very same things they themselves are doing, with one difference—their sins are worse than the one’s they condemn (cf. Rom. 2: 1-3, 17-24). While concentrating on “specks”, their eyes are full of logs. While straining gnats out of their tea, they are swallowing camels (Matt. 23: 24). The “logs” or “planks” are symbols of self-righteousness, the most damning sin of all. “It is a psychological fact that the sins which beset us are the very sins we most quickly detect and condemn in others” (Chamblin, p. 56). We generally see the sins of others with 20/20 vision. They are so glaring and obvious that we wonder in amazement that these people cannot see their faults. What we can’t see is our own faults because our sins (the logs) are blinding us. Ferguson directs our attention to the sin of “censoriousness”.

So deeply has his sin conquered him that he has become blind to it. Sensitive to the sin in others, he has been desensitized to the sin in his own heart....

This, says Jesus, is the ultimate tragedy of the hypocrite. He reaches the place where he is acting a part in order to hide from others and from himself the real nature of his own sin and guilt. But now he has confused acting with reality. He is deluded into thinking that he has become what he once knew he could only pretend to be—better than others....

This spirit of censoriousness has a common symptom. It often manifests itself by flying into a rage against some injustice. Do not misunderstand. It is right to be opposed to each injustice we encounter. But sudden and strong outbursts of emotion can sometimes be signs of a sensitivity that is personal rather than moral and spiritual....

David's life furnishes an obvious illustration of a hardened heart. He sinned seriously because of his lust for Bathsheba. He committed adultery with her and arranged for the death of her husband (2 Sam. 11: 1-17). But the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to tear the scales from David's eyes....

I am not for a moment suggesting that any man who burns with anger against unrighteousness is a hypocrite. God alone knows the heart of each man. But what is clear in David's case, and implied in Jesus' teaching, is that to have strong feelings about the sins of others that are not matched by ruthless dealing with our own sins is *hypocrisy*. And further, outbursts of anger can be the expressions of a heart that does not know how to say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

The heart that has tasted the Lord's grace and forgiveness will always be restrained in its judgment of others....[The Pharisees] never tasted this grace, and so they did not know that he was gracious to sinners (*The Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 152-153).

Some people are more given to censoriousness than others, but all of us, some more than others, can identify with this sin. If King David, the Psalmist and a man after God's own heart, could be this way, I doubt that most of us are immune. The worst sins are not the ones *I* commit, but the ones *you* commit. Such is our thinking, and it takes a lifetime of sanctification to mortify (put to death) our self-righteousness.

However, we should not use the fear of self-righteousness as an excuse to overlook the sins of others—sins which are harmful and possibly fatal. Sticking our heads in the sand makes us resemble ostriches, not Christians. Jesus does not forbid judgment altogether, but only hypocritical judgment. As soon as we have examined our own lives and properly dealt with our besetting sins, then we are at a better vantage point to help others deal with their sins (v. 5; Chamblin, p. 57). While it is certainly not admissible to commit sin in order to be more sympathetic with sinners, it is nevertheless true that when we have struggled with a particular sin, we are better able to understand how this sin can gain the mastery over someone. Some of the humblest Christians I know, and the most helpful, are people who were delivered from the very depths of human depravity. Being forgiven much, they now love much (Lk. 7: 36-47). Helping others defeat sin is part of bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6: 2). The next time around, it may be you—or me—who needs help (6: 3).

The wages of sin is death, and if we allow professing brothers and sisters to persist in their sins, we have ignored one of the valuable means of grace God gives the church to awaken sinners of their danger. The Apostle Paul chastises the church at Corinth for failing to excommunicate the unrepentant, incestuous member (1 Cor. 5). It was not modesty or humility over their own sins which prevented the church from taking action. The church of Corinth sported a whole catalog of problems, and it was pure arrogance which kept them from facing yet another one (v. 2). But who were they to think that such surgery was negotiable? Paul on his part had already judged the man and orders the church as a body to do the same (vv. 3-4). The purpose of such judgment was not to clean up the mess and live happily ever after as a church, but to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh [i.e. his sinful flesh] that [in order that] his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). Thus, the temporal judgment of the church is a

deterrent to the final judgment of hell. All of us are necessary for each one of us, and each one of us is necessary for all of us (1 Cor. 12).

Matthew 5: 6 presents the flip side of the coin. Ironically, those who claim that we should *never* judge others for their behavior conveniently ignore the fact that Christ is now judging people to be dogs or swine. Not only this, but He is instructing us to do the same. The offer of the gospel to unbelievers and forgiveness to erring Christians (i.e. those who profess to be Christians) has limitations. If they continually reject it, we should not continue to offer it to them. The gospel is “holy” and precious, like fine “pearls”. It is not something to throw around indiscriminately to people who make a mockery of it. We would never throw precious pearls into a herd of pigs and expect them to be appreciated.

Surely we must be careful in the way we apply this principle, lest we withhold evangelism from people who may be on the verge of accepting the gospel. It is one thing for a person to *respectfully* refuse the offer of the gospel, but at the same time not completely close the door to it. They may indicate in a variety of ways that, while they are not yet interested in Christ, they are still not opposed to our friendship or hearing more about Him. This is much different to a man who says, “I’ve heard all this before, and I am not remotely interested in receiving Christ as my Savior. Do not bother me again with this nonsense!” To continue witnessing to such a man is clearly to throw the precious pearls of the gospel under his feet, and we should afford this man no such opportunity. The same verdict must apply to a professing believer who remains unrepentant and entrenched in sinful patterns. After the proper steps of Matt. 18: 15-20 are carried out to the point of excommunication, he must be judged as a “Gentile and a tax-gatherer”, that is, an unbeliever. Hopefully after such stringent measures by the whole body of believers, he will repent and be restored to the church (cf. 1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2: 5-11). Jesus gives us further commentary on this passage in His instructions to the disciples, particularly as it applies to evangelism and missions (Matt. 10: 14-15; cf. p. 115).

### ***12. Persistent Prayer—Matt. 7: 7-12; Lk. 11: 5-13***

It seems that there is no connection with this passage with what has preceded it, but this is not the case (cf. Hendriksen, p. 361; Carson, p. 186). After carefully considering the instructions of the Sermon on the Mount, we could easily conclude that applying them is hopeless. And we would be correct if there were no help available; but there is. If we are serious about living this way, we must pray for God’s help; and not simply to pray, but to pray fervently. All three verbs, “ask”, “seek”, and “knock” are present active imperative and can be translated, “keep on asking”, “keep on seeking”, and “keep on knocking”. Don’t ever stop! Jesus is, therefore, teaching us *persistence in prayer*. This is no contradiction to His condemnation of pagan repetition in Matt. 6: 7. We are not attempting to manipulate God into action with many words, nor must we pester (annoy) God into doing something for us that He is reluctant (hesitant) to do. Persistence in prayer is necessary *for us* because we must be reminded continually of our incompetence and weakness. God already knows that we are totally dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit to live this kind of life, but sometimes we forget this. Staying “connected” to God in prayer reminds us of how much we need Him.



His argument is *a fortiori*—from the lesser to the greater—as is often the case. If even earthly fathers, who are often evil, give good things to *their* children, how much more will your heavenly Father, who is wholly good, give good gifts to *His* children who continually ask Him for these gifts? Jesus uses a well-known parental experience to make His point. Anyone who has small children knows how persistent they can be in asking for what they want. Sometimes, we as sinful parents give them what they want not because they really need it but just to get some peace and rest!

The promise of answered prayer is not without limitations as if we can persistently pray for anything we want—a new Mercedes car perhaps (?)—and receive it. This would amount to jerking these instructions completely out of the context of the Sermon on the Mount. God wishes to give *good* gifts to His children, not stones which look like bread and poisonous snakes (the ersatz eel perhaps?—Hendriksen, p. 363) which look like edible fish. God is not necessarily opposed to giving us a Mercedes car if He sees that we really need it (although I honestly can't think of a single situation in which *any* of us would need such an item), but He would make very sure that this would be something which is *good* for us before granting it. Many of the things we ask for are stones and snakes, but God loves us too much to give us everything we ask for—things which would hurt us and not help us and things which would be detrimental to the realization of His kingdom in our lives.

Throughout the sermon, Christ has been teaching us that the good things in life are not primarily material, but spiritual. The problem with us is that our treasures are too worldly and our focus too earthly. Jesus has already taught us *what* we should pray for. We should pray for His name to be honored and worshipped throughout the world. We should pray for His kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, a kingdom in which His righteousness prevails among men. We should also pray for earthly necessities like “bread” because we have to eat in order to live and to be effective laborers in His kingdom. We should pray for forgiveness and the willingness to forgive others; for if we are unmerciful, how will others know about God's mercy? We should pray for deliverance from temptation and sin, for how will others know about God's holiness if we are not holy? Now He is teaching us *how* we should pray for all these things and for other things related to His kingdom—continually and persistently. This should be our prayer: “Lord, give us good things—like the righteousness described for us in the Beatitudes and throughout the Sermon on the Mount—good things which will make us effective in making your name known throughout the earth.” Luke's gospel comprehends (includes) all good things in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are explicitly told to ask and keep on asking for the Holy Spirit—namely, the Spirit's gracious influences upon our lives (Lk. 11: 13; cf. Gal. 5: 22-23, the fruit of the Spirit).

Further teaching on persistence is provided in Lk. 11: 5-8, the parable of the friend, and Lk. 18: 1-8, the parable of the persistent widow. In both examples, the argument from the lesser to the greater is used. If a man will not give his friend three loaves of bread because he is a friend, he will at least give him what he wants because he is persistent and will not let him alone. As our Father, God is much more than our friend, and He never feels inconvenienced when we ask Him to help us. An unrighteous judge will not give a widow legal protection because it is the just thing to do, but he will give her whatever she wants because her persistence is annoying him. How much more will our heavenly Father, who is righteous, give justice to His chosen people who “cry to Him day and night”?

### 13. The “Golden Rule”—Matt. 7: 12

This verse could possibly be a reference to either 7: 7-11. Notice the connecting “therefore” (*oun*). Because God gives us good gifts, we should be generous to others by treating them as we wish to be treated. Or the verse could be related to 7: 1-6. We don’t wish to be judged unjustly, therefore we should extend the same justice to others. Most likely, it is a summary statement comprehending the whole teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. “The Law and the Prophets”, mentioned first in Matt. 5: 17, is mentioned once again here, which implies that the whole sermon is bracketed between 5: 17 and 7: 12. The Law and the Prophets are summed up (“for this is”) in this rule, “however you want people to treat you, so treat them”. “This way of putting it provides a powerful yet flexible maxim [rule] that helps us decide moral issues in a thousand cases without the need for multiplied case law” (Carson, pp. 187-188).

It may be confusing that Christ would sum up the whole law with the requirements toward one’s neighbor without mentioning the requirements toward God. Paul does the same thing in Gal. 5: 14, “For the **whole Law** is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”, a quotation taken from the Law (Lev. 19: 18). Two interpretations are possible. First, Jesus and Paul may be saying that the law **concerning one’s neighbor** is summed up in this law. Or they may be implying that if we are truly keeping the law toward our neighbor, we will also, at the same time, be honoring the law concerning God. In the same way that we cannot love God without loving our brother (cf. 1 Jn. 4: 20), we also cannot love our brother without loving God—the two things are mutually **inclusive**.

### 14. The Conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount—7: 13-27

I don’t really approve of most altar calls. Many preachers seem bent on manipulating people into the kingdom through prolonged invitations, including forty stanzas of “Just As I Am”. But let’s not throw the baby out with the bath water. Jesus offers an invitation at the end of His sermon: “Enter by the narrow gate....” Two gates and two ways are presented to us, followed by either destruction or life. From this passage we can determine the source of the early church’s synonym for the Christian life—“the way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19: 9, 23; 24: 14, 22). Perhaps Jesus borrowed the expression from Gen. 3: 24, “the way to the tree of life”.

Throughout this conclusion, we find a series of “two’s”. Two gates, two ways, two groups of people, two destinations, two trees, two kinds of fruit, two builders, two kinds of houses (Carson, p. 188; Hendriksen, pp. 367-371). The option that is **not** presented is third: the middle gate, the middle way, the middle destination, etc. It is clear that there are only two alternatives—either enter the small gate and live, or enter the broad gate and perish. The house which is not built on the rock is built on sand; there is no foundation consisting of rock **and** sand. When it comes to Jesus, there can be no neutrality—“He who is not with Me is against Me” (Lk. 11: 23). We either love Him or hate Him, but we cannot be indifferent to Him (Jn. 15: 18).

The description is frightening, to say the least. *Many* are entering the wide gate and the broad way that lead to destruction while but *few* are finding the small gate and the narrow way that leads to life. At the time, it was both a statement of fact and a warning. Very few of those who were listening to Jesus were committed disciples, and the time was coming soon when they would have to make a firm decision about their loyalty. As Carson observes, Jesus was not telling those who are *already Christians* to *continue* along the narrow way, but to *enter* it (p. 189). While Jesus describes the character of true believers throughout the sermon, He also describes the opposite.

What can we imply from vv. 13-14 about the relative number of Christians in comparison to unbelievers at the end of the world? Can we assume that the number of those who reject Christ at any given time in history will *always* outnumber those who receive Him as Savior? The answer one gives to this question can be laden (loaded) with his eschatological perspective. If we attempt to set our presuppositions aside and look objectively at the text, we should agree that the passage does not *directly* address this issue, nor does it address the question of those who have never heard of Jesus Christ (Chamblin, p. 59). By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the vast majority of those who have lived and died had never even heard the name, Jesus Christ, much less the gospel. Jesus is clearly setting two alternatives before those who can now make an intelligent choice either to repent and believe in Christ or to reject Him. The demand for decision is not relevant to those who have never heard the gospel (cf. Rom. 1: 18-32).

The primary emphasis in vv. 13-14 seems to be on the description of the two gates and two ways. Carson has noted that two different words for “narrow” (New American Standard Bible) are used in the Greek text. The *gate* is described as “narrow” (*stene*) in v. 13, while the *way* is “narrow” (*tethlimmene*) in v. 14. The word *tethlimmene* is related to the word *thlipsis* (“tribulation”) “which almost always refers to persecution” (*Matthew*, p. 188-189). Thus, the narrow gate and the narrow way is the way of suffering and persecution which is not very appealing to most people. Most will take the wide gate and the broad way which promise greater ease and more company. Ironically, the path of persecution leads to life, while the way which appears easy leads to death. Furthermore, the smallness of the gate (cf. Chamblin, p. 59) implies that one must travel lightly. He cannot be loaded down with the heavy baggage of this own self-righteousness and self-indulgence if he expects to pass through this small gate. The wide gate, on the other hand, accommodates anything we wish to take with us (Hendriksen, p. 369).

The false prophets of vv. 15-23 are those who entice people away from the narrow way that leads to life (Chamblin, p. 59). Sometimes, the false prophets can sound very orthodox and convincing, but even if we are not very theologically educated, we should recognize such people by their fruit—i.e. by the life they produce. Are their lives producing the righteousness of the kingdom described in the Sermon on the Mount, or are they producing the works of pride and selfishness? There are many powerful preachers in Uganda who are preaching the “gospel” of material success, not the gospel which calls people onto the path of self-denial and suffering for the sake of Christ and others. But what kind of path did our Lord Jesus follow himself, and what path did He tell us to take? Did He promise us worldly success, or did He promise us affliction? (Jn. 16: 33) If we are not personally experiencing affliction and suffering, what do the Scriptures tell us about sharing in the afflictions of others? (1 Jn. 3: 16-18; Heb. 10: 32-33). We should not

allow ourselves to be fooled by such false prophets. If their fruit is bad, they are not good trees; for good trees don't produce bad fruit, and neither do bad trees produce good fruit.

How does one know that a person is a true believer—simply by profession? Obviously not, for these false prophets were addressing Him, “Lord, Lord !” The lordship of Christ does not consist in calling His name, but submission to His rule. Luke's version very succinctly (briefly) defines the matter of lordship in *doing*, “And why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and *do not do* what I say?” (Lk. 6: 46). Matthew further defines the “doing” not in terms of performing miracles (v. 22) but in terms of practical righteousness (v. 23). Whether these false prophets were actually able to prophesy, cast out demons, or work miracles was, in Jesus' estimation, beside the point. On the Day of Judgment, He need not challenge their claims, but he will condemn their character.

Jesus was speaking of everyone who would follow the path of *Judas Iscariot* who was present when the Sermon on the Mount was delivered. There is *no reason* to believe that Judas was *unable* to heal the sick and cast out demons with the other eleven disciples when they were sent out on their missionary journey (Matt. 10). They were sent out in pairs (Mk. 6: 7). Wouldn't Judas' *partner* be suspicious had he not been able to heal the sick or cast out demons? Would he not have reported this incompetence to the other ten disciples when he returned, especially since all of the disciples were ambitious to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Lk. 9: 46; Matt. 20: 21)? At the Last Supper Jesus finally announced that one of the twelve would betray Him. What did the *other eleven* disciples say? “Oh, you must be talking about Judas! He's an incompetent fraud!” Instead they asked, “Is it I?” They were more suspicious of *themselves* than they were of Judas to whom they had entrusted the ministry funds (Jn. 12: 4-5).

In the OT King Saul was able to prophesy on two occasions (1 Sam. 10: 10-11; 19: 23-24). The second time he prophesied he was trying to assassinate David. King Saul was clearly an unconverted man, and yet he prophesied. In Numbers 22, Balaam's *donkey* prophesied. Is Balaam's donkey a believer? As we examine the description of unbelievers in Heb. 6: 4-6, we ask, “How could this be?” How could people who have once “been enlightened”, who have “tasted of the heavenly gift”, who have been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit”, who have “tasted of the good word of God and the powers of the age to come”, *fall away so that it is impossible to renew him again to repentance*? That the author is distinguishing these false professors from true believers is evident from the context, for in v. 9 he says, “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that *accompany salvation*, though we are speaking in this way.” This text, and the examples of Judas and Demas (2 Tim. 4: 10), prove that a person can be *so close* to the kingdom of God, but yet *so far away*.

Not those who merely *hear* Jesus' instructions, but those who *act* upon them are like the wise man who builds his house upon the rock. Only they will *survive* the storms of life and the final judgment. Throughout the sermon Christ has been explaining the righteousness of the law of God given through Moses but comprehensively fulfilled and explained in His own person and teaching (cf. Carson, p. 192). Antinomian (without law) Christianity which claims that the believer is no longer under the moral law of God given in the OT is a faith built upon sand. The question is not *if* the believer is under the law, but *how*. Obviously, Christ takes us deeper into the divine intention of this law than Moses ever did or could. As we study the life of Christ and

the further explication of the law found in the apostolic epistles, we will find that the demands of holy living are not less, but greater, upon the Christian than the OT Jew.

The response to Jesus' teaching proves that this was not the typical worn-out instruction of the scribes who were always quoting some other authority. The audience was "amazed" because here was someone who was endowed with His own authority (vv. 28-29).

***J. The Healing of the Centurion's Servant—Matt. 8: 5-13; Lk. 7: 1-10***

The chronology of this event is given to us in Lk. 7: 1, "When He had completed all of His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum." Matthew inserts the healing of the leper in 8: 2-4, a story which we have determined from Mark 1: 40-44 to have occurred much earlier. It is possible that Matthew inserts the story here in conjunction with the healing of the centurion's slave to show the comparison between the faith of the leper and that of the centurion. "If you are willing, You can make me clean" (v. 2), compares with "but just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (v. 8).

As to the arrangement of the material in chapters 5-9, the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) emphasizes the **authority** of Jesus' **teaching** while chapters 8-9 emphasize the **authority** of Jesus in **performing miracles**. This is brought out both in Matthew and Luke by the centurion's acknowledgement of His authority (Matt. 8: 9; Lk. 7: 8). The centurion, whose authority rests on the authority of the emperor, recognizes that Jesus' authority rests on the authority of none other than God. Jesus responds to such faith by healing his servant from a distance and says, "Go your way; let it be done to you **as you have believed**", a reference to the Centurion's unwavering confidence in His authority (Chamblin, pp. 61-63).

In the Matthew account, the centurion seems to have spoken with Jesus personally (v. 5) while Luke's gospel reports that the centurion sends some friends to speak to Jesus (v. 6). We need not be concerned about this difference since in both cases the centurion is making a direct appeal to Jesus. Luke simply gives us more detail about his appeal. Luke is writing primarily for Gentiles, and he highlights the wall of separation between them and the Jews—a wall which he was keenly aware of as a Gentile (cf. Col. 4: 7-14 in which Luke is not mentioned among the "circumcision"—v. 11; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, p. 103). Cornelius was obviously a Gentile proselyte to the Jewish faith and was highly regarded among the Jewish people (vv. 3-5), yet he was still not on the same standing as his Jewish counterparts. According to Rabbinical law—not OT law—any Jew entering a Gentile home would become ceremonially unclean (Lk. 7: 6—"for I am not worthy for You to come **under my roof**", Chamblin, p. 64, quoting Gundry, p. 143; also see Gal. 2: 11-14, in which Peter refused to eat with uncircumcised Gentile Christians). Jesus' response to his faith makes it clear that ancestry was not as important as faith (v. 9), a fact that would be an encouragement to Gentile Christians reading Luke's gospel later.

Matthew, on the other hand, goes even further in highlighting the universalism of the gospel to his primarily Jewish audience by leaving out any reference to Cornelius' Jewish friends. Christ not only says that he has not found so great a faith with anyone in Israel, but that one day the Gentiles will share table fellowship with Abraham in the messianic banquet accompanying the

kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 25: 6-9; Lk. 14: 12-24; Carson, p. 202). He also adds a rebuke and warning to the Jews that while the Gentiles will be invited to the banquet, the Jews will be “cast out” (v. 12), a judgment which Luke later records (Lk. 14: 24). Along with the story of the Gadarene demoniacs, the story serves as an important introduction to Gentiles entering the kingdom of God (Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke*, p. 897, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gabelein, gen. ed.)

***K. Jesus Raises the Dead Son of the Widow of Nain—Lk. 7: 11-17***

This story is recorded only in Luke. The grief of this woman at the loss of her only son is accentuated by the fact that she was now faced with probable destitution (Liefeld, p. 899). Much of the time Jesus requires a show of faith before healing someone, but not in this case (cf. Geldenhuys, p. 223). Luke explicitly mentions Jesus’ compassion for the woman and her desperate situation (v. 13). Heedless of ritual defilement (Lev. 22: 4-6; Num. 19: 13), He touches the coffin and tells the young man to arise. One can only imagine the joy of the mother and the horror of those who were not emotionally attached; but fear soon turned into worship as they glorified God for a great miracle. Although Christ had centered his ministry in Galilee, word about Him was spreading throughout Judea and the surrounding district (v. 17).

This is now the first time Jesus has raised someone from the dead, the daughter of Jairus being the second (Lk. 8: 52-55), and Lazarus the third (Jn. 11). Each resurrection miracle is a foreshadowing of the future resurrection of all believers.

***L. The Doubts of John the Baptist; Jesus’ Mild Rebuke and Tribute—Matt. 11: 2-19; Lk. 7: 18-35***

The chronology of this event seems to be that of Luke. In Lk. 7: 17, the report about Jesus’ miracles goes into Judea, where John has been imprisoned for about one year. During this year Jesus has been preaching and healing in Galilee—known as the Greater Galilean Ministry (Carson, p. 261). When John’s disciples get word of all that Jesus has done, they report their findings to John in prison.

John was now entertaining some doubts since Jesus’ procedure in bringing in his kingdom was not in keeping with ***John’s understanding of the prophets***, particularly their emphasis on the Messiah’s ***judgment of the wicked*** (Vos, p. 338; cf. Matt. 3: 11-12). If Jesus was truly the Messiah, and if He had come to judge the wicked, then why is His servant John in prison? In other words, “What’s wrong with this picture of the Messiah’s reign?”

Jesus’ response to John (Matt. 11: 4-6; Lk. 7: 22-23) is a mild rebuke. The miracles of His ministry were clear signs that the Messianic kingdom promised in the OT had become a reality (Isa. 35: 5-6; 61: 1; Lk. 4: 18-21). It was true that the element of ***immediate, climactic judgment*** was lacking in His ministry, but that was no reason to discount the ***miraculous signs*** of Messiah’s reign which were ***already*** present. There were other OT prophecies about the “suffering servant” which John seems to have forgotten (Chamblin, p. 80; cf. Isa. 53, 42). Those who do not “stumble” over Christ—“fall away”—because the Messianic judgment is delayed, will be truly blessed (“stumble” is *skandalizo*, the same word used in Matt. 13: 57—“offended”;

Matt. 24: 10—“fall away”; Matt. 26: 31—“fall away”; Lk. 17: 2—“stumble”). In Carson’s estimation,

It is therefore an implicit challenge to reexamine one’s presuppositions about what the Messiah should be and do in the light of Jesus and his fulfillment of Scripture and to bring one’s understanding and faith into line with him (p. 262).

John’s doubting was no sign that he was a mere “reed shaken by the wind” (Matt. 10: 7; Lk. 7: 24). Indeed, if John was a man of weak constitution or a coward, he would not have rebuked Herod Antipas of adultery and gotten himself imprisoned. John was no sycophant (a person who seeks the favor of those with wealth or power through flattery) like those who wore soft clothing and waited on kings (v. 8; v. 25); he was a rugged preacher of righteousness fearless in the face of men. Jesus’ words imply that he was responding to some criticism of John from the multitudes as a result of John’s doubting. But if John were only a reed shaken by the wind, surely the multitudes would not have gone out by the thousands to be baptized by him. (Thus, Jesus’ remark, “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?” In other words, “If you thought John to be this weak, vacillating person, then why did you flock to him by the thousands?”)

The multitudes knew him to be a prophet, but in one sense he was more than a prophet (v. 9; v. 26). He not only was a forerunner of Christ, like all other prophets, but he was a forerunner who was *predicted* by the forerunners (v. 10; v. 27). Malachi clearly refers to John in his prophecy (Mal. 3: 1) as the messenger who will go before the Messiah, one likened to Elijah (4: 5-6). And while the OT prophets were far removed in time from the Messiah whom they predicted, John was living in the same era and was able to actually see the fulfillment of the OT prophecies in the person of Christ (Hendriksen, pp. 485-488). In a literal way, and not merely metaphorically, John was a messenger “before the face” of Christ (Vos, p. 337), qualifying him as being the *greatest—in privilege*—among those born of women during the *OT era* (v. 11a). Yet he is not greater—in privilege—among those who will live to see the fulfillment of the OT promises in the death and resurrection of Christ, particularly the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost and the emergence of the NT church (v. 11b). In this sense, even the disciples of John who would live to see these things were greater (in privilege) than he.

In the final analysis, neither John the Baptist nor Jesus was pleasing to the present generation of Jews—with the exception of the common sinners (represented by the tax-gatherers) who repented at the preaching of John the Baptist (Lk. 7: 29). The Pharisees and lawyers (7: 30), on the other hand, had rejected the preaching of John the Baptist and God’s purpose for their lives. They were like children in the market place who were playing games with one another. The girls were playing a wedding game by playing the flute, but by refusing to dance, the boys were not playing along. The boys, on the other hand, were playing a game of funeral by playing a dirge (song played at funerals), but the girls refused to play along by not mourning (professional mourners at funerals were normally women). Jesus uses the funeral dirge as an analogy for John’s warnings of judgment and his self-disciplined life in the wilderness. The mourning was an analogy of John’s insistence on repentance. The wedding game with its flute-playing and dancing stood for Jesus’ preaching of the gospel and the joy which attended all who believed in Him. “But in actual fact the people neither repented under John’s preaching nor believed Jesus’

preaching. ‘This generation’ rejected both John and Jesus, and turned against both of them with hostility (vv. 18-19a)” (Chamblin, p. 82).

This interpretation leads us to a better understanding of Matthew’s insertion of v. 12, “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.” The first part of the verse speaks of the period of John’s ministry inclusive of the present ministry of Christ when these words were spoken (“until now”). John the Baptist marks the transition between the prophets of the OT and the Messiah of whom they prophesied (v. 13). During this important transitional period from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, the kingdom of heaven “suffers violence” (NASB) or “has been forcefully advancing” (NIV) (cf. Chamblin, p. 81 and Carson, p. 266). The verb is either present middle or present passive voice which allows either translation, but the way the verb is translated dramatically affects the meaning of the verse. I prefer the NASB, “suffers violence”, in the passive voice because it agrees with the negative connotation (meaning) of the verb, *arpazo* (see below). The kingdom had been suffering violence from the very inception of the preaching of John and had continued to suffer violence “until now” during the entire ministry of Christ. Although people were coming into the kingdom through repentance at the preaching of John and now the preaching of Christ, the progress of the kingdom was not without severe resistance. We have already seen that demonic activity was now at its peak, possibly more than at any point in history before or after the cross. Furthermore, Satan allies himself with men, and the leaders of the Israelite nation were willing accomplices of Satan in opposing the kingdom of heaven—“violent men take it [or seize it] by force”. Hendriksen has preferred to render the verb “take by force” in the positive sense as “eagerly taking possession of the kingdom” (p. 490); and it must be admitted that this interpretation agrees more conveniently with Lk. 16: 16, the parallel passage. Chamblin and Carson offer another interpretation by using the verb in a negative sense. The “violent men” (*biastes*) are not men who are *receiving* the kingdom of heaven but men who are *opposing* the kingdom and hostile to it. This fits better with the context of vv. 16-19 in which Jesus chastises “this generation” for rejecting both His ministry and the ministry of John. It also is in accord with the broader context of the increasing resistance to Jesus found in later chapters and continuing throughout *Matthew* (Chamblin, p. 82; Carson, p. 267). Carson also notes that the verb, “takes by force” (*arpazo*), is a common verb in the NT which generally has an evil connotation (p. 267; cf. Matt. 13: 19). It is not the verb used in Lk. 16: 16 for “forcing his way into it” (*biazomai*).

Majority opinion does not determine truth, and the wisdom of God is demonstrated both in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the life and ministry of John (Matt. 11: 19b; Lk. 7: 35). The austerity (harshness and simplicity) of John’s life was appropriate for one who stood on the threshold awaiting the coming of the kingdom. Jesus’ eating and drinking (the accusation of gluttony and drunkenness was a lie), was equally appropriate for one who had formally inaugurated the kingdom (Chamblin, p. 82; cf. Matt. 9: 15). While Matthew emphasizes the *deeds* of Christ and John, Luke emphasizes the changed lives of those who were their spiritual children.

### ***M. Unrepentant Cities—Matt. 11: 20-24; Lk. 10: 12-16***



Matthew continues the theme of rejection into vv. 20-30. Jesus' reproach of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum could also have been repeated on other occasions as it appears to have been done when He sends out the seventy (Lk. 10: 1). This is an amazing passage which is packed with theological implications.

**First**, Jesus clearly demonstrates that there are *degrees of privilege* with respect to the message of the kingdom. All three of these cities had received *more* privileges than Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom because they had witnessed miracles which *had not been done* in these other cities. Therefore, it is pointless for anyone to claim that every country on earth, much less every individual in every country, has received an equal opportunity to hear the good news of the gospel. There are people groups even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who have never heard of Jesus Christ, and there are individuals in evangelized countries who have never had the opportunity to hear a clear presentation of the gospel.

**Second**, there are *degrees of judgment*. The cities who had witnessed the mighty deeds of Christ and rejected them will be punished more severely than Tyre and Sidon. Those who reject Christ will be judged more severely than those who have never heard of Christ. Greater privilege implies greater responsibility and greater judgment for unbelief. "More tolerable" does not imply the *lack* of judgment but a mitigated or *lessened* judgment. In the same way we learn from Paul that every man will be judged for his deeds (Rom. 2: 4-10; 2 Cor. 5: 10). It is, therefore, not true that everyone will receive the same punishment in hell.

**Third**, Jesus is the one who determines the degree of privilege each locality and each individual receives. He is the one who made the decision to perform His miracles in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, *instead of* Tyre and Sidon. The Lord sovereignly determines where He will work and how He will work. But further, He also knows what *would have occurred* if He had chosen differently. *If* He had done miracles in Tyre and Sidon, *they* would have repented. Yet, even knowing this, He chose to do His work in places where they would not repent.

On his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul attempted to take the gospel to the western portion of Asia Minor, but he was *forbidden* "by the Holy Spirit" from doing so. He also tried to take the gospel to Bithynia, "and the Spirit of Jesus *did not permit them*". Finally, he had a vision in the night of a man in Macedonia saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," after which he concluded that God was leading him into Macedonia (Acts 16: 6-9). The Holy Spirit had sovereignly rejected two other locations in favor of Macedonia. Later on, both western Asia Minor and Bithynia received the gospel but not before thousands of people perished without ever hearing it. We labor in vain to understand God's sovereign choices; we must only confess with Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" (Rom. 11: 33)

**Fourth**, we are left with the sobering reality that there are people in this world, who have not been given the opportunity to learn about Christ, who *would believe* if given the opportunity to do so. It is therefore our responsibility to take the gospel to them. Sovereign choice does not belong to us, and it is our responsibility to evangelize the whole world to the extent of our ability.

***N. The Sovereign Self-Revelation of God the Father and God the Son—Matt. 11: 25-30; Lk. 10: 21-24***

These words could have been repeated on a number of occasions, and they are useful to both Matthew and Luke in different contexts to confirm the sovereignty of God in self-revelation. We possess in these verses the flip side of the coin. On one side is the responsibility of the hearer to repent and believe (Matt. 11: 20-24; Lk. 10: 12-16); on the other side of the coin is the sovereign will of God to either reveal the truth effectually to the heart or to conceal it (our present passage). From this passage alone, we may conclude that human merit is the deciding factor in God's self-revelation. He reveals Christ ***not to the wise*** (*sophos*, the same word used in 1 Cor. 1: 19-27) ***and intelligent***—that is, to those who consider themselves as such—but to “babes” (*nepios*—infant) who are helpless and see themselves as such. But this begs the question: Why are some people proud, arrogant, and resistant to the gospel, while others sense their helplessness and need for the gospel? To put the emphasis on the character of the recipients would create a gospel of works, not grace, and would miss the whole point of the passage. God is not only sovereign in ***where He plants the seed***, but in the ***preparation of the soil*** which receives the seed. The circumstances of our lives are all ordained by God, and those circumstances play a large role in preparing us either to receive the gospel as humble “babes” or to reject it as proud Pharisees.

The sovereignty of God in election is often troubling to Christians who consider it ***unfair*** for God to reveal Himself to some but to hide Himself from others. It ***would be*** unfair for God to show partiality ***if*** He was ***obligated*** to His creatures in any way, but He is not. He is not obligated to distribute material wealth equally to all people (Matt. 20). He is the owner of all wealth. He is not obligated to give everyone the same intelligence or talents. They are also His to distribute as He pleases. At present we cannot fully appreciate the wisdom of God revealed in election, but one day with “new eyes” which see more clearly, we will comprehend this wisdom more fully. Until then we must simply submit to it and praise God accordingly as Jesus did on this occasion, “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth.... Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.” Hendriksen has noted that the Father's good pleasure is primarily the result of ***revealing*** the Son to the helpless and not the result of ***concealing*** the Son from the arrogant and self-righteous. God takes no delight in the sinful rejection of His Son nor in the death of the wicked (pp. 500-501, Ezek. 18: 23, 32; 33: 11, cited by Hendriksen). The context of Jesus' statement in *Luke* is the exhilarating report of the seventy disciples after the successful completion of their missionary journey. In that context, we can easily see that Jesus' focus would not be upon those who were hardened against the gospel, but receptive to it.

Yet, we must reckon with the fact that God's eternal purpose in salvation is fulfilled not merely in revealing Himself to some, but in concealing Himself from others. With this one eternal purpose God is “well-pleased”, and there is no evidence that Jesus distinguishes between God's purpose in ***election*** (revealing) from His purpose in ***reprobation*** (concealing).

Having ascribed to the Father the sovereignty of hiding and revealing the truth, in v. 27 Jesus makes it clear that the Father has handed over this sovereignty to the Son. “No one knows [*epiginosko*] the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know [*epiginosko*] the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” The word *epiginosko* is a more intensive word for “know” than *ginosko*, and means “to know perfectly or completely” (Richard

C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 285). Both words are used in 1 Cor. 13: 12 in which Paul is contrasting our knowledge of Christ in the present with our knowledge of Christ in the future glory: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I **know** [*ginosko*] in part, but then I shall **know fully** [*epiginosko*] just as I also have been **fully known** [*epiginosko*].” No one fully and completely knows the Son but the Father, and no one fully and completely knows the Father except the Son. Further, this full and complete knowledge of the Father has been handed over to the Son to be given to anyone whom the Son chooses to reveal Himself.

[It should go without saying that this full and complete knowledge of the Son both here and in 1 Cor. 3: 12 cannot imply **exhaustive** knowledge (covering every possible detail) when the word is applied to **us**. Although the Son has exhaustive knowledge of the Father—covering every detail and leaving nothing out—and the Father the Son (as well the Holy Spirit—Rom. 8: 27), finite creatures such as we will **never** have that exhaustive knowledge even in heaven. The finite cannot exhaustively comprehend the infinite; otherwise, the finite would be God. But our knowledge of Christ in heaven will be a complete and full knowledge **compared to** our incomplete and partial knowledge now. Therefore, *epiginosko* must of necessity mean **one thing** when applied to the Father and the Son and something **less** when applied to us. Grammar alone cannot decide all issues of theology but must be combined with the analogy of Scripture for theological precision.]

For those who seek Him as helpless infants—and not for those who imagine themselves wise and intelligent—Christ now offers His invitation (vv. 28-30). The common people were weary and heavy laden with the heavy yoke of scribal and Pharisaical regulations which insisted upon works as the means of salvation (Matt. 23: 4). Such a yoke included the painful uncertainty of never knowing whether I am accepted by God or whether I still stand under His wrath and indignation (Hendriksen, p. 503-504). While the additional regulations of the Pharisees made the burden heavier than it needed to be, the Mosaic Law by itself was a burden upon the conscience (Acts 15: 10; in which the reference is not to scribal additions to the Law, but to the Law alone). And though the animal sacrifices demanded in the Law could offer **temporary** atonement for sin and a certain measure of relief from the burden of guilt, they could not do so **permanently** since they were required day after day and year after year. The author of Hebrews informs us that the Law “can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near” (Heb. 10: 1). The one who offered his sacrifices knew that they must be offered again and again, thus reminding him of sin’s pollution which barred him from the Holy of Holies and full remission of sin and unconditional acceptance with God, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10: 4; cf. also Heb. 10: 2-3, 19-22).

One purpose of the law is to serve as a disciplinarian to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3: 24). The law reveals the holiness of God and exposes the sinfulness of man in order to kill his hopes and ambitions of being saved by law. But the law can fulfill this function only in those whose blind eyes are opened by the Holy Spirit to understand its radical requirements. Saul the Pharisee, concerned only with the external requirements of the law, entertained high hopes of being blameless before the law (Phil 3: 4-6) until its true meaning and demands “came” to his consciousness. “But when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died” (Rom. 7: 9). The commandments of the law were supposed “to result in life” but “proved to result in death for me” (7: 10). How did it come about that a commandment meant for life (Lev. 18: 5; Deut. 30: 15) proved instead to result in death? The answer from Paul the Christian is that sin uses the law to produce the very desires and actions which are condemned in the law (Rom. 7: 11; cf. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self*, p. 53). Though the law is “holy and righteous and good” (v. 12),

we are sinful, and the law in the hands of sinners produces only death and destruction (Chamblin, *Matthew*, p. 85). The people were weary and heavy laden not only because of Pharisaical tyranny, but mostly because of sin's tyranny. Their use of the law dug them deeper and deeper into the pit of sin's slavery. In Chamblin's words,

Jesus, the One who is gentle and lowly in heart, uses the Law as an instrument of his love (5: 21-48). Trying to keep the Law without resting in Him, puts a person under bondage and keeps him there. Are not many whom Jesus addresses, "weary and burdened" precisely because of their efforts to keep the Law (cf. 23: 4; Acts 15: 10)? (p. 85)

Christ will replace that heavy yoke with a lighter yoke which is easier, and with a load which is lighter (v. 30). By throwing off the burdensome yoke and heavy load, the followers of Jesus do not thereby become "yoke-less" and "load-less". They are not given rest to do as they please but to take up the yoke of Christ which teaches them how to use the law productively—"Take My yoke upon you, and *learn* from Me." The way to find true rest for the soul is not in freedom from the law, but freedom from the law as the only means of being acceptable to God. Keeping the law to be acceptable to God results in slavery, but absolute submission to the rule of Christ is a yoke of true freedom. In Christ we have the assurance that we are already forgiven and accepted. This acceptance, in turn, gives us the love, freedom and ability to obey His commandments (Jn. 14: 15).

### ***O. Jesus Anointed by a Prostitute—Lk. 7: 36-50***

The timing of this dinner is indefinite and it is reported only by Luke. He places the event after the upbraiding of the multitudes for their criticism of John the Baptist, while Matthew follows Jesus' tribute to John with woes against the unbelieving cities. Thus, while Matthew offers a *corporate* rebuke to the unbelieving multitudes, Luke gets more personal with Jesus rebuking the *one Pharisee* for his unbelief.

This is a beautiful story of repentance and forgiveness. Not only did Jesus dine with the tax-gatherers and sinners (Lk. 15: 1-2; 19: 5-7), he also dined with Pharisees (cf. Lk. 14: 1). He did not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the "good people" and the "bad people", the religious and the non-religious. All alike were sinners in need of salvation. In this He sets the example for evangelism and missions. While individuals may be forced by logistics (time and money) to limit their evangelistic outreach and missions to a certain group of people whether rich or poor or middle-class, we must remember that as far as the total mission of the church is concerned, we cannot leave anyone out. Jesus came to seek the lost from every strata of society. What was so scandalous to the Pharisees was that Jesus would give *any* of His time to openly sinful people like this immoral woman (presumably a prostitute although only *harmatolos* or "sinner" is used and not the word, *porne*, "prostitute"; cf. 1 Cor. 6: 15).

Possibly the only reason the Pharisee (Simon, v. 44) invited Jesus into his home was to test him in some way or another (cf. Lk. 14: 1—"watching Him closely"). Though it does not seem that he would have arranged for this prostitute to come, she presented a convenient opportunity for Simon to "test" Jesus' ability to evaluate people. Obviously, he thought, if Jesus was any judge of character, he would not allow this woman to even touch him, much less wipe his feet with her tears and kiss them. But as Jesus demonstrates, He could not only "read" the woman's character,

but Simon's character as well. The woman must have mustered (gathered together) tremendous courage to enter the Pharisee's home knowing how she would be rejected by Simon. Only her love for Jesus and her gratitude for His saving message for sinners gave her the boldness she needed to overcome her fear. Customarily, people ate by leaning toward the table in a reclining position with the feet pointing backwards (It sounds uncomfortable, doesn't it?); therefore, it was easy for the woman to gain access to Jesus' feet (Geldenhuys, p. 233). The perfume she used to anoint His feet was probably the same kind as that mentioned in Matt. 26: 7 on a different occasion in which the perfume was applied to Jesus' *head*, not His *feet*, shortly before His crucifixion. If so, it was expensive, at least judging from the reaction of the disciples in Matt. 26: 8-9. Her action, then, was a sacrifice of worship completely lost upon Simon but graciously received and noted by Christ who interpreted the action as an act of repentance and belief (vv. 47, 50). We learn from this that it is not important whether others consider us to be pious people, but whether our worship is sincere, in which case it will most certainly be noticed by God.

From the very moment Jesus had entered Simon's house, He had been "snubbed" (treated with contempt or scorn) by Simon's deliberate omission of customary courtesies toward guests. His feet had not been washed by Simon's servant (something Jesus did not consider beneath His own dignity—Jn. 13: 3-17); He had not been greeted with the customary kiss on the cheek; and His head had not been anointed with oil (Ps. 23: 5). Perhaps Simon had invited Jesus into his home not so much for the purpose of testing Him, but simply to demonstrate in no uncertain terms his contempt for Jesus. As usual, Jesus doesn't miss anything and uses his contempt as an object lesson on love and forgiveness. Extending a courtesy to Simon that Simon had not extended to Him, Jesus compares him to the debtor who owes "fifty denarii" (or 50 days' wages) and "loves little" (vv. 41, 47). He did not say that Simon had *despised* Him, which was of course, true, and from this we learn that to love Jesus only a "little" is the same as despising Him. He deserves much more than that, and those who profess faith in Christ whose affections offer Him but little love and commitment, actually hate Him. In like manner, Simon did not see himself as a true debtor to God because he did not see himself as a real sinner. The real sinners were "out there" somewhere, like this prostitute; and if no debt is owed, no love need be shown.

One day in glory we will meet this prostitute who threw caution to the wind, and what was left of her worldly pride, to fall at Jesus' feet with contrition and faith. She is our role model, for we can come to Him in no other way. Simon, for his part, did not wish to enter the kingdom of God by the narrow, small gate (Matt. 7: 13-14), in which case he would be required to unload the heavy baggage of self-trust and self-satisfaction. But Jesus refused to save Simon on his "pedestal" of self-admiration. Only to the woman, and not to Simon, did He say, "Your sins have been forgiven", and "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

So often, those who have lived openly sinful, immoral lives before their conversion make the best Christians afterwards. (Saul the Pharisee was a murderer; but as Paul the Christian he labored more than all the other apostles—1 Cor. 15: 9-10.) They realize how much they have been forgiven, and they love Christ much in return. Christians who have been reared by Christian parents often fail to grasp the severity of their own sins, and they either grow up without a genuine understanding of repentance and faith, or they live lackluster (mediocre or dull) lives as Christians, not pressing forward to the prize (Phil. 3: 7-14). This incident and parable has something for the rank (coarse) sinner and also the professing Christian. For the

sinner who believes that his sins have placed him beyond the saving reaches of Christ' mercy, the passage proves that there are no repentant sinners too sinful to be forgiven; as the old hymn goes, "Wonderful the grace of Jesus, **greater** than all our sin." If a murderer can be saved, and if a woman who sells her body can be saved, so can anyone else. On the other hand there is a message of warning here for the professing believer. How much do you love Christ, and do you love Him so little that you despise Him? How much you love Christ is determined by your **perception** of how much you have been forgiven. If you have been forgiven **at all**, you have been forgiven of **much**, for there really are no **little** sinners or **little** debtors out there in this world. We are all **big** debtors who need **much** forgiveness. But what is your perception of your sin? This is the raging question which must be answered, and if the wrong answer is given, there is no salvation.

### ***P. Ministering Women—Lk. 8: 1-3***

Following the anointing of Jesus' feet by a prostitute and His special recommendation of her faith and love, Luke mentions a group of women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses and were supporting the ministry of Jesus. Geldenhuys makes note of the fact that although many women are singled out in Luke as women of faith, none are mentioned who are hostile to Christ or opposed to His work (p. 233). Other "honorable mentions" will follow in all four gospels including Mary and Martha (Jn. 11), the women who stood by His cross at Golgotha (Jn. 19: 25; Matt. 27: 55-56; Mk. 15: 40-41; Lk. 23: 49), and the women who were the first witnesses to His resurrection (Matt. 28: 1; Mk. 16: 1; Lk. 23: 53-24: 10; Jn. 20: 1). The Apostle Paul mentions many women who were helpful to him in ministry (Rom. 16; Phil. 4: 1-3). Although women were usually marginalized (considered unimportant) in ancient cultures such as Israel, the gospel accounts prove that they were joint heirs with men to the kingdom of God.

Because they are weaker in physical strength, women are often abused both physically and emotionally, and laws have often favored the rights of men over women, even in Judaism where the property rights of fathers reverted to sons and not to daughters. Jesus is the true liberator of women, and anywhere in the world where Christian ideals have taken firm root, the lives of women have improved dramatically over a period of time. There is still much progress which remains to be accomplished in establishing the rights of women.

### ***Q. The Charge of Madness—Mk. 3: 20-21***

This passage is found only in Mark's gospel. Jesus was a man driven to accomplish His ministry, and for this reason He may have neglected His own health from time to time. He probably did not eat regularly because of the demands placed upon Him by the multitudes which needed healing and teaching, and most likely He got little sleep. Fearing mental imbalance, His people (literally "kinsmen") came to get Him away from the multitudes for a season so He could rest (Lane, p. 139).

### ***R. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—Matt. 12: 22-37; Mk. 3: 22-30; Lk. 11: 14-28***

Matthew speaks of the man being both blind and dumb while Luke does not mention the man's blindness. Mark does not mention a particular individual at all, but all three accounts report the

same incident. The focus of the passage is not on the particular miracle but the accusation made against Jesus; namely, that He casts out demons only by the power of demons. His ability to cast out demons prompts the multitudes to raise the urgent question whether He is the Son of David, a title which is Messianic (Hendriksen, p. 435; cf. Matt. 21: 9, 22: 41-45, cited in Hendriksen).

In response to this question from the multitude, the Pharisees quickly attempt to “pour cold water on the fire” of their hopes that this was truly the long-awaited Messiah of OT prophecy (Chamblin, p. 89). By ascribing His power to Beelzebul (Satan), His accusers have for all practical purposes called Him the devil (cf. Matt. 10: 25). Before examining how serious this accusation is, Jesus first examines the weight of their accusation through two logical arguments. The first argument is the *reductio ad absurdum*, reducing an argument to a conclusion which is absurd. In other words, the logical consequences of the Pharisees’ accusation of demon possession are impossible and absurd. Why would Satan cast out Satan (vv. 25-26)? This would be the same as an army general fighting against his own troops on the battle field. Such a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand for long; it would be self-defeating.

The second argument is the argument of self-consistency (v. 27). The Pharisees are not being consistent with their own disciples who were making the same claims. Some of their own disciples claimed to cast out demons, but if this were true, then Jesus’ accusers would have to admit that their own disciples were demon-possessed just as Jesus was. In other words their accusation against Jesus, if it proves anything, proves too much. It proves that the Pharisees’ own disciples were demon-possessed, something they would not wish to admit. The question of whether the disciples of the Pharisees were truthful in their claims to cast out demons was beside the point as far as the argument goes, and we do not have to speculate as to whether others beside Jesus were able to exorcise demons (Hendriksen, p. 525). The same question arises in Matt. 7: 22; see your notes on that passage. I personally believe that the claims of the Pharisees were false, but that the claims of *some* on the Day of Judgment, like Judas Iscariot, will be truthful claims. But the issue is not the ability to cast out demons, but a genuine relationship with Christ which produces godly character.

Having proven their accusation false, Jesus indicates that His ability to cast out demons is from the Spirit of God. The “if” in v. 28 does not leave this conclusion in doubt, but serves as the protasis (the conditional clause) of Jesus’ argument. Jesus has already proven the absurdity of Satan opposing his own kingdom. Thus, the “if” clause of v. 28 has already been proven; namely, that He casts out demons—not by Satan—but by the Spirit of God. *If* this is true, and it has been proven to be true, *then* the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of Satan, has come (the apodosis or conclusion to the statement).

Luke reports Jesus as saying, “But if I cast out demons by the *finger* of God, then the kingdom has come upon you.” This is an interesting difference which may be a reference to the acknowledgement of the Egyptian magicians that the miracles produced by Moses were from God’s finger—that is, from God’s hand (Liefeld, *Mark*, p. 951; *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, ed.). With this reference, Luke is making a point that Christ is the new Moses, the new Deliverer of Israel, destroying the works of Satan just as God destroyed the powers of Egypt in the exodus event. As to whether Christ said “the Spirit of God” or “the finger of God”, it is not unlikely that He said *both* on this occasion.

Using another illustration in v. 29 to support his point, Jesus says that a homeowner (the “strong man”) will not willingly sit by and allow a thief to rob his house. The thief must first bind the strong man, and then he will be able to carry off his goods without fear of retaliation. In this parable Luke provides more detail than Matthew and Mark. Luke informs us that the strongman is “fully armed” and that “someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him”. In no uncertain terms Jesus claims a power which is *superior* to that of Satan. Satan is the strong man, but Christ is stronger, and he can do to Satan whatever he wants to do because He is able to bind Satan. He also says that someone takes away the strong man’s “armor” and “distributes his plunder”. This is Jesus’ parabolic way of saying that Satan has fortified himself in this world against the kingdom of God and thought that he was secure. But he was wrong; he was not secure. God is now, through Christ, stripping Satan of his defenses and will take back what Satan has stolen—namely, *men* who belonged to God, presently this blind and dumb man who belonged to God.

Therefore, we learn from this parable that we must be careful in our interpretation of *all* parables. Christ is not likening *Himself* to the thief who breaks in and steals what does not belong to Him. Satan is the *real thief* who has usurped the kingdom of God, taken what belongs to God and stored it in his own house. Jesus has been sent from God to recover what Satan has stolen, right out of his own house (under his very nose) fully fortified with all the power and defense that Satan can muster, and there is *nothing* Satan can do about it (cf. Matt. 16: 18—“the gates of Hades shall not overpower it”—namely, the Church armed with the gospel and the Holy Spirit). When the disciples returned from their successful mission, Christ interpreted their success as the dethroning of Satan and his fall from heaven (Lk. 10: 18).

There is no neutrality when it comes to Christ. Either we are allies of Christ and His kingdom or we are allies of Satan and his kingdom. This was precisely what the Pharisees were doing by resisting Jesus’ work on earth. While He was gathering men into His kingdom by performing good works, the Pharisees were scattering the multitudes by making false accusations against Him (Hendriksen, p. 527). But there was no middle kingdom which belonged to the Pharisees; they were, instead, the unconscious dupes (a person tricked) of Satan. In the same way, there is no middle kingdom belonging to *both* God *and* Satan, and Africans who believe that they can have the blessings of Christ on Sunday while appealing to African magic and witchcraft on Monday, are just fooling themselves. By appealing to African traditional religions and witchdoctors to make their crops grow, to heal a relative, or to gain an advantage over an enemy, they ally themselves with Satan’s kingdom. With respect to a person’s life, Christ is Lord of *all*, or He is not Lord *at all*. You cannot have Him as Savior unless you are willing to do what He says as Lord (Lk. 6: 46).

By crediting the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of Satan, the Pharisees committed the *unpardonable* sin. We hear all kinds of theories about the unpardonable sin or “the sin unto death” (1 Jn. 5: 16). Some people believe suicide is the unpardonable sin since a person cannot come back to life to ask forgiveness for this sin. But Paul was forgiven for murdering other people, and it is inconceivable that a person cannot be forgiven for murdering himself. There are many sins in our lives which are hidden to us, and all of us will die with some unknown, undetected sins for which we have not specifically asked forgiveness. This is why we pray, “Forgive us our debts”—not just past and present debts, but *future* debts (sins). From this



passage the unpardonable sin is defined for us, and we need not speculate (guess) about what it is and whether a true believer can ever commit it.

It should be clear that the unpardonable sin is not a temporary denial of Christ even by a Christian, the very sin for which Peter was forgiven. Perhaps Christ even had Peter in mind—since he was listening on this occasion—when He said, “And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him”. And what shall we make of the Apostle Paul who for years blasphemed the name of Christ, but repented and became the greatest of the apostles? What should be understood in this case is the deliberate, persistent rejection of the Spirit’s work in Christ against overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The Pharisees not only *knew* Jesus’ work to be the work of God—for there was no other explanation for it—but knowing this they *continued* to oppose Him. In the words of Carson (following the work of G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, p. 340; cf. 323-253),

The distinction between blasphemy against the Son of Man and blasphemy against the Spirit is not that the Son of Man is less important than the Spirit....Instead, within the context of the larger argument the first sin is rejection of the truth of the gospel (but there may be repentance and forgiveness for that), whereas the second sin is rejection of the same truth *in full awareness that that is exactly what one is doing*—thoughtfully, willfully, and self-consciously rejecting the work of the Spirit even though there can be no other explanation of Jesus’ exorcisms than that (pp. 291-292; emphasis mine).

After citing the comparability of this sin with Heb. 6: 4-6 and 1 Jn. 5: 16, Carson notes,

In each instance there is *self-conscious perception* of where the truth lies and the light shines—and a willful turning away from it. This is very different from Paul’s persecution of the church (1 Cor. 15: 9), which was not unforgivable (1 Tim. 1: 13) (p. 292; emphasis mine).

Added to this is the notable fact that Jesus was not addressing this warning to the uneducated multitude but to those who were supposed to be experts in the Scriptures and the religious leaders of the people. The scribes and Pharisees, above all people, were aware of the prophetic indicators in Jesus’ ministry which pointed to Him as the promised Messiah (Lane, *Mark*, p. 146). Yet, they saw all His works and deliberately refused to believe in Him. Therefore, their sin was far worse than that of the multitudes which had less knowledge of the Scriptures and less ability to recognize that His power was from God.

In light of this historical context, we need not be afraid of ascribing to the devil the work of the Holy Spirit when we are skeptical of some would-be miracle workers in our day. There are many who are making great claims for their gifts as healers and exorcists (those who cast out demons), but have little verification (proof) of their claims. Considering the fact that tens of thousands of people walked from distant cities to bring their loved ones to Jesus for healing or exorcism, and considering that they heard of His ministry only by word of mouth (not by TV, radio, newspapers, or billboard advertisements) it is certainly odd in the days of modern communication and transportation that we do not hear of the same thing happening in our day *anywhere in the world*. *If* the healings taking place in Mbarara or Kampala, Uganda are genuine works of the Spirit of God, *then* there can be *no other explanation* for these miracles, but *if* the masses of people are not flocking to these healers by the hundreds of thousands—when there is so much sickness in Uganda—*then* this can only mean that the masses are *not convinced* that genuine miracles are taking place. Perhaps by their “charismatic” personalities these “miracle-

workers” have persuaded a few thousand people that they are “for real”, but Jesus did not need a powerful personality to convince people that He could heal the sick and raise the dead. For anyone who was watching, however opposed to Jesus they were, there was no other explanation than that a notable miracle had taken place (cf. Acts 4: 16-22).

By their blasphemous words (referring to v. 24) the Pharisees had proven to be the “bad trees” which Jesus speaks of in v. 33. In this case the bad fruit was their speech (Chamblin, p. 91). The storerooms of their hearts (v. 34; *thesauros*) were filled with evil making it impossible for them to say anything good. A person’s speech is a very good indicator of the state of his heart—a very sobering truth. Spend a lot of time with someone and hear what he has to say on various important issues—religion, family, moral issues, people he knows, life in general. If he rarely, if ever, says anything edifying which encourages and builds up the listener, it probably means that he has nothing in his “storehouse of ideas” positive and edifying to say. This does not mean that there is no place at all for criticism or negative evaluation. If this were true, Christ would not be a good man (v. 34—“You brood of vipers!”)! Nevertheless, a man’s speech should present a generally positive outlook about life and a generous spirit reflecting a joy generated by his unshakable faith in Christ and His work in the world (1 Thes. 5: 16-18). A man’s speech springs from the overflow of his heart, and if his heart is filled with evil, his speech will be characteristically evil. For this reason, Jesus says that we shall give an account on the day of judgment for our **words** (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 10 where “deeds” are the criterion of judgment). By our words we will be justified and by our words we will be condemned (v. 37). This is not a statement of justification by **words**, but recognition that a person’s “careless words” (v. 36), spoken when he is not attempting to impress others, prove his profession of faith in Christ or falsify it.

Luke 11: 24-26 (cf. Matt. 12: 43-45) is a further commentary on the impossibility of neutrality introduced in v. 23, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.” The heart which is vacated of either evil spirits or the Holy Spirit is an impossibility. If an evil spirit departs for a time and the heart is not filled with divine influence from the Holy Spirit, another evil influence worse than the first may result. The human heart is powerless against the onslaught of the devil; man’s only hope is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There is an individual and corporate aspect to this warning. Individually, a person may be endowed with many common graces which are given to unbelievers. He may possess a large measure of self-discipline, charm, and generosity which are interpreted by Christians as signs of regeneration. Even if carefully observed, he may not stand out from a crowd of Christian people but would blend in perfectly. He is “swept clean” as it were. Such is the condition of an unbeliever who may have lived a very wretched and immoral life, but through some influence other than Christianity he may have turned the corner and reformed his life. He has improved, but has remained unrepentant and unconverted. In the words of Matthew Henry, his life is

swept from the filth that lies open to the eye of the world, but it is not searched and ransacked for secret filthiness, Matt. 23: 25....The house is **garnished** [decorated] with common gifts and graces. It is not **furnished** with any true grace, but **garnished** with the pictures of all graces....The house is **garnished**, but the property is not altered; it was never surrendered to Christ, nor inhabited by the Spirit (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Luke*; emphasis his).

Being delivered of the one demon of outward filth and loose morals, this person may then be occupied by eight demons of pride, self-righteousness, and deceit which are worse than the first,

for self-righteousness is the worst of all sins. It is easier for a tax-collector and a prostitute to enter the kingdom of God than for a self-righteous scribe or Pharisee, a fact which Jesus makes crystal clear in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer (Lk. 18: 10-14). He *is* not who he *says* he is or who people *think* he is. He *is* who God *knows* him to be.

Corporately, the parable fits well as a description of the Jewish nation. Through the tireless efforts of Jesus' ministry, the nation had been delivered of much of the demon possession that had tormented the whole country. Everywhere Christ went, He cast out demons. The nation was now standing at the cross-roads of decision. Will they be satisfied with half-measures—exorcisms of demoniacal powers—or will they allow Christ to have His way with them by inviting Him to cleanse them of all sin? From the tragic history of the Jewish nation, we know their answer to Jesus' invitation (Geldenhuis, *Luke*, p. 331).

### *S. The Multitudes Seek for a Sign—Matt. 12: 38-45; Lk. 11: 29-32*

Both Matthew and Luke report the request for signs in connection with the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Not only did the Pharisees rashly accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the ruler of demons, they refused to recognize all of his other powerful works and miracles. They wanted to see a sign from Jesus unlike all the other signs He had given. Exactly what they wanted Him to do is not said, but possibly they wanted something spectacular and sensational (Hendriksen, p. 533). Jesus would continue to heal the sick, but He would not produce a spectacular sign for an evil and adulterous generation who refused to heed the signs which had already been given. Just before Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate had sent Him to Herod who had wanted Jesus to do a few "tricks" for him as well, but Jesus did not comply with his desires (Lk. 23: 8-9).

But He would give them one sign, the sign of Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, and the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for the same period. It is clear from His reference that Jesus accepted the story of Jonah as an historical fact, not a fable. If the sign of Jonah in the sea monster was to be a sign similar to His burial in the earth and resurrection, it must be factual; otherwise, how would it be a true sign? How was the experience of Jonah a sign to the Pharisees? It would not be an immediate sign, but would serve as a sign when Jesus rose from the dead. Just as Jonah rose unharmed from the belly of the sea monster, Christ would rise again unharmed from the heart of the earth. If the Pharisees were looking for some spectacular sign from Jesus, His resurrection from the dead should do the trick (should be sufficient evidence), but we know from Biblical history that even when Jesus rose again from the dead, the adulterous generation of the Jews were persistent in their unbelief (Lk. 16: 31). Signs and wonders do not persuade the sinful heart to repent and believe; only the Holy Spirit can accomplish that.

Jesus then compares the unbelieving Jews with the men of Nineveh in Jonah's day (v. 41). The comparison and contrast concerns the identity of Jesus, the identity of Jonah, and the identity of the Jews and the Ninevites. Jesus was the perfect Son of God while Jonah was a sinful, stubborn, and rebellious prophet—and a minor prophet at that, not a major prophet like Isaiah. "Something greater than Jonah is here" standing in front of the Jews. While Jesus had demonstrated His authority and power through attesting miracles, Jonah had performed no such signs and wonders for the Ninevites. While the message of Jesus was one of forgiveness and

mercy, Jonah, who clearly did not want the Ninevites to repent, had only declared the impending judgment of God—“Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The recalcitrant (defiant of authority) Jews had enjoyed every benefit of the word of God in the OT through His appointed prophets from Moses to Malachi, but the Ninevites never had the advantage of the oral message of the prophets nor their written word. Yet with all their disadvantages, the Ninevites had repented at the preaching of Jonah. “Less enlightened people obeyed less enlightened preaching, but more enlightened people refuse to obey the Light of the world” (Hendriksen, p. 535-536).

It is obvious that Jesus considered the repentance of the Ninevites to have been genuine repentance; anything less would have rendered His comparison ineffective. Unlike the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah for whom it will be “more tolerable” on the day of judgment than for the cities of Bethsaida and Chorazin (Matt. 11: 22), the men of Nineveh will actually participate in condemning “this generation” of Jews. Their ability to judge the unbelieving Jews would not be possible if they were themselves being judged at the same judgment. It is true that the Assyrian Ninevites were eventually destroyed by the Babylonians, but their defeat took place a full 150 years after the preaching of Jonah, plenty of time for successive generations of Ninevites to revert to the old wicked ways of their forefathers.

The second comparison concerns the Queen of the South (the Queen of Sheba; 1 Kings 10: 1). Like the men of Nineveh, she had none of the advantages of the written word of God nor did she ever witness any miracles. She had only heard of reports of the wisdom and riches of Solomon which she could easily have dismissed as mere rumors, but she was determined to investigate these reports herself by traveling some 1200 miles from modern day Yemen (Hendriksen, p. 538). By way of contrast, the Jews had witnessed healings and exorcisms by Jesus which could not be explained as anything other than miracles, and these had been done right under their noses, not 1200 miles away. “Something greater [much greater] than Solomon is here” standing right in front of them but they refuse to acknowledge Him.

The passage has much to teach us about the sovereignty of God in election. People with much fewer advantages and who are much less informed about the gospel can come to Christ with the little truth they have while others who have the benefit of solid expositional preaching and teaching can remain year after year in evangelical churches and remain unconverted. Undoubtedly this is a mystery, but the history of the church demonstrates how God can blind the eyes of some while revealing Himself to others who are disadvantaged (Matt. 11). The Jews were hardened while the Gentiles were saved, and while millions of Westerners—with the advantage of trained pastors and thousands of evangelical books—have become hardened to the gospel, millions of disadvantaged people from developing countries have welcomed it. Our response to this mystery should be wonder and praise, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Rom. 11: 33)

***T. Jesus’ Mother and Brothers—Matt. 12: 46-50; Mk. 3: 31-35; Lk. 8: 19-21***

The temporal connection of both Matthew and Mark place this incident in context with the accusation of demon possession and the desire for signs. Note Matt. 12: 46, “While He was still speaking to the multitudes...” and Mk. 3: 31, “And His mother and His brothers arrived...”

In the second great discourse, Christ will inform His disciples that His coming would bring division between members of families (Matt. 10: 34-36). He was not being insensitive to Mary on this particular occasion, but simply using their presence as an opportunity to teach a very fundamental truth. The most important relationships in life are not based on biology, but faith. While not relegating (assigning to a lower position) family relationships to a position of insignificance, Jesus is elevating our relationship to Him to the position of *most* significance and importance. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that we feel a closer kinship with other believers than with members of our own families who are not believers. The human family is an earthly representation of the family of God, but the priority in the mind of God has always been the family of God and not the human family. His goal has always been to redeem fallen men by bringing them first into relationship with Himself, and second, into relationship with all those who are likewise in union with Him.

It should also be noted that it is not someone who merely claims to be His disciple who is his “brother, sister, and mother”. He is one who “does the will of God” or “My Father who is in heaven”. As in so many other places in the Synoptics, *profession* of faith does not necessarily mean *possession* of faith.

***U. The Third Great Discourse in Matthew: Parables of the Kingdom—Matt. 13: 1-52; Mk. 4: 1-34; Lk. 8: 4-18***

The temporal connection of this discourse is found in Matt. 13: 1, “On that day...”—apparently, the same day in which the events of 12: 22-50 had taken place. This chronology seems to be supported by Mark who places the parables in the same context.

***1. The Purpose of the Parables—Matt. 13: 11-17; Mk. 4: 10-12; Lk. 8: 8-10***

Christ uses parables to instruct the *responsive* disciple, the one who listens well with the purpose of learning and obeying, the one who has “ears to hear” (Ramm, pp. 277-278). According to Lk. 8: 10, knowledge of God and His kingdom is a gift which is bestowed upon some by grace and withheld from others because of their persistent unwillingness to hear. Christ did not begin His ministry by teaching in parables. The Sermon on the Mount was not in parables, but straight-forward ethical teaching. He begins to teach in parables because of the unwillingness of the multitudes to hear the straight-forward truth. Both Matthew and Mark place this discourse in context with the Pharisees’ charge of demon possession.

The second purpose of parables, then, was to hide the truth from those who were *unresponsive* to what they had *already* heard. The parables, in part, are a judgment for unbelief consisting of the judicial hardening of men’s hearts much the same as God hardened Pharaoh’s heart following his stubbornness in letting the nation of Israel to go free (See Ex. 7: 3; 8: 15, 19, 32; and 9:12). The reader will notice from these passages that Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God hardened it. Thus, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by God came as a judicial judgment upon Pharaoh.

However, this does not remove the difficulty of the passage since it had always been God's plan to harden Pharaoh's heart in order that the power of God on behalf of Israel might be known throughout the world (Ex. 7: 3; 9: 15-16 with Rom. 8: 17-18; see also Prov. 29: 1). Once again we are faced with the difficulty of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

In Matthew 13: 14-15 Christ quotes Isaiah 6: 9-10 which is directed toward unbelieving Israel before their defeat by the Babylonians. Just as Pharaoh had hardened his heart, Israel had hardened their own hearts against the continuing messages and warnings of the prophets (cf. Isaiah 5: 1-7; Jer. 7: 12-15, 25-34; 13: 8-14; 29: 19, 20; 35: 16, 17). Christ now faces the same opposition and hardness of heart. He quotes Isa. 6, not from the Hebrew but from the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint (LXX) (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p.556-557). It is worthy of note that the passage in Matthew emphasizes the **responsibility of the people** in hardening their own hearts while the passage in Isaiah emphasizes the **sovereignty of God** in hardening their hearts. In this there is no contradiction. It is precisely because the people have hardened their own hearts to the truth that God will continue to harden them. God is simply giving them what they wanted from Him—nothing. By understanding this, we can understand Jesus' statement in 13: 12, "For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him." In other words, those who have already received Christ's teaching, repented, believed, and begun to obey, will receive more and more understanding. But those who continue to hear Him and refuse to accept His teaching, even the understanding they have will be taken away from them. Their light will be turned into darkness. The judicial hardening which we find in Matthew is the fulfillment of the prediction of hardening in Isaiah which had become a "terrible reality" during Jesus' ministry (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp.554-556, including footnotes.)

For many months, Jesus had been preaching about the kingdom of God and the righteousness of His kingdom, but for the most part, the people had continued in persistent unbelief. So the question is: if they refused to receive His **plain** teaching, what use was it to give them any more? Christ was simply practicing what He had preached in the Sermon on the Mount, not to throw what was holy to dogs and swine [unbelievers who are entrenched in unbelief] lest they simply trample it under their feet (Matt. 7:6). Consequently, He begins to teach the multitudes only in parables, partly as a **judgment** against them and partly as a special measure of His **common grace** to all sinners so as not to increase the guilt of their unbelief and their punishment in hell (Lk. 12: 47-48). Commenting on Mk. 4: 3-34, Lane says,

The motive for Jesus' use of the parables is expressed in terms of his accommodation to that stage of preparation which was present in the crowd; he spoke the word "as they were able to hear it." This means that he adapted it to the level of understanding that he found in his listeners. Had Jesus spoken to the crowds in a direct manner they would have been forced to make a decision immediately. That decision could have expressed only unbelief and rejection. Jesus' adoption of the indirect address of the parable was accordingly an expression both of grace and of judgment. It was an expression of grace which allowed time for reflection on his appeal to penetrate beneath his words to "the word." It was an expression of judgment upon their lack of preparation to receive directly the word of the Kingdom of God (*Mark*, pp. 172-173).

The true disciples of Jesus, on the other hand, would from time to time receive the additional instruction which came through Christ's interpretation of the parables (Mk. 4: 34).

## **2. The Parable of the Sower—Matt. 13: 3-9; 18-23; Mk. 4: 3-9, 13-20; Lk. 8: 4-15**

Jesus interprets this parable for His disciples, but not for the general multitudes for reasons given in vv. 11-15. The seed which fell beside the road represents people who hear the word of the kingdom but do not understand it. The evil one then comes and snatches away what has been sown. Notice that the word of the kingdom had been sown “in his heart” which appears to imply something more substantial than superficial hearing. Yet, Christ explicitly says that the message of the kingdom has not been understood by this person. The seed has been sown beside the road or on a path beside the field, implying that the soil upon which the seed is sown is hard-packed from human traffic—earth which will not absorb the seed. The **hard-ground-hearer** is the person is one who, perhaps, has progressively heard the gospel but who has resisted it time and again causing his heart to become calloused (hardened) to the gospel, much as a man’s hands become hardened after many years of using hand tools. He may “understand” it intellectually, for the gospel is not intellectually complicated, but he does not understand how the gospel applies to *him*, and he quickly dismisses it as information not relevant to his life.

The **rocky-ground-hearer** represents the man who initially receives the word “with joy”, with some measure of enthusiasm. We have met people like this who appear to be genuinely converted and joyful in their new-found faith. For a time they are eager to learn Biblical truth and fellowship with God’s people, but later they are confronted by skeptics from the outside, friends who ridicule them. Or they may be confronted by more aggressive enemies of Christianity who threaten them with bodily harm or financial loss if they do not renounce their faith. Little by little, they isolate themselves from the church and eventually disappear. This is a real possibility for people living in countries where Christians are persecuted. Worn down by constant harassment and persecution, many new converts return to their former religion.

Affliction (v. 21) may refer to hardship which is more general than persecution. It can refer to any difficulty which threatens to challenge the truthfulness of one’s faith. For example, what if the new Christian begins to experience many new difficulties immediately after professing his faith in Christ? Perhaps he loses his job, or his wife deserts him. Or maybe he gets sick. He may have responded to the gospel believing that Christ would shield him from the storms of life, and he is disillusioned that his troubles are worse now than before he became a Christian. His faith has no firm root in the very thin layer of rocky soil; and life can be rocky, indeed. In other words, his understanding of the Christian faith is shallow (without root and depth) and fails to reckon with the fact that Christ does not give us immunity from suffering. Considering his first estate as an unbeliever to be better than his last estate as a believer, he goes back to the old ways. “It’s no use being a Christian,” he reasons. “My life was easier as an unbeliever.” This is shallow, short-sited thinking, but the very kind of thinking which Jesus is speaking of in the parable. The rocky-ground hearer should be a warning to the church to help those who have recently professed faith in Christ. They are little children whose understanding of the faith is shallow, in which case they need immediate nurturing in the faith to be prepared for the onslaught of affliction and possible persecution.

While the rocky ground hearer is confronted by external afflictions and persecutions, the **thorny-ground-hearer** is overcome by internal temptations which distract him away from the truth. The roots of his faith are intertwined with other roots, the roots of worry and greed. The worry of the world is most likely anxiety concerning what to eat, what to drink, and what to put on (cf. Matt. 6: 25 where the same root word is used—*merimnao*). Anxiety over material things can be

a fatal distraction to the most essential thing, one's relationship to God. On the flip side of the coin are those who have no real worries about money but simply want more of it. Procuring (acquiring) the basic necessities of life is not the problem, but rather the acquisition of affluence and abundance. Essentially these people are just as worried and anxious as the former group, but at a higher level; and they cannot enjoy anything they have since what they have is never enough. Besides, their possessions could be lost, making life—in their estimation—not worth living. These are the kind of people who attend the Sunday morning worship services but all the while they are thinking of what they are going to do on Monday at work. They are not concerned about the interests of the kingdom of God, but how to expand their own personal kingdoms.

Thus far, all three of the soils mentioned are unfruitful. There is nothing wrong with the seed which is the same in each case. The same seed is sown on the good soil which produces fruit in differing amounts. Not every *good-soil-hearer* is the same and some will be more fruitful than others. Some Christians have been endowed with greater gifts than others and will use those gifts productively in extraordinary ways (cf. Matt. 25: 15); others use the little ability they have been given in ordinary ways. Some bring forth a hundred-fold, some sixty and some thirty. The important point to consider is not the difference in the amount produced, but the fact that the good soil is *always* productive to a greater or lesser degree. The true believer produces fruit because the seed of the gospel is absorbed into his heart and germinates, causing a transformation of life. Jesus does not describe what the fruit is, but we can be confident that it would include the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5: 22-23)—and the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.

Many Christians get confused about professing believers who are active in the church for some time only to fall away later. They then conclude that such people were saved but somehow lost their salvation. But this is obviously not the conclusion Christ comes to. Judging from the purpose of parables given to us in vv. 10-17, none of the hearers are truly converted except the *good-soil-hearers*. Everyone else has a temporary exposure to the gospel which does not result in saving faith, however much some of them resemble Christians for a limited time. John the Apostle puts it this way: “They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us” (1 Jn. 2: 19). Jesus thus warns His future church of professing believers who are not true believers. True believers are those who persevere to the end (Matt. 24: 13).

### ***3. The Parable of the Tares Among the Wheat—Matt. 13: 24-30, 36-43***

This parable is recorded only in Matthew. It is another of the parables which Jesus explains for His disciples but not the general multitude (13: 36-43). The one who sows the seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed refers to the sons of the kingdom and the tares or weeds to the sons of the devil. The one who sowed the weeds is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. All of these details are essential to the parable. However, Christ assigns the parable one primary meaning: at the end of the age, Christ will send His angels to weed out unbelievers from the field to reveal the glory of His people (v.40-43).



Some expositors have interpreted the field in this parable as the church, an interpretation which would lead us to believe that our conception of the church should include the inevitability of an unbelieving membership within it. While it is certainly true that there are unbelievers who are members of the church, this parable does not sanction the notion that unbelievers are part of the church by *definition*. *Ekklesia* (the Greek term for “church”) means “called out ones”—that is, those who are *called out of the world*. The parable also does not eliminate the responsibility of believers to “weed out” those members who are living in open disobedience to covenantal obligations (See 1 Cor. 5; Matt. 18: 15-20). Jesus does not say that the field is the *church*; He says that the field is the *world*. He also says that at the end of the age He will send forth his angels who will remove all stumbling blocks and lawless people, not out of His *church*, but “*out of His kingdom*”. At the same time, as part of the world, the church must be included in our understanding of this parable.

The **word** “church” (*ekklesia*) does not appear in the passage; but the **concept** of the church is present, as the community in which the Rule of God is realized during the time between the advents of Christ. Moreover, the church is here represented as a **mixed** company, consisting of true believers (“the sons of the kingdom”) and false (“the sons of the evil one”). It is not enough to think of “the sons of the evil one” as standing in the world, outside (or alongside) the church; for the picture speaks of the sowing of tares **among** the wheat, and the explanation speaks of the angel’s **weeding out of his kingdom** “all who do evil.” (Chamblin, p. 99; emphasis his).

John Calvin also includes the church within the scope of the parable, and with his characteristic humor offers this application:

All that he [Christ] intended was to exhort those who believed in him not to lose courage, because they are under the necessity of retaining wicked men among them; and, next, to restrain and moderate the zeal of those *who fancy that they are not at liberty to join in the society with any but pure angels* (*Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-122; emphasis mine).

Hendriksen has also noted that Jesus is speaking about the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13: 11). It is no mystery that unbelievers live among (*ana meson*) believers in the world. The mystery would exist only if believers were *not* confronted with this necessity for Paul says that we would have to go out of the world to avoid it (1 Cor. 5: 10). On the other hand, it is a “mystery” that in the providence of God unbelievers are allowed to live among believers in the church until the end of the age, and further, that “we must respect this arrangement” (Hendriksen, p. 573).

It should be noted that the gospel will be preached in the whole world since the kingdom of God is not limited to the church. God owns the *world*, not just the church, and the very fact that the sons of the kingdom are being sown everywhere in the *world* insists on the conclusion that God’s reign and rule is extended throughout the world. The tares are sons of the evil one, accomplices of Satan and slaves in his kingdom who are living in the world on borrowed time. At the end of the age the sons of the evil one will be gathered up by the angels who are sent by the Son of Man and will be cast into the furnace of fire (hell). In other words, the sons of the evil one, although allowed for the present to co-exist with the sons of the kingdom, will eventually have no place in the “field”, God’s world.

The parable emphasizes patience (Hendriksen, p. 571). The workers wanted to rid the field of tares immediately, but doing so would have also eliminated some of the wheat as well. The

owner is wiser, and he will allow both the wheat and the tares to grow up together and then will turn over the reaping to more experienced men who can tell the difference between the two plants. Although Jesus tells us that we will know false prophets by their fruits (Matt. 7: 15-16), He does not imply that our analysis of every false believer will be infallible. As Hebrews 6: 4-8 teaches us, there are many in the church who exhibit every external indication of saving faith who have never experienced it internally. At the end of the age, the angels, not men, will be given the task of sorting out the true believer from the false. Presently the passage encourages us to exercise caution in our administration of church discipline (Chamblin, p. 100) without eliminating the need altogether (1 Cor. 5).

***Excursus on the Interpretation of Parables (See Knox Chamblin, Matthew, pp. 95-96 from which most of the following analysis has been taken.)***

A parable is an extended simile in which the word “like” is used. “The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed” or “The kingdom of heaven may be *compared to* a man who sowed good seed in his field.” The noun, *parabole*, is composed of the preposition *para* (“beside, alongside”) and *bole* (“to cast or throw”). Thus, in order to illustrate spiritual truth, Jesus cast along side of it tangible pictures to provide concrete explanations. These pictures provide “hooks” on which the spiritual meaning can be “hung” or understood. The allegory, on the other hand, is an extended metaphor which does not use the words “like” or “compared to”. The word *allegoreo* contains the prefix *allo* (“other”) and the base *agoreuo* (“to speak”) implying that when one speaks in an allegory he actually implies something “other” than what is said on the surface. Thus, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life”, a metaphor which implies that Jesus sustains one’s spiritual life, not that he is a loaf of bread. In Gal. 4, Paul treats the story of Sarah and Hagar allegorically, using Sarah as the representative of the New Covenant and Hagar as representative of the Old Covenant. The meaning of Sarah and Hagar is, therefore, hidden beneath the surface of the language.

In the allegory, each detail has meaning and importance for the interpretation. For example, in the allegory of old age in Ecc. 12, “the watchman of the house” which “tremble” are the old man’s arms which were once strong defenders of the house but which are no longer any use in defending himself. The “mighty men stoop” is a reference to his legs which are bent from age and the “grinding ones” which “stand idle” are his teeth which are no longer effective in chewing his food. Each word of this allegory has a separate meaning which must be determined for the complete interpretation of the allegory—the need to worship and serve God in one’s youth rather than waiting until old age. On the other hand, in a parable the details serve to fill out the story and make it as realistic as possible. The “merchant seeking fine pearls” (Matt. 13: 45) is an ordinary activity during Jesus’ day. Further, all the details contribute to the *central thrust* of the parable, the one central meaning of the parable, without the necessity of having separate meanings of their own. For example, in the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13: 33), the leaven is the kingdom of heaven which spreads imperceptibly (invisibly) but thoroughly throughout the world, but there is no separate significance to the three pecks of meal or the woman. We should not allegorize the parable by saying that the three pecks of meal stand for the three persons of the Trinity or that the woman represents the church. Allegorizing parables gets us into all kinds of fanciful interpretations.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the allegorical elements in Jesus' parables. In the parable of the sower, several elements in the parable are identified. The seed is the gospel or the words of the kingdom; the different soils represent people who have different responses to the gospel, the thorns represent the deceitfulness of riches, etc. Thus, in all parables there is an allegorical element which must be interpreted to gain the interpretation of the whole parable. Without these allegorical elements, the parable makes little sense. In the parable of the merchant, the pearl is the kingdom of heaven and the merchant is the person who hears the gospel of the kingdom and imputes to the kingdom its proper worth. He is willing to give up everything else in order to possess the kingdom. Unless the merchant and the pearl have allegorical meanings, the parable is incomprehensible. Yet, the allegorical elements do not stand alone by themselves as they can in an allegory, but without exception contribute to the central meaning of the parable. This is clear from the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares in which there are many allegorical elements which exist in a dependent relationship to the main story and the central thrust.

In the final analysis Chamblin cautions the interpreter not to force Jesus into a rigid parabolic method to the exclusion of allegories when it is evident that he used allegories extensively in his parables.

While it is helpful to distinguish "parable" from "allegory," we must be careful not to separate them as though a speaker or writer (especially one so free, creative and subtle as Jesus) is prohibited from interlacing them in his teaching. What we find, in fact, is that Jesus uses allegorical features as expressions of his pedagogical [teaching] artistry and within the framework and under the control of his chosen parabolic medium (*Matthew*, p. 96).

#### ***4. The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven—Matt. 13: 31-33; Mk. 4: 30-32; Lk. 13: 18-20***

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are twin parables which can be taken together (although Mark does not include the parable of the leaven). It could be argued that while the mustard seed demonstrates the outward growth of the kingdom, the leaven demonstrates the inward growth (Hendriksen, p. 565). The mustard seed is the smallest of garden seeds but when the seed is fully grown, it reaches ten to fifteen feet tall, big enough to provide shelter for birds. The parable illustrates the unimpressive and inconspicuous (unnoticeable) beginnings of the kingdom of God. It is essentially hidden to the world of men who take no notice of it. Yet, within the mustard seed is all the genetic potential of the fully grown tree, and so it is with the kingdom of heaven. Within its humble beginnings is the whole potential of the consummated kingdom awaiting the return of Christ. In other words, just as the future glory of the mustard seed (all 15 feet of it) is present in the simple seed, so also all the future glory of the consummated kingdom of God is present in its humble beginnings at Calvary's cross. In Jesus' first advent He unleashed all the potential power of the kingdom which grows slowly but without fail. The kingdom which will be consummated with power and glory is the very same kingdom inaugurated at the birth of Christ with humility and seeming insignificance. Having already discussed the inclusion of allegory within parables, it is worthy of note that the birds resting in the branches of the mustard tree may very well be a reference to the Gentiles (Chamblin, p. 100).

The leaven indicates the inward, penetrating growth of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus may be referring to the fact that the Christian faith is not some loose attachment—like membership in a country club—but an all-encompassing commitment which penetrates and dominates the whole of a person's life. No area of a person's life is left untouched by his commitment to Christ. But this leavening influence also applies corporately to any people or culture in which Christianity takes a firm root. No aspect of society—family, work, education, business, government, etc.—remains unaffected as the kingdom of God spreads its influence through the church—defined as the elect people of God. As with the mustard seed, this leavening influence is imperceptible at first, but the power causing the growth has been unleashed within the person and within society. Its effects will be evident to all in due time.

### ***5. Parables as the Fulfillment of Prophecy—Matt. 13: 34-35***

Matthew reinforces Jesus' intent to speak to the multitudes only in parables by referencing the parables to Ps. 78: 2. In that Psalm, consisting of 72 verses, the iniquity and unbelief of Israel is highlighted repeatedly. God had revealed His mighty works again and again to Israel only to have them turn away from His lovingkindness. The same is happening now in the ministry of Christ who is the antitype of the Psalmist. As Yahweh had revealed Himself in the mighty deliverances of Israel, Jesus has revealed Himself through the mighty acts of healing and casting out demons. The response he receives from the Jews is the same Yahweh received from the OT people—rejection and unbelief (Hendriksen, pp. 569-570).

### ***6. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price—Matt. 13: 44-46***

These are two more twin parables both of which occur only in Matthew. It is evident that they are spoken immediately after the explanation of the wheat and the tares and only to the disciples (v. 36). The common theme is the surpassing value of the kingdom of God compared to anything else a person may possess. In ancient times one of the most secure means of hiding wealth was burying it in the ground. In the present case, the owner of the field may have died without telling anyone else about it, and now the field is owned by someone else (Hendriksen, p. 575). The man who found the treasure—perhaps a common laborer farming another man's field—recognizes the value of the treasure when he sees it (Chamblin, p. 102, quoting Gundry, pp. 276-278). The ethics of buying a field with hidden treasure without telling the owner about it first does not come into view and any speculation about this would draw attention away from the intended meaning. Jesus only wishes to illustrate two important truths with both parables. **First** and foremost, the kingdom of heaven—which includes forgiveness, fellowship with God and His people, eternal life, the inheritance of a new heaven and earth, et al—has inestimable (incapable of estimating) value, more than anyone can possibly imagine. **Second**, there are those who recognize the value of the kingdom when they see it and are willing to part with everything else in order to possess it. Implicitly (what is implied) there are also those who see no value in it whatsoever, namely the crowds who are rejecting Jesus and who need to hear this parable.

We are reminded of the Apostle Paul who said that he counted everything else—including his reputation as a law-abiding Pharisee—as “dung” (refuse) in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ as his Lord and Savior (Phil. 3: 7-8). There is simply nothing else in life which

comes close to knowing Jesus Christ. Christ said that it profits a man nothing even if he gains the whole world and loses his soul (Matt. 16: 26).

### ***7. The Parable of the Dragnet—Matt. 13: 47-50***

This parable is also found only in Matthew and is the *seventh* in the series, a number which may symbolize the completion of Jesus' purpose to deepen the understanding of the disciples and to withdraw the truth from the general multitudes (cf. "Purpose of the Parables" above). It is similar to the parable of the wheat and the tares. Just as the field of the world (inclusive of the church) consists of believers and unbelievers, the sea—also a metaphor for the world of men—consists of both. Furthermore, the separating of the good from the bad will not take place until the "end of the age" and God employs the angels, not men, to determine who is false and who is true. For the second time, Jesus upholds the doctrine of punishment for the wicked—the furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (cf. Matt. 13: 41-42). Jesus told His disciples that they would become fishers of men (Lk. 5: 10), and as they proclaimed the gospel their "net" would catch all kinds of people, some of whom were genuine believers and some of whom were false. This implies that Jesus has the church in view as the net consisting of all kinds of people.

### ***8. Conclusion to the Parables in Matthew—Matt. 13: 51-52***

Jesus wishes to make sure that the disciples have understood the meaning of the explanation of the wheat and the tares and the last three parables, as well as all the other parables. Had they needed more explanation, He would have provided it. Not so with the crowds who do not receive any clarification of His teaching. The disciples alone have been privileged to hear these things (v. 36). Fairly soon Jesus will be entrusting the proclamation of the kingdom of God to these chosen disciples with the exception of Judas Iscariot, and their understanding of the kingdom is crucial for their future mission. Of course, much is still lacking in their comprehension as will be demonstrated later (Matt. 16: 21-23; 18: 1; 20: 20-28), but in time and with the coming of the Holy Spirit, these things will become clearer to them. They will very soon become a dynamic and powerful witness to the kingdom of God.

Unlike the scribes and Pharisees who could not get out of the "box" of their own traditions and interpretations of the OT, the new scribes—the disciples—would be able to draw from old things (the Old Covenant) and new things (the New Covenant). They are the new heads of God's household, the church, and they are given the responsibility to provide for the needs of this household of faith from the treasuries of both covenants which find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Thus equipped, the disciples would be far more adequate in shepherding the sheep than the scribes whose sermons were often lifeless and lacking illustration, who were often concerned about trivial things like tithing on garden herbs (Lk. 11: 42), who often skirted around the law for the sake of their traditions (Mk. 7: 9-17), and often rambled on and on about nothing without any order, a deficiency in their teaching which is demonstrated in the Talmud (Hendriksen, pp. 382-383).

### ***9. Additional Parables found in the Mark and Luke Discourse on Parables—Mk. 4: 21-29 Lk. 8: 16-18***

There are many more parables of Jesus which are not placed within this larger discourse on parables, but Mark includes two, and Luke one which have the same context as the parable of the sower. The parable of the lamp has been included by Matthew within the Sermon on the Mount (5: 15-16) but Jesus gives it an entirely different slant in the Mark and Luke passages. In Matthew, the parable refers to the outward witness of the citizens of the kingdom whose behavior is a light bringing glory to God. Here in Mark, the parable has profound eschatological implications. Thus far, the person and work of Christ has been “a veiled enigma [mystery]” for most people (Lane, p. 166), a lamp which has been hidden under a peck-measure or a bed. But this will not always be true for the things which are now hidden about Christ and His kingdom will one day be brought out into full light for all to see. Christ comes now as a humble sower (cf. context of Mk. 4: 13-20), but at the end of the age in the *parousia* (His final coming; Matt. 24: 27), He will come with His angels as a sovereign harvester who will be acknowledged and recognized by all (Phil. 2: 9-11; Lane, p. 166).

The call to faith comes in v. 23. Given the privileged position of the disciples, they should be able even now to discern Jesus’ veiled purpose. For others it is a warning. (The multitudes may or may not be present when this parable is spoken; cf. Lane, p. 164 and the context of Matt. 13: 31 and Mk. 4: 30-31 in which the mustard seed is the next parable.) Just as no one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel, His final purpose and mission will not remain hidden forever, but will one day be exposed for all to see. It is therefore crucially important that one *listens* to what Jesus is saying *now* (v. 24; Lane, p. 167), for this will be the measure which determines what he receives in the future eschatological kingdom. Possession of the kingdom in its consummation at the end of the age will be depend on what he understands of this kingdom in the present (Lane, p. 167). The multitudes had very little understanding of Jesus’ present ministry among them, but even this little understanding will one day be taken from them. The disciples, on the other hand, were growing in their comprehension of Jesus’ person and work, and one day they will be given much more understanding.

The next parable of the seed (vv. 26-29) demonstrates the inevitable growth of the kingdom by the sovereign power of God. The man who casts seed upon the soil is a simple farmer who does not understand how the seed grows. He has no knowledge of the biological and chemical phenomenon which causes germination. But even those of us who have studied such phenomenon in modern science cannot really explain their ultimate cause. We can only describe what is happening but not the principle of life behind it which remains a mystery to us. So it is with the kingdom of God. ***The work of Jesus’ disciples is simply to cast the seed; it is not our work to cause the growth or to understand the growth which is itself a mystery too great for us.*** Unlike the parable of the tares and the wheat and the dragnet, in which the task of harvesting and sorting is given to angels, this parable presents the man as the one who puts in his sickle to gather the harvest. Similar to Matt. 9: 37-38, the disciples are given the task of harvesting souls, but the reference to the mature grain may mean that the eschatological harvest at the end of the age is in view.

One application of this parable is that although the *work* of the kingdom has been entrusted to us, the *growth* of the kingdom has not. Growth is not our business or responsibility, and we cannot fully comprehend the secret operations of the Spirit of God who causes this growth (v. 27); we

may only observe with wonder and amazement. We are encouraged that the preaching of the gospel—the casting of the seed—will inevitably result at the end of the age with a multitude of believers which cannot be numbered (Rev. 7: 9). The growth of this harvest cannot be stopped precisely because its cause is the sovereign purpose of God.

***V. The Cost of Discipleship; the Calming of the Sea —Matt. 8: 18-27; Mk. 4: 35-41; Lk. 8: 22-25; 9: 57-62***

***1. The Cost of Discipleship***

There is no temporal connection with this event and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law which occurs chronologically much earlier (see above). If we follow the narrative in Matthew, Jesus gives orders to depart to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 18). He is interrupted by a scribe who wishes to become one of his disciples (vv. 19-22). This interruption is followed by his original intent to get into the boat and go to the other side of the sea. On the journey a storm comes up which Jesus calms by the power of his word. In v. 28, He and the disciples get to their destination on the other side in the country of the Gadarenes where they meet two demon-possessed men (vv. 28-34). He heals them and then gets back into the boat to cross over the Sea of Galilee again to come to his own town of Capernaum (9: 1).

It is difficult to determine the timing of the episode of Matt. 8: 19-22 which differs somewhat from the episode in Lk. 9: 57-62. In Matthew, *two* men approach Jesus with an interest in discipleship while in Luke there are *three*. In Matthew, they are on the shore ready to embark in a boat to the other side while in Luke they were walking along the road. Neither of these differences leads to the conclusion that they are separate events. If there were three men, Matthew simply condenses the story (which he characteristically does) to include only two. As for the place, they could have been on a road close to the departure point on the shore. Matthew and Luke simply insert the pericope (short story) in different places to suit their own purposes.

The correct chronological order seems to be that of Matthew. It is difficult to explain why he would interrupt the narrative between v. 18 and 23 at this point to randomly insert a story about two men who wished to become disciples. Further, there is nothing in vv. 28-34 which is thematically connected to the story; thus, we are led to believe that this is a simple chronological reporting of events, not thematic. But if this is the correct chronological order, the strict requirements for discipleship given in the passage are highlighted by the fact that Jesus is on the move, going from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other preaching the kingdom and healing diseases. He has little time for those who hesitate to accept the call; there had been no such hesitation by those whom he had already chosen (Matt. 4: 20—note the word, “immediately”). On the other hand Luke inserts the pericope just before the 70 disciples are sent out (10: 1), and this context may give us further understanding of the text.

Luke tells us that Jesus “appointed” seventy others. In all the Synoptic texts dealing with the calling of the disciples—whether the first disciples, the twelve, or the seventy—Jesus is always the one doing the choosing (e.g. Matt. 4: 19—“Follow me and I will make you fishers of men”; Mk. 3: 13—“And he went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to him”; Lk. 6: 13—“And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and

chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles”; Jn. 1: 43b—“And He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me’”). On the night he was betrayed, he explicitly tells his remaining eleven disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you.” Jesus was looking for disciples according to his *own choosing*; he was not looking for *volunteers*.

This may help explain Jesus’ lack of enthusiasm for the volunteer scribe of v. 19—“Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” How many times had Jesus heard this? Matthew and Luke don’t tell us, but possibly many times, and this occasion may be only the token example. With his charisma as a healer, teacher, and exorcist Jesus could have drawn to himself hundreds of “disciples” who wanted to be part of the “action” and excitement of his ministry. (Even the twelve got carried away with the prestige of being with Jesus—Lk. 22: 24; Matt. 20: 20-21). But Jesus wasn’t looking for volunteers who would easily come—and just as easily go.

Neither Matthew nor Mark tell us how the scribe responded to the less than tempting “benefit package” Jesus lays out in v. 20, but from the looks of things, Jesus didn’t have to say anything else—his words were probably met with stone-cold silence. The scribe was probably accustomed to an easy life of study and comfort, not at all the hardship which awaited the traveling disciples of Jesus who were dependent upon the kindness of others for sleeping accommodations (Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 1, p. 388). The scribe reminds us of someone else, the rich ruler who cannot bring himself to part with his money for the privilege of following Jesus. When Christ spelled out the demands of discipleship, the rich ruler didn’t say anything either, but walked away sadly (Mk. 10: 17-20). I think we are justified in picturing this scribe doing the same thing. Lest we all congratulate ourselves for being such devoted followers and disciples of Jesus, just remember that few of us (none of us?) have been called upon to sell all our earthly possessions, give the money away to poor people we don’t know, and follow Christ without knowing where we will sleep tonight. But this is precisely what Jesus was telling the rich ruler and the scribe to do. He does not make the same demands on all of us, but he has the right to demand whatever he wants from any of us. And if such stringent (strict) calls to discipleship come in the future, a true disciple will not flinch in the face of that call. This brings us to the second man in Matt. 8: 21.

At this point in Jesus’ ministry, a “disciple” was not necessarily a committed follower (cf. Jn. 6: 66, the context of which is the feeding of the 5000), but could have been anyone following him around and regularly listening to his teaching. “Jesus repeatedly challenges disciples in *name* to become disciples in *fact*” (Chamblin, p. 65, emphasis mine). The “disciple” in v. 21 wanted to follow Jesus, but first he must bury his dead father. This doesn’t seem to be asking too much, and Jesus’ response to the man is so startling (abrupt?) that some commentators have interpreted the man’s request as buying more time before making a firm commitment. In other words, his father was not dead yet, and he wanted to wait until that happened before following Christ (Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 296; Calvin, *Harmony*, p. 389). Carson says that the Greek could be interpreted this way “only with difficulty”. Quite possibly Jesus was testing the man’s commitment without any intention of following through with the literal requirement. He knew the man’s commitment to be weak (cf. Carson, p. 209). We may as well ask whether he would have actually demanded the rich ruler to give up all his wealth before following him. We will



never know because neither person was *willing* to do what Jesus asked. What we should understand is that we must be *willing* to follow Jesus wherever he leads us and to do whatever he asks us to do. What he asks one person to do will be different from what he asks others to do, and the intensity of the requirements will be different for all. However, submission to his lordship must be substantially the same.

It is possible that the man's father had not yet died, but, as Carson suggests, this does not totally explain the severity of Jesus' reply (p. 209). Family commitments are the most important earthly commitments, but they cannot be compared to one's commitment to the kingdom of God. The lordship of Jesus Christ takes priority above all else, even the love of family, and whoever does not "hate" his family, or even his own life, *in comparison* to his love for Christ is not worthy of Christ (Lk. 14: 26). The priority of allegiance to Christ above that to family is especially acute (strong) when one's family has no attachment to Christ. "Allow the dead to bury their own dead" indicates that Jesus knew something about this man's family—they were spiritually dead. Consequently, let *them* tend to the care of the dying father (or dead father) while *he* follows Christ. Apparently, Jesus' person and message had "struck a chord in the man's heart" (made a profound impact on him), but not upon his family who doubtless had heard of this miracle-worker from Nazareth, but had not pursued him. It was now time for *him* to make a firm decision. There are, indeed, important responsibilities to be taken care of, but which can just as well be performed by the spiritually dead. This is something to ponder for believers who are considering their life's work—"How many unbelievers can do what I do just as well or better than I can?" Doubtless, they cannot do what you do consciously for the glory of God, but unbelievers do some things quite well. (I would rather be "under the knife" of a gifted, unbelieving surgeon who loves his work and studies the latest research than a Christian surgeon who is slack in his studies and less gifted in his field. So let the spiritually dead do the complicated surgery while the less gifted Christian surgeon comes to the mission field where there are no surgeons.)

The same explanation can be given for the man who wishes to tell his family and friends "goodbye", also an understandable request. But when a man is plowing, he cannot allow himself any distractions, lest he plow a crooked furrow. Perhaps Jesus discerned in this man a love for his family and friends which would have been a constant distraction to his work as a disciple (Geldenhuys, p. 296). Sometimes we are more often disposed to pleasing our families than we are to pleasing God, and we can come dangerously close to making an idol of our families. Discipleship may require the leaving of family and friends for prolonged periods of time; it certainly would for this particular individual. Western missionaries to Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> century packed all their belongings into caskets before shipping off to Africa. The life-expectancy of a white missionary to Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was only a year and a half. Most of them died very quickly of various forms of illness, primarily malaria. This is why Africa was known at that time as the "white man's graveyard". (I'm glad it is not the white man's graveyard today!) Courageous missionaries heeded the call of Christ to "hate" their fathers, mothers, loved-ones, and their own lives in comparison to Christ in order to obey his call to discipleship. The results of their labors—millions of churches scattered across Africa—is plain to see.

None of this implies that the cost of discipleship is always becoming a missionary or full-time pastor. The cost of discipleship is different for every Christian, but it is just as real for every

Christian. He who is *unwilling* to take up his cross and deny himself, is not worthy of being a disciple of Christ, and in his frantic attempt to save his life, will actually lose it (Lk. 9: 23-26).

## 2. *The Calming of the Sea*

This miracle is reported by all three Synoptists. The chronology of the event seems to be given in Mark 4: 35, “And on that day...”, the day of His parabolic discourse. The importance of the story lies partly in the fact that Jesus is now performing a different kind of miracle. He has healed the sick and cast out demons, but now he shows his sovereignty over the forces of nature itself. The Son of Man who has no place to lay his head can nevertheless sleep through a storm (Mk. 4: 38) because he is able to calm the storm with his omnipotent (all-powerful) word.

Sudden, violent storms in the Sea of Galilee are common because of its location 600 feet below sea level and surrounded by hills. Cool air sometimes sweeps down from Mt. Hermon which is 9200 feet high and mixes with the warm air hovering over the sea (Hendriksen, p. 410). This mixing of warm and cool air causes turbulent weather systems to develop rapidly. Some of them experienced sailors, the disciples were not unnecessarily alarmed. They knew what a dangerous storm looked like, and this was one of them! Besides, at this point the boat was filling up with water (Mk. 4: 37), not a happy moment for even the most experienced sailors. Jesus, on the other hand, was not alarmed—only exhausted from doing his work and catching some much needed “winks” (rest) in the back of the boat. He was fully human, and he often became exhausted from the work load.

The difference in the Synoptics can be seen in what the disciples said to Jesus and what he says back in return. Matthew’s account says, “Save us, Lord; we are perishing!” Mark’s account says, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”—a note of disrespect even for their Master. Luke’s account says, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” Most likely *all three* statements were made plus many more—all with exclamation points (!) at the end!

Another difference in reporting is the nature and timing of Jesus’ rebuke concerning their lack of faith. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus rebukes two things: their fearfulness and their lack of faith. Fear and faith don’t mix well together; one generally drives out the other. But did Jesus say that they had “no faith” or “little faith”? We don’t really know, but the main point is their fearfulness which is symptomatic of their lack of faith. They had been with Jesus long enough to be well-acquainted with his power, and had there been no grounds for rebuke, he would not have offered it. It is the first of several rebukes which set the disciples apart from the multitudes who had only minute understanding of who Jesus was (Lane, p. 177). At the same time, the present distress was somewhat different. Healing a disease or casting out a demon is one thing, controlling the cosmic forces of nature is another—“for who can control the weather?” (Hendriksen, p. 413) Therefore, there is some warrant (reason) for their surprise, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” If they were familiar with their OT Bibles, the answer to this question would have been as instantly forthcoming as the calming of the sea—this man is also God who delivered the Israelites through the Red Sea and the same God who calms the roaring of the seas (Ps. 65: 7; Chamblin, p. 67). Who except God can do such things? Thus, we have a better understanding of Jesus’ purpose in the whole episode. In the final analysis he had elicited (called forth) the desired response—wonder and awe at his majesty, the prerequisite

of faith. He was fully aware of their deficient faith grounded, as it was, in their deficient knowledge of who he was. He had not only *calmed* the storm; he had *caused* the storm in the first place as an occasion for furthering his disciples' theological education—particularly in the area of Christology.

Herein we can understand another difference in the reporting of this event. Matthew reports Jesus' rebuke *before* he stills the waves while Mark and Luke report the rebuke *afterwards*. Which is it? The answer is both/and. He rebukes their lack of faith *both* before *and* after his mighty display of power. The whole point in calming the waves is the strengthening of their faith; thus, he returns to the lesson he sets out to teach (cf. Hendriksen, p. 412). For believers, crisis situations are not designed by God to destroy faith, but to build it. The more experience we have in seeing God at work delivering us through seemingly impossible situations, the more we will be in awe of his mighty power and providence.

***W. Healing of the Gerasene (Gadarene) Demoniac(s)—Matt. 8: 28-34; Mk. 5: 1-21; Lk. 8: 26-39***

The pericope (short story) has a strong temporal connection with the calming of the sea (cf. Matt. 8: 18, 23, 28; Mk. 4: 35; 5: 1; Lk. 8: 22, 26). Jesus is getting into a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee, and he arrives at his destination in Gadara (the country of the Gadarenes). Mark and Luke also place this event immediately after the calming of the storm, giving us additional evidence of its chronology.

In Matthew there are *two* demon-possessed men while Mark and Luke record only *one*. Both Mark and Luke provide more details of the event which centers around only one of the demoniacs who wished to accompany Jesus back to Galilee (Mk. 5: 18; Lk. 8: 38). Although Jesus in his humanity did not know the day or the hour of his second coming (Matt. 24: 36), the Synoptics generally present him as being in full possession of omniscience (Matt. 17: 27; Jn. 1: 48; Jn. 4: 17-18; Mk. 9: 33-37). Safely assuming this to be the case here, it means that Jesus crossed over the Sea of Galilee knowing that he would heal two demoniacs, that only one(?) would believe in him, and thirdly, that he would be rejected by the whole population—not a very “successful” evangelistic and healing campaign according to many modern-day televangelists and “healers”, but a worth-while effort from his perspective.

Added to this is the fact that Jesus did all this for a Gentile living among pig farmers (pig-farming Jews were as scarce as—well—hen's teeth). The demoniacs were living in the country of the Gadarenes, Gentile country, making Matthew's inclusion of this story all the more significant.

The passage gives us interesting information about the effect demons could exert upon their human victims. These particular victims showed all the symptoms of insanity for Mark tells us that he was living among the tombs, crying out night and day and inflicting wounds upon himself with stones (5: 5), and Luke tells us that he went around naked. (We may assume the same behavior of the other demoniac.) Such insane behavior encourages some expositors to interpret all demon-possession in the Bible as insanity, but the Biblical record is that they were possessed by demons, not that they were insane. At least one, possibly both, had super-human strength

which apparently grew more intense with time (were more demons added progressively with time?). He had been bound with shackles and chains often (*pollakis*), but each time he had broken free. From this we may deduce that there is much power given to those who are demon-possessed (especially with a legion of them), but generally in the Bible it is reported as uncontrolled, destructive power with no useful purpose.

[But there are other pictures of demon-possession “for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light”—2 Cor. 11: 14. Gary North writes of case after case of documented demon-possession in *None Dare Call it Witchcraft*. In one case, an untrained Brazilian who operates on patients successfully without anesthesia, is possessed by the demonic spirit of a German surgeon. He never loses a patient. There have been numerous documented cases of SHC—spontaneous human combustion—in which living persons have inexplicably burst into flames (not a pretty picture) consuming even their bones which require 5000 degrees of heat to burn to ashes. The book is a fascinating read and a slap in the face to Western skeptics who deny the existence of the supernatural.]

There is also weeping and self-infliction of bodily harm (Mk. 5: 5), symptoms of human misery accentuated (made worse) by complete social ostracism (removal from society). We may ask whether the Biblical writers are trying to paint us a picture of hell—a hell dominated by weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13: 42), hatred toward God, self-hatred, inconsolable sorrow, and complete and final removal from the social graces of others, but mostly from God. Satan is a cruel taskmaster who wishes others to share in his downfall.

At least one of the demoniacs is possessed by multiple demons for they call themselves “Legion” (Mk. 5: 9; 8: 30; Lk. 8: 30). A Roman legion consisted of 6,826 men (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures, Bibleworks*), but this does not imply that the word “legion” is meant as a definite number. However, Mark tells us that the demons entered 2000 swine which indicates a very large number of demons in possession of this man. The **first response** of the demoniac, with the power of multiple thousands of demons capable of breaking chains, was submission—he bowed down to Jesus (Mk. 5: 6). In spite of their superior numbers, the demons knew that they were in the presence of a superior power and had no choice but to submit. One of the main purposes of this pericope in all three Synoptics is to demonstrate the superiority of Christ over the demonic realm and Satan himself. The **second response** is the recognition of Jesus’ deity, though this cannot be classified as true worship. Speaking his name, “Son of the Most High God”, is a futile attempt on their part to gain the mastery over him (Lane, pp. 183-184). The expression, “What do I have to do with You” amounts to no more than, “Why do you bother us?” (Hendriksen, p. 414) or “Why do you interfere with us?” (Lane, p. 183).

The **third response** is an inquiry about what Jesus plans to do with them coupled with a request for mercy (Matt. 8: 29b; Mk. 5: 7b; Lk. 8: 28b, 31). The passage brings up almost as many questions as there are demons. For example, what do the demons mean by saying, “Have you come here to torment us before the time?” (Matt. 8: 29)? Hendriksen and Carson interpret “the time” as the “appointed time” (the word is *kairos*) or the final judgment which includes the judgment of Satan and his demons (Rev. 20: 10; Hendriksen, p. 414, Carson, p. 218; Calvin sees no compelling reason to interpret the question in this way, but that the “time” is a general designation of judgment, not **the** judgment—*Harmony*, Vol. 1, p. 432). It appears from the verse

(Calvin aside) that Satan and his demons know something of the “appointed time” of their final destruction, and these particular demons in Gadara think that any “torment” from Jesus at this time would be premature (cf. Rev. 20: 10, where the same word, *basavizo*, “torment”, is used).

While the word “torment” has reference to the final destruction of demons in the “lake of fire” (Rev. 20: 10), the “abyss” (Lk. 8: 31) is most likely a reference to the **temporal** punishment of demons before their **final** punishment (For a more thorough treatment of this position, see C. Jonathin Seraiah, *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future*, pp. 90-97). Revelation 20: 1-3 teaches that Satan will be bound and thrown into the “abyss” for a thousand years so that he will not be able to deceive the nations as he had before. But after a thousand years, he will be released from the abyss and will make war against the saints (Rev. 20: 7-9). Thus, Satan’s imprisonment in the “abyss” is **temporary** until he is released just before the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

If the abyss is a temporary place of punishment for Satan, it is also most likely a temporary place of punishment for demons until the final “torment” in the “lake of fire”. This theory is supported by such texts as Jude 6, “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in **eternal bonds** under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” When Satan rebelled, many of the angels in heaven rebelled with him. The Bible does not tell us **when** these fallen demons were placed in “eternal bonds” but it is possible that they were imprisoned at the same time Satan was imprisoned (Rev. 20: 1-3), or **some** of the fallen angels may have been immediately placed in the abyss while **others** were allowed to roam the earth. At this point, they are “kept” (*tereo*—held in custody) until the final judgment.

[For passages related to the binding of Satan, see Matt. 12: 29; Mk. 3: 27. Satan is the “strong man” whom Jesus has bound. We do not have time to deal with all the thorny questions related to the binding of Satan in Rev. 20: 1-3, and how he continues to blind the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4: 4) while being bound, but the typical reformed position is that to some extent his power on earth was seriously diminished at the first coming of Christ, his atoning work, and resurrection. See also Rev. 12 and Lk. 10: 17-18. The passage in Rev. 20: 1-3 says that he can no longer deceive the “nations”; nothing is said about his inability to blind “individuals”. Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain how Satan can be bound in the abyss “shut and sealed over him” while his influence on earth is evident to all. The Dispensationalists have a ready answer for this, saying that Satan is bound during the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth, but their position brings up more problems than it solves. For a thorough treatment of *Revelation* from an amillennial perspective, see *More Than Conquerors*, William Hendriksen. Also read *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, Robert G. Clouse, ed.]

We find the same idea expressed in 2 Pet. 2: 4, “...God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, **reserved for judgment**....” The words, “reserved [*tereo*—the same word used in Jude 6] for judgment” indicate that “hell” (not the same term as “lake of fire”) or the “pits of darkness” are temporary places of confinement for demons until the final Day of Judgment (Seraiah, pp. 92-93).

Our brief examination of the above texts has provided the background for questions which arise from the healing of the demoniac. The demons beg Jesus not to send them into the abyss (*abusson*, Lk. 8: 31, same word used for abyss in Rev. 20: 3). Exactly what did this punishment imply for the demons which had been roaming freely upon the earth and were doing what they wished to their possessed victims? It meant that they were faced with the possibility of being banished from the earth forever only to await their final destruction in the lake of fire at the final

judgment. It seems unreasonable to assume that every time Jesus cast out demons during his ministry, they were simply free to possess someone else. (Matthew 12: 42-45 speaks only of a demon which left a man on his own free will, not one who was cast out by force.) And if, indeed, the demons could simply possess another man after being cast out of the Gadarene demoniac, then why are they so afraid of the consequences of Jesus' actions against them? (cf. Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 255). The demons were faced with a real punishment which terrified them, but they also figured that their final judgment was premature ("before the appointed time").

We can only speculate why Jesus granted their request to enter the swine. Perhaps they wished to generate ill feelings against Jesus who would be accused of killing the swine (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 415). If this was their purpose, it worked, for the whole population of the region asked Jesus to leave. Or their request could have been one of providing temporary housing for themselves until the next human victim. This motive is unlikely if the demons themselves destroyed the swine by causing them to run off the cliff and drown. But how do we know that the *demons* caused the drowning of the herd—a common, but unproven assumption of expositors? Jesus had control over the demons, and *he* may have caused the herd of swine to drown in order not to grant them the ultimate goal of their request, embodiment in the swine. After the swine drowned, the demons were now left in the same predicament, without bodies wandering around and seeking rest in another victim (Matt. 12: 43) or banished to the abyss. I prefer the last possibility, that after the drowning of the swine, the demons were then banished to the abyss where they could do no one any more harm. But we can only speculate. If one has a problem with Jesus destroying some one's pigs, he must keep in mind that they were his pigs in the first place.

After hearing about all this from the herdsmen, a large crowd from the town comes out to the cliffs to find the demoniac clothed and in his right mind sitting at the feet of Jesus (Lk. 8: 35). There is symbolism here, for without Christ we are all like the beasts of the field, out of our minds and controlled by demonic influences. Only Christ can put us in our "right minds" to think clearly and properly about life in submission to God.

It is here that the tragedy of unbelief is revealed in the story. Rather than rejoicing in the deliverance of one (two according to Matthew) of their own from the bondage of demons, they are more concerned for the loss of swine. Swine are more important than people. Nor are they concerned for their own spiritual bondage or that Jesus could have healed some of the sick among them (Hendriksen, p. 415). They asked Jesus to do nothing for them; they simply asked him to leave them alone. Is this not typical of unbelievers? They only want God to leave them alone, not realizing that every possession they have is a gift of his grace (Matt. 5: 44-45). If they remain unrepentant, God will one day grant them their wish, as Jesus does here. They will be banished away from the presence of God where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We have no further word in the story about anyone who may have responded to the testimony of the demon possessed man whom Jesus commissioned to spread the word. (Because the Gentiles would not be swept away in the fever of materialistic Messianic expectations, Jesus does not mind the publicity in Gadara.) Luke reports that he testified "throughout the whole city" (Lk. 8: 39) while Mark says he proclaimed his message in Decapolis. The city of Gadara was in Decapolis, but this may not have been the city which rejected Jesus but rather the city of Gergesa right on the coastline. The demoniac's "home" (Mk. 5: 19) may have been in Gadara rather than

Gergesa (cf. Hendriksen, p. 413; Geldenhuys, p. 255; Carson, p. 233, notes). It is conceivable, then, that the healed demoniac did not go back to the city which rejected Jesus, thus leaving them to their eternal fate. But it is also exegetically possible that he proclaimed his good news in the very city who rejected Jesus. This seems to be the best possibility, for the city mentioned in Lk. 8: 34 is most likely the same city mentioned in v. 39. If so, the story highlights the supreme patience of God in pursuing resistant sinners with the gospel. At their request, Jesus left them, but he did not leave them alone to their fate. He sent them an undeniable, living testimony to his power of healing and forgiveness.

***X. Jesus Returns to Capernaum—Matt. 9: 1; Mk. 5: 21; Lk. 8: 40***

Mark gives us the correct chronological sequence. After Jesus heals the demoniac, he crosses the Sea of Galilee again and arrives in Capernaum, identified in Matt. 9: 1, “His own city” which is now Capernaum and not Nazareth (Matt. 4: 13).

***Y. Matthew’s Dinner—Matt. 9: 10-17; Mk. 2: 15-22; Lk. 5: 29-39***

***1. Eating with Tax-collectors and Sinners***

We don’t know how much time elapsed between Matthew’s call and the celebration in his house with other “tax-gatherers and sinners”. Donald Guthrie places this event much later (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, “Outline of the Life of Christ”, p. 558). Carson offers the most convincing chronology of events which I will condense as follows (*Matthew*, p. 221): From the context of Matt. 9: 18, it is clear that the healing of Jairus’s daughter and the hemorrhaging woman occur just **after** the dinner with Matthew and his friends (Matt. 9: 10-17). All three Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke) place the raising of Jairus’ daughter **after** Jesus heals the demoniac in the country of the Gadarenes (or Gerasenes) which is reported in Matt. 8: 28-34, Mk. 5: 1-20, and Lk. 8: 26-39. Matthew 9: 2-8 places the healing of the paralytic **after** the healing of the demoniac in Gadara (the country of the Gadarenes), but Mark 2: 2-12 and Luke 5: 17-26 place the healing of the paralytic much earlier **before** the Gadarene healing. Matthew wished to arrange **all four** of these events together to suit his thematic purpose.

Carson argues—correctly, I believe—that Matthew’s dinner must have taken place significantly **later** than Matthew’s call as a disciple. However, since his call and the dinner with tax-collectors and sinners go well together thematically, **all three** Synoptists put the two events together. Significantly, **none** of the Synoptists tie the two events together with strong temporal connections (cf. Matt. 9: 9-10; Mk. 2: 14-15; Lk. 5: 28-29. Carson believes that Mk. 1: 40-2: 22 provides the basic chronological framework (p. 196) while leaving out many details. For a possible chronology of events, see the outline of the Synoptics.

Table fellowship was considered the most intimate form of social interaction, and by eating with sinners Jesus was publicly declaring his identification with them, particularly, just as he did sinners, generally, at his baptism (Mk. 2: 16; Matt. 9: 11; Lk. 5: 30). It must have been a wonderful celebration for those who had been the spiritual outcasts of Jewish life. They now had a Savior who would accept them—“warts” (flaws) and all.

The text indicates that the Pharisees and their scribes (interpreters of the Law) did not approach Jesus directly but his disciples, a detail reported in all three Synoptics. Perhaps knowing they could gain no headway with Jesus, maybe they could at least create some in his disciples about his credibility. No self-respecting person would have table fellowship with such contemptible people. The Pharisees were spiritual descendents of the Hasidim, the faithful Jews who refused to defile themselves with Hellenistic ways and illegitimate sacrifices during the oppressive regime of Antiochus Ephiphanes in the second century before Christ (see notes above). Many had chosen to accept death rather than disobey the Law (F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 69-73). They could not fellowship with tax-collectors; to do so made them ritually unclean (Lane, p. 104).

Making no attempt to defend the character of his hosts (the “sinners”), Jesus hastens to defend his actions. Healthy people didn’t need a doctor, only the sick ones. He came to call sinners, not righteous people. Jesus is speaking “tongue in cheek” (with irony; cf. Lk. 15: 7 for more irony), for he knows there is no one who is good or righteous but God (Mk. 10: 18; Rom. 3: 1). He had not come to extend the call of salvation to people who had an inflated opinion of their own righteousness, but people who knew they were sinners in need of forgiveness. Only those who were “poor in spirit” would inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5: 3). We should not misrepresent Jesus’ words to mean that all self-righteous people are beyond the hope of redemption. If that were true, none of us could be saved, for all of us are self-righteous to one degree or another. Self-righteousness is the very opposite of God-righteousness. We must also remember that possibly the most self-righteous person who ever lived became the greatest apostle of Jesus Christ—the Apostle Paul (Phil. 3: 5-6). The real intent of Jesus’ rebuke is to shake the Pharisees out of their presumed self-righteousness and to embrace him as their only hope just as these “sinners” had done.

In the final analysis, God is not as concerned for *ceremonial* purity as *actual* purity (Matt. 9: 13). He quotes Hosea 6: 6, spoken during a time when northern Israel continued to bring their ritual sacrifices before the Lord but whose hearts were far from him. Isaiah had warned Judah, the southern kingdom, of the same mistake, assuring them that God was disgusted with their sacrifices and feasts. What he really wanted was justice and compassion for the poor, the orphan and the widow—the actual practice of faith (Isa. 1: 10-17). Institutional and external righteousness is not enough, for Christ clearly proclaimed that “unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5: 20). Being good students of the Law, they should have understood this principle since at one very important Passover God had accepted the worship of those who were not ceremonially clean (2 Chron. 30: 17-20).

## ***2. The Question of Jesus’ Authority: Fasting or Feasting (?); the Lesson of Cloth and Wineskins***

We will consider all of the texts above since they are presented *thematically* with the question of Jesus’ authority, not because they are temporally connected to one another. It is pretty clear that the question of fasting came up during Matthew’s dinner. Jesus and his disciples, now including Matthew, are feasting and having a good time and are all the sudden approached by the disciples of John and the Pharisees who frown upon their extravagance. The twin parables of the cloth



and wineskins also seem to have been spoken on the same occasion to explain Jesus' rationale (reason) for feasting. This leaves the incidents of the grainfields and the man with a withered hand (see below) which did *not* occur in temporal connection with Matthew's dinner but deal with the same theme of Sabbath-keeping and Jesus' authority as Lord of the Sabbath.

Before we get into the text, let us notice the subtle ways that the Synoptics can differ from one another in the reporting of the same event. Matthew says that "the disciples of John came to Him" with the question of fasting, "Why do *we and the Pharisees* fast, but your disciples [the disciples of Jesus] do not fast." Mark's account is ambiguous (could be interpreted in two different ways) by saying, "And John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and *they* came and said to Him, "Why do *John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees* fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Who is the *they* in v. 18, the Pharisees or the disciples of John—or both? The text in Luke appears to present the Pharisees as the ones who were speaking to Jesus since they are the ones grumbling in v. 30 and also the ones Jesus addresses in v. 31. The natural reading of the text supports the interpretation that the Pharisees were the ones speaking to Jesus about fasting in v. 33. On the other hand, what if the question of fasting came up at another time and location and not at Matthew's feast? This is a distinct possibility (Lane, p. 112) although the smooth transition from the v. 32 to v. 33 appears to support the interpretation that this controversy was taking place at Matthew's feast. Though the chronological relationship may not be verifiable, the logical relationship is present (Hendriksen, p. 427). The context would seem to support the concurrence (happening at the same time) of these two events since the issue of fasting comes up at the same time that Jesus and his disciples are feasting.

There is also the ever-present problem of chronology. Matthew moves from the twin parables of the cloth and the wineskins to the healing of Jairus' daughter (9: 18)—the more likely order (Hendriksen, p. 429)—while Mark and Luke continue thematically with Sabbath issues. The transitional statements of Mk. 2: 23 and Lk. 6: 1 do not give us much help in establishing when the "grainfield" incident occurred and Mk. 3: 1 and Lk. 6: 6 are also vague chronologically. However, the thematic arrangement of Mark and Luke stand out clearly.

#### *a. Fasting or Feasting (?)*

Most likely *both* the Pharisees *and* the disciples of John are speaking to Jesus about his disciples and their lack of fasting. Matthew emphasizes the disciples of John and Luke emphasizes the Pharisees. The significance of the text lies in the question: Why don't Jesus' disciples practice fasting? All three Evangelists want us to focus on this question, not whose doing the asking. It was true that fasting was an issue for both the Pharisees and John's disciples. We may infer from Jesus' statement in Lk. 18: 12 that the Pharisees fasted twice a week but this was voluntary (Lane, p. 109 and footnote). The OT may have required one day of fasting—on the Day of Atonement—which may be inferred, but not decisively proven, from Lev. 23: 27, but at any rate this was not the regular practice of fasting which was the subject of this conversation. The Pharisees and disciples of John were not approaching Jesus here with a question of the Law, for fasting was not absolutely prescribed in the Law except for one day at most. The question pertained to their religious traditions.

Some commentators believe that Jesus uses the question about fasting as a platform for teaching the difference between the OT dispensation of promise and the New dispensation of fulfillment. The Messiah had been promised throughout the OT dispensation, but now the Messiah was present in the person of Jesus and the promise had been fulfilled. Therefore, the present was no time for regular fasting since the “bridegroom” is here. For his disciples to fast when he was present would be as inappropriate as fasting at a wedding ceremony when the food is lavishly spread on the tables but no one is enjoying the food! On the contrary, the present time, with the presence of Christ, was a time for feasting—the occasion for joy and celebration, not austerity and mourning with which fasting was often connected (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, J. P. Lewis, “Fast, Fasting”).

This celebration would soon pass, and the bridegroom would be taken away—a veiled reference to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion (Mk. 2: 20)—and then the disciples would have occasion to mourn and fast. It should be said that Jesus was not in v. 20 establishing fasting as the norm for the church age when he is not physically present. Christ is taken away from his disciples for only a *short* time between his death and resurrection and becomes eternally present with his church through the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. So the church age is likewise *not* the time for ritual mourning and fasting. At the same time neither does Jesus teach the absolute inappropriateness of fasting in the NT. It is used in conjunction with prayer and is often necessary (Matt. 17: 21) and advisable (Acts 13: 2-30). Jesus assumed that his followers would fast but instructed them not to make a show of it, but to do it privately (Matt. 6: 16-18). Nevertheless, it is not something we may impose on others as a rule.

It was clear from some of the accusations leveled at Jesus that he was not opposed to feasting and having a good time; he was called a “drunkard and a glutton” (Matt. 11: 19). But he didn’t concern himself with pleasing the Pharisees who would not be pleased with anything he did anyway (Matt. 11: 16-17). Nor, for that matter, had he attempted to please John and his disciples. Jesus had not patterned his life after the austerity of John the Baptist who had a different role to perform—to prepare a highway in the desert for the Lord. The manner of John’s life was symbolic of the spiritually desolate (“desert”) condition of the people of Israel living at this time—sheep who had no shepherd (Matt. 9: 36) taught by prophets who were wolves posing as sheep (Matt. 7: 15). It *should* have been a time of fasting, mourning and pleading with God to send the Messiah as the Savior of his people, a time of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All of this preparatory work John had done admirably as Jesus testifies (Matt. 11: 7-11), but he had not come merely to continue the work of John the Baptist in preaching repentance. Jesus does this as well (Mk. 1: 14-15), but he goes beyond John’s work by sovereignly establishing his kingdom in the hearts of men and preparing twelve apostles who would continue the work of his kingdom after he left. As far as his first coming was concerned, he had not come primarily “to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him” (Jn. 3: 17).

The mistake of some of John’s disciples is that they failed to see the gradualness of the kingdom of God between the first and second coming—a coming in *salvation* followed by a coming in *judgment*—an honest mistake made by all the OT prophets of whom John was the last. Climactic judgment would surely come at a *future* time, and those who did not believe were judged already (Jn. 3: 18). Some had also failed to reckon with the fact that John’s mission had ended shortly after Jesus’ mission had begun. For at least two decades there were still some

followers of John the Baptist as far away as Ephesus who had not yet received the gift of the Holy Spirit who was essential for the continuing mission of the kingdom (Acts 19: 1-6). By insisting on the immediate baptism of fire (the fire of judgment), they had missed the baptism of the Spirit which John had predicted. Were they not in one sense the same? (Acts 2: 3)

Had they listened more carefully to John (Jn. 1: 35-51), they would have done the same thing as Peter, Andrew, James, and John did by coming over to Jesus. However, after John failed to see the “fire” of Jesus’ baptism and the judgment of the wicked, particularly the judgment of the wicked who put him in prison (cf. Vos, p. 338), he wavered a bit in his certainty of Jesus’ identity (Matt. 11: 1-6). His uncertainty is understandable for it is possible that John had been in prison for a little over a year before his execution (Hendriksen, pp. 239, 585) and had lived in deplorable conditions which weakened the body and the human spirit. He had been taken into custody at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and the calling of Matthew (the time this episode takes place) was much later on in the Galilean ministry. At any rate, his questions about Jesus’ identity had not lessened Jesus’ appreciation for his ministry. Jesus’ answer to John’s disciples in this episode serves as an introduction to his assurance later in Matt. 11: 5 that he *is* who he claims to be, the long-awaited Messiah. And although it may be unwarranted to interpret the “bridegroom” of Jer. 33: 11 as a reference to the Messiah, the joyful restoration of Israel and the Davidic kingdom described in that chapter certainly foreshadow the joyous celebration Jesus is encouraging here, especially in light of the broader context of Jer. 31: 27-37 and the promise of the New Covenant.

### ***b. The Lesson of Cloth and Wineskins***

Jesus continues his distinction between anticipation (Old Covenant) and fulfillment (New Covenant) in Lk. 5: 36-39 and the other Synoptics. Some things just can’t be mixed. New unshrunk cloth should not be used to repair old cloth. Old cloth has already shrunk with repeated washing while the new cloth will shrink when it is first washed and with the next several washings. As it shrinks the new cloth will pull away from the old cloth and ruin it. This is the picture given to us in Matthew and Mark. Luke gives us additional information. The new cloth Jesus is talking about is actually taken from a new garment which means that the *new* garment is ruined for the sake of the old garment while not significantly improving the old garment. According to Matthew and Mark, the *old* garment is ruined while in Luke the old garment looks bad because the new cloth doesn’t match the old. Before sorting out the meaning, let’s look at the next illustration.

New wine should not be placed in old wineskins. The new wine will continue to ferment and expand and the old, inflexible wineskins will not be able to expand as the fermentation process continues. The new wine will therefore, burst the old wineskins causing both the loss of the new wine and the old wineskins. New wine must be placed in new skins if one wishes to keep his wine! (By the way, the Greek word used for wine is *oinos*, the same word used of wine in Jn. 2: 1-10 when Jesus made water into wine—120 gallons of it. This is the alcoholic stuff that ferments, not grape juice. It is also the same kind of wine spoken of in Matt. 11: 19, *oinopotes*—wine-drinker or glutton. It is also the wine, *oinos*, Paul told Timothy to drink for his stomach—1 Tim. 5: 23. There is *nothing* sinful about drinking wine, but there *is* something sinful about drinking too much of it—Eph. 5: 18, where, you guessed it, *oinos* is used again.)

Luke presents both of these illustrations as a parable (v. 36). In Matthew and Mark the new patch of cloth ruins the old cloth, while in Luke tearing the new cloth from a new garment ruins the new garment without helping the old. With the parable of the wineskins, both the new wine and the old wineskins are ruined. What are we to make of the differences in Matthew and Mark on the one hand and Luke on the other? In interpreting a parable, the separate details are important to fill out the story, but they should not cloud the central meaning of the parable. What is the central meaning of the parable, and can there be two interpretations based on the different emphases in the Synoptics?

The central meaning is the same in all three Synoptics even though the details are different. The question does not revolve around which cloth is ruined, the old or the new, or the ruining of the wine or the wineskins. The real issue is not about *preserving* something—cloth, wine or wineskins—but *forcing* old things to *accommodate* new things. Old things tend to dry up and lose their flexibility. Old cloth cannot *stretch* with the introduction of new cloth, and old wineskins cannot *stretch* with the introduction of new wine. On the other hand, the old wineskins can easily accommodate the old wine and the new wineskins are flexible enough for the new wine. The cultic system of the Old Covenant was well-suited for a covenant whose glory was passing away (2 Cor. 3), but it was too inflexible to hold the new wine of the New Covenant. The Pharisees, along with John's disciples, were attempting to fit Jesus and his teaching into an old paradigm (model)—*either* the OT administration of the covenant *or* their own particular interpretation of this covenant (after all, fasting was not required by law, but their traditions had made it regulatory). The twin parables of the cloth and the wineskins are related to the issue of fasting. John's disciples believed that to be good kingdom citizens, one must fast, but Jesus points out that our *response* to this new age should be one of "feasting" on the New Covenant blessings rather than "fasting".

Our response to the kingdom which *has* come, *is* coming, and *will* come cannot be regulated by simple 1, 2, 3 rules and regulations. If we attempt to force the new, expanding, wine of the gospel into the rigid, inflexible framework (paradigm) of the Old Covenant, we will lose the freedom and blessings which the gospel offers (Gal. 5: 1). Is this not the same principle Jesus taught the Samaritan woman when she brings up the question of the appropriate location for worship? "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father....But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship *in spirit and truth*'"—i.e. not *in a certain place* (Jn. 4: 20-21, 23-24).

Moses could never have made this statement and neither could the descendants of Aaron or David. In the Old Covenant there was only one legitimate place for worship and that was the temple in Jerusalem, the place where God had put his name (1 Kings 11: 36)—as simple as 1, 2, and 3. The temples constructed in Dan and Bethel under the administration of Jeroboam I were illegitimate and never recognized as proper places of worship by the prophets (1 Kings 12: 28-30; 2 Kings 10: 29; Amos 8: 14). Jesus, on the other hand, inaugurated a New Covenant with more freedom of religious expression (but not more freedom to sin) and more emphasis on the

**heart** as the necessary sanctuary for worship (“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven”—a continued emphasis throughout the Sermon on the Mount). This emphasis is foreshadowed in the reforms of Hezekiah who prayed that the Lord would pardon Israelites who were ceremonially unclean but whose hearts were sincere in their participation in the Passover (2 Chron. 30: 17-20). God honored his prayer since purity of heart was the typical goal to which ceremonial purity pointed—after all, God was more interested in a clean heart than clean hands.

That the Pharisees, and perhaps the disciples of John, were not ready to expand their understanding of the kingdom of God may well be the meaning of Jesus’ statement in Lk. 5: 39 (recorded only in Luke). People who are satisfied with the old ways of doing things are not inclined to accept new ways. As we say in the South where I grew up, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” The Pharisees were perfectly satisfied with the religious traditions they grew up with, and most of them, with few exceptions, were not about to change. Evidently some of John’s disciples had the same sentiment otherwise his baptism and teaching would not have survived for two decades and spread as far west as Ephesus (Acts 19—a passage which does not imply that these “disciples” were not true Christians. They were like Apollos who needed better training in the “way”—Acts 18: 24-26).

The resistance to new ways of doing things is still very much alive in the Christian church. “We have always done it this way” is an adage which every pastor and Christian has heard at one time or another. There is, of course, nothing wrong with Christian traditions as long as they do not get in the way of progress in the kingdom of God. But so often they do, and if they do, they need to be scrapped rather than given canonical status as if they were the word of God.

***Z. The Healing of Jairus’ Daughter and the Woman with a Hemorrhage—Matt. 9: 18-26; Mk. 5: 21-43; Lk. 8: 40-56***

The temporal connection in Matt. 9: 18 is much stronger than that of either the Mark passage or the Luke passage. The impression given in Mark is that Jesus gets off the boat and is immediately approached by Jairus. This seems very logical since in Mk. 5: 1 Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee to the country of the Gerasenes, and in v. 21 he seems to be returning. The same connection appears to be made in Lk. 8: 26 and 40—Jesus sails to the country of the Gerasenes and then returns. When we examine the Matthew passage, the natural reading is that the synagogue official, Jairus, comes up to him “while” he is still telling the twin parables of Matt. 9: 16-17 (note v. 18—“while he was saying *these things*”, a temporal connection which would make little sense without the context of vv. 16-17). We have already said that the chronological connection between the twin parables and the “grainfield” incident is a very **weak chronological** connection but a very **strong thematic** connection because of the subject matter of the Jesus’ authority in all religious matters, including the Sabbath (Mk. 2: 22-23; Lk. 5: 39-6: 1). Both Carson and Hendriksen agree that the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead and the healing of the hemorrhagic woman occur immediately after Jesus’ teaching about the garment and the wineskins. For a proposed chronology, see the outline.

Another difficulty arises when we examine the different Synoptic accounts. In Matthew, it appears that the official approaches Jesus **after** his daughter is already dead, but in Mark and

Luke the initial contact with Jesus occurs *before* the daughter dies. Apparently, Matthew shortens the account to include only a report of her death, but this does not remove the difficulty since what the official says in Matthew is different from Mark and Luke. It is clear from Matthew's text that he eliminates the report of the messengers from Jairus' house (Mk. 5: 35; Lk. 8: 49) that the girl had died and condenses the whole story into a few verses. It is conceivable that Jairus makes *two* impassioned pleas to Jesus, one *before* the girl dies and then another plea *after* he finds out that she has died (see explanation below). At any rate, meticulous reporting is not necessary to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Scriptures. Matthew's reporting of the incident does not change the fundamental meaning and significance of the event.

Jesus could have healed Jairus' daughter at a distance as he also did the centurion's slave (Matt. 8: 5-13). We can only speculate why he didn't, but the delay was the occasion for the death of Jairus' daughter whom Jesus would raise from the dead, the second time Jesus raised someone from the dead (cf. Lk. 7: 11-17 for the first time).

After Jesus had departed with Jairus to heal his daughter, a woman who had been afflicted with a hemorrhage for twelve years came up to him and very discretely touched the "fringe" (Lk.) of his cloak. She had no desire to draw attention to herself since any contact with her would render someone ceremonially unclean because of the flow of blood (Lev. 15: 25-33; Lane, pp. 191-192). Nothing is specified about her medical problem, but it could have been a gynecological condition (female condition) (Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke*, p. 916). Mark and Luke make a point of saying that Jesus came into physical contact with many people since the multitudes were "crowding and pressing upon [him]", but Jesus knew that this touch was different for power had gone out of him (Lk. 8: 46). If a person could become ceremonially *unclean* through contact with an unclean person or a dead person, the woman must have reasoned that she could become *clean* (including healing) through touching Jesus. (The suggestion of superstition by Lane and Liefeld is, in my opinion, unfounded—cf. Lane, p. 192; Liefeld, p. 916).

Whatever the case, there is not one hint of criticism of her action in the passage. Rather, in all three Synoptics Jesus makes the statement, "your faith has made you well". He does not imply that there is something inherently powerful and healing about faith. Faith by itself, and in the wrong object, has no such power (v. 46 explicitly says that the power of healing belonged to Christ, not the woman), but if that faith has its object in Christ, then it serves as a ready instrument by which Christ demonstrates his power. It was faith which led the woman to risk touching his garment. Had she *not* believed in his healing power and touched his garment, she would not have been made well—divine sovereignty and human responsibility go hand in hand in the Bible. Sometimes the Evangelists report healing without making any reference to the person's faith, as with the man with the withered hand (see passages above). Faith is, therefore, not absolutely essential for Jesus to heal although it is necessary for a person's sins to be forgiven. On the other hand, sometimes Jesus refuses to do many miracles because of the absence of faith (Mk. 6: 5—see comments above on this passage).

The hemorrhagic woman is one example of Jesus healing the unclean. The leper had been another example. Matthew (8: 28-34) and Mark (5: 1-20) place the healing of two demoniacs (only one is mentioned in Mark) out of chronological order as another example of Jesus' concern for unclean people. The demoniacs lived among the tombs where they came in contact with the

dead, making them ceremonially unclean. Now we come to the raising of Jairus' daughter from whom Jesus incurs ceremonial uncleanness (Lane, p. 190, footnote). In the story of Matthew's call, Jesus ate with tax-collectors and sinners, unclean people. Matthew and Mark are going out of their way to emphasize the fact that Jesus came to make the unclean, clean.

When the child died, messengers came from Jairus' house informing him of her death. In their minds, there was now no hope and therefore no need to bother Jesus any further. According to Matthew's account, Jairus never gave up hope but believed Jesus could also raise his daughter from the dead (v. 18). Had he heard the story of the widow's dead son in Nain? The scenario may have been as follows: Immediately after hearing of the girl's death, Jesus encouraged Jairus by saying, "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe" (Mk. 3: 36; Lk. 8: 5). Jairus then *did* what Jesus told him to do; he *believed* and said, "My daughter has just died [an acknowledgement of the reality of her death]; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

After Jesus arrived at the house, he encountered the loud weeping and wailing of professional mourners (Mk. and Lk.) mixed with the music of professional fluteplayers—not exactly "music to one's ears". Hiring professional mourners and musicians to mourn the dead was the ordinary practice for the Palestinian culture which explains how these people could "shift gears" so quickly from mourning to laughing when Jesus tells them that the girl is only sleeping. They were not stricken with grief at the death of a girl whom they didn't even know, but only making an honest(?) living. If we are offended at such a ludicrous practice, then so was Jesus even though he grew up in this culture. If we read the gospels carefully, we come face to face with the fact that Jesus is a cultural iconoclast (critic) challenging the legitimacy (lawfulness) of established cultural traditions. To put it mildly, he despised the practice of professional mourning and showed his disrespect for the time-honored custom by "putting them out" of the house (*ekballo*—the same word used in Matt. 21: 39). The episode makes one wonder what Jesus would think of other funeral traditions. In Africa hundreds of "mourners" may come to the funerals of people they scarcely even know, not really to mourn the dead, but to visit with friends they haven't seen for years and to eat the free food provided by the bereaved. They may contribute a little money for the food, but generally less than they eat. Meanwhile the bereaved have to suffer not only the death of the loved one, but the financial loss which may take years to overcome. American funerals can be similarly ludicrous (foolish) with the costs of burying the dead sky-rocketing into the thousands of dollars and "mourners" catching up—almost gleefully at times—on the latest news from friends they haven't seen in twenty years, friends whom they will not see again until the next funeral. This does not imply that there are no genuine mourners or sincere people at African and American funerals; there certainly are. It is also not a blanket condemnation for visiting old friends and laughter at funerals. However, I am suggesting that much of our cultural practice is quite possibly disgusting to our Lord. Just because this is the way we do it—"This is our culture"—does not mean that Jesus sanctions it or likes it.

By saying the child had not died, but gone to sleep, Jesus is not denying that the child was really dead, but only *denying that death was the ultimate fate of the child*. To the professional mourners, his statement may have been humorous since he was too late to heal her and would now "make a fool of himself" by attempting to raise her from the dead (Carson, p. 231). But Jesus had known the whole scenario (schedule of events) when he was first approached by Jairus, including the fact that he would allow the child to die and that he would raise her from the

dead. This was the teachable moment for this Jewish leader, a respected synagogue official, who would tell his Jewish friends all that had happened from the healing of the hemorrhagic woman to the raising of his dead daughter. He had been with Jesus during the whole saving episode and had been allowed with his wife into the room of his daughter along with Peter, James and John to witness the miracle (Mk. 5: 37, 40).

The formula for raising the girl from the dead is similar to that of Lazarus in Jn. 11: 43; he utters a command, “I say to you, arise!” The spirit of the dead girl then “returned” (Lk. 8: 55) indicating that when a person dies, there is a separation of the spirit from the body. This separation will be complete until the second coming of Christ when the spirits of believers will be reunited to their bodies (2 Cor. 5: 4-8; 1 Thes. 4: 16; Matt. 27: 50-53). In the present case, the spirit of the girl returns, and she will face death another day. Even the dead obey his command when Jesus asserts his divine authority. When Christ returns from heaven to receive his church, he will “descend with a shout” (1 Thes. 4: 16). We may wonder *what* he will shout. Will he utter another command, “I say to you, arise!”? Whatever the case, when Jesus shouts, things happen! Even when he shouted on the cross just before his death (Matt. 27: 50), graves were opened and the dead were raised! Jesus previously demonstrated that he had authority over demons and sickness; with the raising of Jairus’ daughter he asserts his authority over death itself which is the consequence of sin.

The significance of this miracle cannot be underestimated, for it was a foreshadowing of the resurrection of the dead. God created man to live, not to die, but man chose disobedience and death. The power of Jesus in raising the dead to life is the pledge or guarantee of our resurrection and the assurance that death is not final for believers. God’s plan to populate the earth with image-bearers who will obey him cannot be thwarted by sin and death. The raising of Jairus’ daughter, therefore, is also a metaphor (figure of speech containing an implied comparison). By raising her from the dead, Christ implies that those who are spiritually dead will be raised to spiritual life.

The disciples should have remembered this event, and several other resurrections besides, on the day Jesus was crucified and buried. It makes one wonder why they could not immediately believe the report of Jesus’ resurrection (Lk. 24: 11), but I doubt we would have been less skeptical had we been there.

The girl gets up and walks around (*peripateo*), but to defuse any idea that she is only an apparition (ghost-like appearance), Jesus commands that they give her something to eat (cf. Lk. 24: 36-43).

#### ***AA. The Healing of Two Blind Men and a Demon-possessed Man—Matt. 9: 27-34***

These two miracles are reported only by Matthew. Some commentators consider the second miracle to be a “doublet”, the same one reported in Matt. 12: 22-24. But the demon-possessed man in Matt. 12 is both dumb *and* blind while the one in Matt. 9 is only dumb, or mute. Carson appropriately asks why Matthew needed to repeat the same exorcism when Jesus performs so many other exorcisms (p. 234). The wording of v. 27—“And Jesus passed on from there”—leads us to believe that Jesus had just departed from Jairus’ house and was approached by two



blind men. Hendriksen believes that these two healing episodes take place on the same day as the healing of the hemorrhagic woman and Jairus' daughter (*Matthew*, p. 434).

By calling Jesus the "Son of David" the blind men were acknowledging him as the Messiah, proving that though physically blind, they could see spiritually better than most people (Carson, p. 233). The healing miracles of Jesus, though literal and historical, also have metaphorical intent (see above). By raising the dead to life, Jesus proves that the spiritually dead can become spiritually alive at his word. He heals the sick to prove that he can turn back the ravaging effects of the fall and that those who are sick in sin can be forgiven and made whole. By giving sight to the blind, he demonstrates that those who are spiritually blind and cannot "see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3: 3) can receive their sight and recognize who Christ is for the first time.

The healing of the dumb (mute) man who was demon-possessed takes place immediately after the healing of the blind men. Notice the wording of v. 32, "And as they were going *out*..." Jesus had healed the two blind men *inside* a house (v. 28) and now he is going *out* of the house. Little details like this help us to keep the chronology of the story in order.

Like the blind men, the dumb man who is also demon-possessed is a real, historical person, but also serves a metaphorical purpose. A dumb man cannot speak which means that he also cannot proclaim the praises of God. Man is made for the glory of God, and his mouth is designed to give praises to his Maker. Sin has made men dumb so that they cannot speak of the glory of God. A demon-possessed man is controlled by a demon, but men are created for the purpose of willingly submitting themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ, not for the purpose of being controlled by demons. Paul says in Col. 1: 13, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." A dominion is a realm of control, and sinners who have not been forgiven of their sins are still living under Satan's control. Demon-possession is a more profound and ostensible (showy) display of a life controlled and dominated by Satan. A life dominated by overt (open) sins like murder, sexual perversion, etc. also presents a *more visible* display of Satan's control which is *more hidden* in others. Fundamentally, however, the difference between demon-possession and sinful degradation on the one hand, and "respectable sinfulness" on the other hand, is only one of *degree* rather than *kind*. Satan controls each one to accomplish his sinful purposes in different ways "for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11: 14). People who may look very respectable and noble on the outside could be the most harmful opponents of the righteousness of God and his kingdom.

In the gospels, demon-possession is a common affliction reminding us that two opposing kingdoms—Christ's and Satan's—are in a conflict to the death. When Christ is crucified, it only appears that Satan has won, but what Satan does not know (for there is nothing in the Bible which indicates his omniscience) is that by instigating the crucifixion of Christ, he has actually "nailed the last nail into his own coffin". At the cross he is definitively defeated although he continues to fight the church (Rev. 12) until the last day when Christ returns to finish him off. Christ delivers his people from the dominion of sin and the dominion of Satan and delivers them over to his dominion which consists in righteousness. Until he returns believers are in a fight to the death "against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*" (Eph. 6: 11-12).

In v. 34, the Pharisees commit the unpardonable sin—ascribing to demons the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 12: 24-32). Satan and his demons are spirit-beings. The Holy Spirit is also a spirit-being. To call the work of the Holy Spirit the work of Satan is to equate the two. Matthew is alerting the reader to the escalating (increasing) tension between Christ and the Pharisees. His compassion for the multitudes (v. 36) is primarily founded upon the fact that those who claimed to be their shepherds, the scribes and Pharisees, offered no helpful leadership for the people, leaving them essentially without a shepherd. The word for “distressed” (NAS) can also be translated “harassed”. The purpose of a shepherd is to lead the sheep rather than harass them, but rather than leading them to salvation by grace, they led them into pits (Matt. 15: 14) by imposing man-made burdens which gave them no rest (Matt. 11: 24; 23: 4). Salvation by works is a burden which no man can bear (Acts 15: 10).

***BB. Jesus Rejected in Nazareth—Lk. 4: 16-30; Mk. 6: 1-6; Matt. 13: 53-58***

While Hendriksen believes the rejection in Nazareth in Lk. 4: 16-30 is the same incident, Guthrie believes that the incident in Matt. 13 and Mk. 6 is a **return** to Nazareth, a separate event. There seem to be too many similarities to consider it a separate rejection, and the two passages are “universally assumed” to be the same event (Carson, p. 335). Gundry believes that Luke “brought forward Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth as a prototype of the rejection of Jesus elsewhere. Thus Luke here arranged his material topically rather than chronologically” (Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 133, footnote).

The scrolls of the book of *Isaiah* were given to Jesus from which he read Isa. 61 pertaining to the Jubilee year, the year of release (cf. Lev. 25). During this year, which occurred every 50<sup>th</sup> year, all who had lost property due to poverty could return to their land. This prevented the native Israelite from being permanently enslaved and cut off from their ancestral lands and the means of production. Being cut off from the land had a spiritual and typological meaning, for the land was the land of promise—the covenant promise to Abraham—and to be cut off from one’s land meant being cut off from the covenant blessings. The sinful condition of mankind brings about scarcity and poverty, for before man sinned in the Garden of Eden, he had plenty.

When Jesus says that he is the fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee, the people are immediately skeptical for two reasons. First, his claim to be the fulfillment of the Jubilee was a claim to be the Messiah who would grant salvation to his people. Second, how could this humble son of a poor carpenter claim to fulfill the Jubilee blessings? Jesus had lived in poverty himself and had not been able for 30 years to overcome it, so how could he eliminate the poverty of others? (Geldenhuis, *Luke*, p. 168) The answers lay in the fact that Jesus was not primarily talking about physical poverty but spiritual poverty. He thus interpreted the Jubilee Year of Lev. 25 and Isa. 61 as being redemption from the slavery of sin and not from the slavery of poverty. The people of Israel, though many were physically poor and enslaved to others, physically blind and downtrodden, were primarily spiritually impoverished and spiritually blind (vv. 18-19). This is not to imply that Jesus was not concerned with physical poverty. He was, but he did not come primarily as a social reformer, as much as liberal theology would wish to cast him in that light. Spiritual poverty is more fundamental than physical poverty, and the conditions of the latter are caused by the former. The Israelites were looking for an earthly Messiah who would bring

materialistic blessings, but the root causes of their political and economic poverty needed to be dealt with first. Man's most serious poverty is the poverty of sin.

Jesus immediately perceives their skepticism and knows what they are thinking. His deeds in Capernaum had already come to their attention and they want him to "perform" for them as well, but he refuses. Instead, he continues to preach to their unbelief. They are like the Jews in Elijah's and Elisha's day who would not heed their message. The result was that both prophets, in essence, shook the dust off their feet in Jewish lands and took the "gospel" to unclean foreigners, the widow of Zarephath in Sidon and Naaman the leper in Syria (cf. 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 25). With this, those who were "speaking well of him" (v. 22) were now "filled with rage" and make the first attempt to kill him (v. 29). Having refused to use his miraculous powers to turn stones into bread, Jesus now uses them to prevent his premature death. He has much more work to do before he departs, and he must not die from falling off a cliff, but be crucified on a cross. His escape proves his words in John, "No one has taken it [his life] away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (Jn. 10: 18).

*Mark* indicates that he "**could do no** miracle there" but had healed only a few sick people and *Matthew* that "he **did not** do many miracles there because of their unbelief". *Mark* does not wish to imply that Jesus' power was dependent upon the subjective faith of his hearers, but only to emphasize that Jesus did not consider it the best of wisdom to perform many miracles amid so much unbelief which would only harden men's hearts and increase their guilt (William L. Lane, *Mark*, p. 204). For a different perspective, *Matthew* could be saying that his miracles were limited simply by the fact that few were coming to him to be healed (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 582). *Mark* positions the story just before the disciples are sent out, a commissioning in which the disciples are warned that they will experience the same rejection (Mk. 6: 11; Lane, p. 204). In this he is following a thematic approach rather than a chronological approach.

The passage should be a lesson to anyone attempting to bring the message of the gospel to sinners. If even Jesus, with his ability to heal the sick, experienced rejection and unbelief, should we be surprised if our message is also rejected by some? Success in the ministry is not dependent upon our skillfulness or persuasiveness in preaching. If it was, then Jesus would never have experienced rejection, for he was, hands down, the most skillful preacher who ever lived. Unless the Holy Spirit is pleased to grant regeneration, repentance, and faith, men will not come to Christ no matter what they hear.

***CC. The Second Great Discourse in Matthew: The Sending Out of the Twelve—Matt. 9: 35—11:1; Mk. 6: 6b-13; Lk. 9: 1-6***

There is no temporal connection between Matt. 9: 34 and 9: 35, but vv. 35-38 are thematically connected with v. 34 and with the commissioning of the disciples in Matt. 10: 1-5. Because of the hardness of Pharisees, the people had no one to care for their spiritual needs, but were like sheep without a shepherd. In Matt. 10 and Lk. 6, Jesus therefore provides the shepherding they need through the commissioning of his disciples. Doubtless, the sending out of the twelve is the foreshadowing of the great missionary expansion of the church which occurs later in Acts and through the next two thousand years (Acts 1: 8).

The student will notice that the **Second** Great Discourse in Matthew occurs chronologically *after* the **Third** Great Discourse—the parables of Matt. 13. This is confusing, but a harmonization of the gospels requires this order. Both Donald Guthrie (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Merrill C. Tenney, editor, p. 558) and Robert Gundry (*A Survey of the New Testament*, p. 210) follow this order.

Jesus' sense of urgency is expressed in vv. 37-38. The people are like crops ready to be harvested, but there is a shortage of workers committed to the task. Anyone familiar with farming understands the urgency in this metaphor. When crops need harvesting, they will not wait for a convenient time to be harvested; they need to be gathered immediately or be lost forever due to bad weather or over-ripening. The multitudes were now ripe for the message of the gospel—the good news in contrast to the burdensome message of their religious leaders who cared nothing for them. But those who were ready to hear the gospel now would not be alive to hear it for long. Some would die of natural causes, but literally thousands would perish by the sword, fire, and famine during the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies in 66-70 AD. Jesus' answer to this crisis was prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers who were committed to the task of making disciples (v. 38). They would not have the luxury of much time.

The same urgency exists today. Although there are many more laborers than in Jesus' day, there are also many more people in the harvest. More than a billion people have never heard the gospel even once, and billions more need further grounding and training in the Christian faith to guard against apostasy and the onslaught of Islam. All over the world the church needs Biblical and theological training for pastors who are shepherding multiple churches but who themselves have never had the opportunity for in-depth training in the Scriptures. Missiologists teach us that windows of opportunity open up in distinct periods of history to reach certain cultures and people groups. If these opportunities are lost due to delay, they may close and never open again. But even if those windows reopen, the people who could have been reached and taught a generation ago will no longer be alive to receive the benefit. The harvest will not wait for a convenient time. **Now** is the time to evangelize **this** generation; **now** is the time to teach **this** generation of pastors.

To highlight the call to evangelism given in vv. 37-38, Matthew reports the sending out of the twelve to cast out demons, to heal the sick, to preach that men should repent, and to proclaim the kingdom of God (Matt. 10: 1, 8; Mk. 6: 12; Lk. 9: 2). It should be noted that the authority by which they performed these miracles was the authority given to them by Christ (Matt. 10: 1; Mk. 6: 7; Lk. 9: 1). Before sending them out Jesus gives them detailed instructions known as the **Second Great Discourse** of Matthew's gospel (10: 5-42). From the concluding verse in 11: 1, we are warranted to believe that the whole discourse was delivered at one time although this is debatable.

### **1. The Priority of the Jews—vv. 5a-6**

From the time of Abraham until Christ, salvation had been “of the Jews” (Jn. 4: 22). God chose them not on the basis of merit or worldly power, but because of His sovereign will to love them (Deut. 7: 7-8). Since there is nothing about man that impresses God, selection is always on the

basis of grace, whether of individuals or nations. The only way for Gentiles to become members of the theocracy in the OT was through submission to the God of Israel and the Mosaic Law, and many had done so (Rahab, Uriah, Ruth, to name only a few). The priority of the Jews continued during Jesus' ministry, a priority which the Apostle Paul enunciated in Rom. 1: 16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek." Paul also practiced the "Jew first" principle on his missionary journeys, taking his message first to the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13: 14; 14: 1; Acts 18: 4, 19; 19: 8). When his message was rejected, he obeyed the instructions given in this second discourse to the twelve by shaking the dust off his feet (Matt. 10: 11-15) and taking the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13: 46). Only with reluctance (hesitancy) did the Jerusalem disciples (Peter, James, and John) accept the equality of the Gentiles as fellow heirs in Christ with the coming of the New Covenant and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10, 15; Gal. 2: 11-14), and even by 60-64 AD Paul still refers to this equality as a "mystery" which God had made known through the Apostles and NT prophets (Eph. 3: 1-6).

It is evident, however, that the *priority* of the Jews in the gospel era did not mean the complete *exclusion* of the Gentiles—as the healing of the Gadarene demoniacs, the centurion's servant, and the Syrophenician woman attest. And even after 1500 years of apostasy from the time of Moses until Christ, and after 2000 more years of apostasy since Christ, the evidence of Scripture is that God still loves the Jews for the sake of the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and that one day there will be a spiritual awakening among the Jewish nation which will result in repentance for apostasy and faith in their long-rejected Messiah (Rom. 11: 28-32). As their rejection by God has meant blessing for the Gentiles, so their reconciliation to God will present blessings far in abundance of their rejection (Rom. 11: 15; cf. John Murray, *Romans*, Vol. 2, pp. 80-84). The world has yet to see what will happen when millions of Jews are converted to Christ and begin zealously evangelizing the world.

## **2. The Message Preached—v. 7**

The message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" would have meant little or nothing to the average Gentile, but the phrase was loaded with meaning for the Jew who had visions of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom and deliverance from Roman oppression. A "this-worldly" view of the kingdom of heaven had dominated the Jewish understanding of the Messianic kingdom with few exceptions (like Simeon and Anna—Lk. 2: 25-38). John the Baptist, Jesus, and now His disciples would preach a different sort of kingdom which included complete salvation from the bondage of sin—the reign and rule of Jesus Christ in the hearts of men.

Other forms of "this-worldly" salvation have appeared on the scene of human history including "Liberation Theology", a theology which views the salvation of the Bible through the distorted lenses of Marxist ideology. But a salvation which is limited to the political freedom of the masses is no salvation. There are billions of "free" people in the world today who are still in bondage to the internal tyranny of sin. Besides, recent history has proved the myth of Marxist "freedom" (cf. Michael Novak, *Will it Liberate?*).

## **3. The Ministry of Mercy—v. 8**

Following their leader, the disciples would continue the ministry of mercy in healing the sick, cleansing lepers, casting out demons, and even raising the dead. The authority and power of Jesus is being given to His disciples to carry on His complete ministry after He has ascended to heaven. Such works of compassion were not an end in themselves, but an important means of drawing attention to the message of the gospel. Large crowds were always following Him because of His great gifts of healing and casting out demons, and such miracles would continue to highlight the message of repentance and faith delivered by the twelve. There is no historical evidence that such miracles are continuing today as a general rule. They seem to be limited to the Apostolic era although there have been reports of isolated healings all over the world by various missionaries. In spite of the limitation of such miraculous works, if perhaps the absence of such works, the ministry of mercy continues to be a very significant part of the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus looked out over the multitudes and felt compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, hungry, oppressed, and sick.

It can scarcely be denied that the work of Christian missions in the relief of the poor and through medical missions has opened doors to evangelism which could not have been opened otherwise. The message of salvation is both by word and deed. If we wish the unconverted to **hear** the message that “God so **loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”, then they must also **see** this love acted out through practical deeds of mercy (1 Jn. 3: 17-18). God made man body and soul, and Christ came to redeem both body and soul by dying on a cross. Any missionary endeavor which ignores the needs of the body while attempting only to “save the soul” is short-sighted and runs the risk of losing credibility. At the very least it is not the missionary method of the Lord Jesus.

At the same time, the complaint of some Christian missiologists and scholars is justified; namely, that sometimes missionaries have emphasized the ministry of mercy to the exclusion of the gospel message itself. They have given the people bread to eat, but the recipients quickly become hungry again for lack of the living bread (Jn. 6: 51). Wells are dug for clean drinking water—a very worthwhile endeavor—but the villagers are still thirsty for the water of life which a man may drink and never be thirsty again (Jn. 4: 13-14). The sick are, indeed healed, but only to get sick again and die without knowing the saving message of the gospel. If we wish to work for the Peace Corp. or some other secular humanitarian agency somewhere in the world and do good deeds, then this is commendable; but do not call it Christian missions. Christian missions must include not only the **deed** of the gospel but also the **word** of the gospel to be called “Christian missions”. Not every missionary must be **equally** responsible for the preaching and teaching of the gospel, but at least everyone on the missionary team must be a committed Christian willing, able, and ready “to give an account for the hope that is in [them]” (1 Pet. 3: 15). Our cup of cold water and slice of bread must be given in Jesus’ name (Matt. 25: 31-46; Matt. 10: 42), not in the name of humanity or in the name of another god.

Just recently the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) signed a formal agreement with Muslim Aid, Great Britain’s foremost Islamic charity. The two groups will now work in official cooperation with one another by sharing personnel and money for particular projects such as the tsunami relief efforts in Sri Lanka in 2004 during which the two agencies began working together informally (*World*, July 21, 2007, p. 25). While some well-meaning Christians would applaud such broad-minded efforts to help needy people, one cannot help wondering

“what Jesus would do”. Should our cup of cold water and loaf of bread be given *both* in the name of Jesus *and* in the name of Allah (Matt. 10: 42; 25: 31-46)? Exactly whose kingdom are we trying to promote?

#### **4. Supporting the Ministry—vv. 9-10**

“Freely you received; freely give” has a close connection both with v. 8 and with vv. 9-10. Jesus had given Himself “freely” to everyone, including them. His message and ministry was by *grace*, and grace must continue to be the driving motivation of His disciples, not material gain (1 Tim. 6: 5). The gospel was not for sale, and mercy ministries were not for profit, even though they could have been very profitable, indeed, considering that the afflicted and their families would have emptied their pockets in exchange for healing. Throughout His ministry Jesus had been a traveling missionary with no sure place to lay His head (Matt. 8: 20), and He was dependent upon the voluntary gifts of generous supporters, including women (Lk. 8: 1-3). Being rich in heaven with the Father, He had made Himself poor on earth that we through His poverty might become rich in faith (2 Cor. 8: 9). As He had offered His teaching, preaching, and healing free of charge, so the disciples were to do the same, dependent only upon voluntary gifts (v. 10; Mk. 7: 8-9; Lk. 9: 3). Not only should they not charge for their services, they should accept nothing resembling a fee for services rendered. Later on in Peter’s ministry, Simon had attempted to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit and, instead, received a severe tongue-lashing from the apostle (Acts 8: 18-23). If the disciples wanted to make money, they should go back to fishing and collecting taxes.

The same should be true today. The gospel is still not for sale. Sadly, it is often presented as an article for sale by charlatans (fake apostles) who “preach” and “heal”—or pretend to do so—for the sake of earthly gain (1 Tim. 6: 5), men and women who live in palaces, drive expensive cars, and wear clothing and jewelry fit for kings. While claiming to be ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven, they are actually usurpers to the kingdom of heaven, building their own personal kingdoms at the expense of others, sometimes simple-minded Christians.

In Africa many orphanages have been built, allegedly for the support of millions of children who have lost their parents to AIDS, war, and genocide. While there are many sincere people ministering in this way, others are taking advantage of wealthier Westerners who want to help but who do not have sufficient time to hold these ministries accountable for donated funds. Thinking their money is providing shelter for orphans, it is really building mansions for frauds.

They have their reward in full (Matt. 6: 2). Jesus said that we should recognize such false prophets by their fruit. “Observe how they live,” He says (Matt. 7: 7-18). Paul, on the other hand, the true twelfth apostle, could say to the Ephesian elders with a straight face (no pretense) and a clear conscience, “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes” (Acts 20: 33). When he could, Paul depended upon the voluntary gifts of other believers even as Jesus did to maximize the preaching of the gospel (Phil. 4: 15-16). At other times, he supported himself by making tents to prevent being a burden upon anyone and to set an example for others (Acts 18: 3; Acts 20: 34-35—“You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more

blessed to give than to receive.’”) With the same bold honesty he could write to the church in Thessalonica, “For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness” (1 Thes. 2: 5).

The instructions not to take gold or silver, or excess clothing, or even food (Lk. 9:3; Mk. 6: 8) was very practical in two ways. First, since the disciples must travel light, they should be unencumbered by heavy baggage, including the heaviest “baggage” of all, gold and silver. Second, and most importantly, they must be remain *psychologically* unencumbered in their ministry. With virtually nothing to lose financially through accidental loss or theft, they could go about their preaching and healing with total freedom, depending on God alone to supply their needs. The implications of these instructions are important for the consideration of modern missionaries. In the days of swift cargo ships and forty-foot shipping containers, missionaries are capable of bringing most of their earthly belongings with them to a foreign country; and, indeed, there can be practical considerations which make this a wise choice. The money spent on shipping containers can be easily offset by the savings on appliances—like refrigerators and washing machines—most of which cost *more* in developing countries than in Western countries where the abundant supply drives down the cost. But there are significant disadvantages to this practice. A large investment of money for shipping personal items can result in less flexibility and openness to change. Situations can change rapidly on the mission field, and needs can arise which require the missionary to move from place to place. If he buys what he needs overseas, he is less likely to be personally attached to it than if he had spent a great deal of money shipping personal items 9000 miles from his former home. Further, few if any of the purchased items will have sentimental attachment. From personal experience, even though Fran and I would have enjoyed some of the items “Made in USA”, we have little fear of losing any or all of our household items purchased in Africa. It’s only “stuff” which can be easily replaced. Books? Well, that’s another matter.

As for money, every missionary needs it; and it is a humbling and time-consuming adventure to itinerate all over the US requesting funds for our support. While raising funds has not been our “cup of tea”, it has been a peculiar blessing—one which we had not sought—to meet individual Christians and congregations all over the US who love Christ sufficiently enough, and who love people in foreign countries sufficiently enough, to give their money monthly and yearly to strange missionaries they don’t even know! Fran and I are still amazed at this phenomenon and continue to be humbled by it and thankful for it. As we labor, our supporting family labors side by side with us! The apostles whom Jesus sent out received their support from the faithful Jews they met in each location. This was as it should be, for those who receive spiritual things from others should be willing to share material things with them (1 Cor. 9: 11; Gal. 6: 6). In the case of expatriate missionaries going overseas, it appropriate that they receive support from their home base so that they may not be, as Paul said, a “burden” upon those those serve (2 Cor. 11: 9), especially in countries which are economically undeveloped. Further, by being financially independent of the national church, the expatriate missionary can be “free from all men” that he might be “a slave to all, that [he] might win the more” (1 Cor. 9: 18). There are times when the missionary must receive correction from the national church, but there are other times when he must speak out on the Biblical errors of the national church which are harmful to its existence.



Based upon the words of Christ, “for the worker is worthy of his support”, it is not ideal or even advisable for *indigenous (national) pastors and national missionaries* in Africa to depend on Western Christians for *their* support. National churches should be—and *must* be—willing to give toward the support of their own pastors and missionaries. This obligation is clearly laid out by the same apostle who chose, in certain contexts, not to burden the new “church plant” with his own material support, even though he could have done so (1 Cor. 9: 1-14, with an emphasis on v. 14, “So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”) It should be noted that Paul is directing this obligation to the *Corinthian church*, not the church in *Macedonia* (probably Philippi) which had graciously supplied his need on more than one occasion (2 Cor. 11: 9; cf. Phil. 4: 15). It is the solemn responsibility of believers to support their own local pastors and missionaries and not force them to rely on the Western church. Remember that Paul is not speaking to a wealthy congregation in Corinth, one whose members he described as “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” (1 Cor. 1: 26). The real limitation was not *money*, but the *will* to give it—a limitation which is true in every culture, however affluent.

It is a well-known fact that many African pastors who have had the privilege of studying in the West are expected upon their return—if they return, and **7 out of 10 do not**—to be independent of indigenous support from their own church and to be dependent upon Western support. All the while, the African church—at least the one I am familiar with—is ready and able to raise 100 million Ugandan shillings (\$60,000 US) to spend on the installation of a diocesan bishop. The problem is not lack of money, but lack of will and lack of priorities. Everyone, and every church, must learn to live within their means, and if there is not enough money *both* for the frills (unnecessary expenses) of ecclesiastical institutionalism (e.g. the installation of bishops and ordination parties) *and* the substantial monthly support of national pastors and lay readers, then *one* of these things must go. But commonly it is not the frills which are cut back and cast aside as superfluous (unnecessary) niceties (luxuries), but the *Biblical obligations* to support pastors and lay readers who very often are not paid on time, or not at all (according to first-hand reports). But God says, “for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2: 30b). It is impossible to honor God while ignoring His word about the support of pastors, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5: 17). Thus, all that has been said thus far in defense of pastors and lay readers *assumes* that they work hard and earn their keep. If they are lazy, they don’t need to be pastors or lay readers, but should be disciplined by the church (2 Thes. 3: 10).

Writing over fifty years ago, Roland Allen warned the Church of England that many of its cherished missiological traditions needed serious scrutiny and overhauling (radical change). It appears that his words have never been taken seriously enough.

...St Paul not only did not receive financial aid *from* his converts, he did not *take* financial support *to* his converts. That it could be so never seems to have suggested itself to his mind. Every province, every church, was financially independent. The Galatians are exhorted to support their teachers [Gal. 6: 6]. Every church is instructed to maintain its poor. There is not a hint from beginning to end of the Acts and Epistles of any one church depending upon another, with the single exception of the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. That collection had in the mind of St Paul a very serious and important place, but it had nothing to do with church finance in the ordinary sense. Its importance lay in its demonstration of the unity of the church, and in the influence which such a proof of brotherly charity might have in maintaining the unity of the church. But it

had no more to do with church finance in the ordinary sense of the word than a collection made in India for Christians suffering from famine in China would have to do with ordinary Indian Church finance. That one church should depend upon another *for the supply of its ordinary expenses as a church*, or even for a part of them, would have seemed incredible in the Four Provinces (*Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, pp. 151-152; emphasis mine; the entire book is a must-read).

### 5. Judgment upon Those Who Reject the Gospel—vv. 11-15

There is both an individual and corporate judgment in these verses. If the individual *household* rejected the gospel, the apostles were supposed to shake the dust off their feet after leaving that house. If the *whole city* rejected the gospel, they were supposed to shake the dust off their feet as they left the city. When the judgment comes at the end of the world, both the individual and the city will be judged. Sodom and Gomorrah—which never received the gospel—will be judged more leniently than that city. Likewise, individuals who have never heard the gospel will be judged less severely than those who have (Lk. 12: 42-48). The act of shaking the dust off one's feet was a typical Jewish custom after traveling through Gentile territory. Not wishing to defile holy objects with Gentile dust, they would shake off the unholy dust before coming back into Jewish territory, the "Holy Land". Jesus uses this familiar custom ironically (or with sarcasm). If any *Jewish* home or city rejects the message of His disciples, it will be treated as a *pagan* home or city (Hendriksen, p. 460). In other words, it was not the distinction between Gentile and Jewish which made a particular location either holy or defiled, but the presence or absence of *belief*.

It should also be noted that the worthiness of the home or city (vv. 11, 13) does not imply *inherent* worthiness as if there was something good or worthy of merit in the person or city which *deserved* the mercy of God. Worthiness has reference only to the willingness of the person or city to *receive* the apostles into their hospitality and to *submit* to their message (v. 14; Chamblin, p. 76).

If we take Jesus' words seriously (and much of our missionary strategy doesn't) then missionary effort should only continue in a given location or a given culture if there is some receptivity to the gospel—how much receptivity is the difficult part of the question. If there is insufficient response, then the time and effort given to evangelism in a resistant culture (or to a resistant person; cf. Matt. 7: 6 and commentary above) *could be spent somewhere else*. Perhaps the house just down the street or the city just down the road a few miles, or the country or culture five thousand miles away, will gladly listen to the message of the gospel *if only they could hear it*. There is just so much time, money, and people to allocate to the missionary effort in any given generation. If we are allocating our resources in Location A, B, C, and D, etc., then we may not have enough resources to place missionaries in Location K; therefore, we need to be judicious (wise) in our assessment of the receptivity of the gospel in a given place. Recognizing that each person is precious in God's sight, we are often hesitant to make these difficult decisions for fear that we are leaving someone behind who could have been saved had we persisted. But we also need to ask the question: Who is not hearing the gospel *elsewhere* because we are hesitant to leave? There are also another theological consideration which transcends the practical issues.

Roland Allen, former missionary and author of *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*,

challenges us to reexamine the wisdom of undaunted (undismayed) evangelism in resistant cultures where there is little fruit from our labors.

The possibility of rejection was ever present. St Paul did not establish himself in a place and go on preaching for years to men who refused to act on his teaching. When once he had brought them to a point where decision was clear, he demanded that they should make their choice. *If they rejected him, he rejected them.* The ‘shaking of the lap’, the ‘shaking of the dust from the feet’, the refusal to teach those who refused to act on the teaching, was a vital part of Pauline presentation of the Gospel. He did not simply ‘go away’, he openly rejected those who showed themselves unworthy of his teaching. It was part of the Gospel that men might ‘judge themselves unworthy of eternal life’ [Acts 13: 45-46; 18: 5-6; 28: 23-28—my citation]. It is a question which needs serious consideration *whether the Gospel can be truly presented if this element is left out.* Can there be a true teaching which does not involve the refusal to go on teaching? The teaching of the Gospel is not a mere intellectual instruction: it is a moral process, and involves a moral response. If then we go on teaching where that moral response is refused, we cease to preach the Gospel; we make the teaching a mere education of the intellect. This is why so much of our teaching of the Gospel in schools...is ineffective. We teach, but we do not teach morally. We do not demand a moral response. We are afraid to take the responsibility which morally rests upon us of shaking the lap. We should refuse to give intellectual teaching to a pupil if he refused to give us his attention: we might equally refuse to give religious teaching to a pupil who refused to give us religious attention.

It is a question which needs serious consideration whether we ought to plant ourselves in a town or village and continue for years teaching people who deliberately refuse to give us a moral hearing. We persevere in this *in spite of the fact that near at hand are men who are eager and willing to give us that moral hearing.* We are afraid to take the responsibility which morally rests upon us of shaking the lap. We have forgotten that the *same Lord who gave us the command to go, gave us the command to shake off the dust from our feet.* We have lost the art of shaking the lap, we have learnt the art of steeling our hearts and shutting up the bowels of our compassion against those who cry to us for the Gospel (pp. 75-76; emphasis mine).

Again, we must exercise caution and discernment. Determining *if* and *when* a culture is resistant and unresponsive is not an easy thing to do—some would argue an impossible thing to do. Still others would argue that the question of receptivity is no longer relevant in our age—that we should preach in any culture or place whether they are receptive or not. Yet, this ignores the practical fact that we *don’t* have unlimited resources, and that, for a number of reasons—the main reasons being our sinful apathy toward the kingdom of God and our lust for earthly treasures and a comfortable and convenient life. However, Jesus is never surprised by the sinfulness of His church. He recognized its limitations when He lived on earth (Matt. 9: 37-38), and He knew that they would continue until this very day. But limited resources are not the issue, as Allen has made clear. Jesus did not give us these instructions because the church would never have enough money and missionaries (for whatever reason). *The real issue is His high regard for His own gospel.* We must take seriously the command of Jesus in Matt. 7: 6 not to throw what is holy to dogs and our pearls before swine. On what hermeneutical or theological foundation do we limit this command to the apostolic era? By telling the *apostles* that they must make judgments about who are dogs and swine, we must thereby assume that Christ has given the same command to the *church* in all ages. We must also believe that the command to make such judgments *presupposes* (assumes) the *ability* of the church to do so, the same argument which can be made for the necessity of excommunication of unrepentant members who are judged as unbelievers. Jesus has given His church the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever the church binds on earth is bound in heaven (Matt. 16: 19). This promise does *not* grant the church infallibility to make final judgments, but to the extent that the church is following the teaching of Christ, it is *capable* of making functional judgments on earth.

We need not abandon resistant cultures and individuals *forever*. Perhaps at a later date God will have prepared the soil through severe providences to receive the seed of the gospel (e.g. famine, war, earthquakes, economic depressions—in the case of cultures—and sickness, death of loved ones, loss of job, in the case of individuals). Until then, we can take the message to places where the soil has already been prepared (cf. Hendriksen, p. 360, who expresses the same viewpoint).

## **6. Facing Persecution—vv. 16-33**

### **a. Persecution by the Jews (vv. 16-17)**

Other than the crucifixion of Christ, Jewish persecution did not break out until the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7, 8: 1). For a long time following His ascension, Jewish Christians continued worshipping on the Sabbath in the synagogues with other non-Christian Jews. When it became clear that they had affinity (close relationship) with the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, persecution began to break out. Verse 17 gives a brief description of this persecution in which Christians would be haled (brought forcefully) before the Jewish courts and synagogue officials and flogged with whips, a common form of Jewish punishment and one which the Lord Jesus endured before His crucifixion (Matt. 27: 26). Saul the Pharisee, before his conversion, took great delight in his attempt to destroy the newly born church which, in his mind, threatened to drag the Jewish nation into apostasy and under the continued curses of the Law (Deut. 28-29). Was it not true that Israel's idolatry with other gods had brought the whole nation into ruin? There was only one God (Deut. 6: 4), and this Jesus also claimed to be God, thus making *two* Gods, not *one*—a blasphemous polytheism. If His disciples insisted that He rose again from the dead and was still alive, something must be done to check the spread of this damnable heresy lest the whole nation suffer another apostasy and exile. Consequently, when Stephen was stoned for blasphemy, Saul took this as an opportune time to escalate (increase) the persecution of Christians and to stamp out the Christian faith once and for all (Acts 8: 3; 9: 1-2; Acts 26: 9-11, particularly v. 11—"I punished them often *in the synagogues*.").

Ironically, after Saul was converted on his way to imprison more Christians in Damascus, he began to feel the scourge of his own whip. Now, Paul the Christian was the one on the run from persecutors just like himself. Having aroused the hatred of the Jews in Damascus, he had to flee for his life by being lowered in a basket through an opening in the city wall (Acts 9: 19-25). There must have been at least a faint smile across Paul's face as he was being lowered from the wall as he pondered over the ironic twist of providence which left him as helpless as the Christians he once persecuted. His escape from his fellow Jews in Damascus highlights one important consideration in Jesus' instructions, "...therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves".

Jesus sends out His disciples as "sheep in the midst of wolves", but though they should be as *innocent* as doves—and, by implication, as *harmless* as sheep—they should not be as *stupid* as sheep. While maintaining the utmost integrity (Acts 24: 16), they should exercise the same "savvy" (shrewdness) as unbelievers who are able both to *survive* and *thrive* in this difficult world (cf. Lk. 16: 8). The disciples would be protected by the power of God until their work on earth was done, but this did not give them the liberty of being thoughtless and naive (gullible or unrealistic) Nor did this give them the liberty of being martyrs at their own discretion (by their

own decision). It is traditionally believed that most of the apostles eventually died a martyr's death. Peter was believed to be crucified upside down, and James the brother of John was the first to be executed (Acts 12: 1-2). However, they submitted to martyrdom only when the need arose, not because they sought it as a meritorious badge (something to earn). They needed to use their heads as well as their hearts in order to live as long as possible to fulfill their ministry. When they were persecuted in one city, they should not remain there like dumb sheep to be slaughtered senselessly and prematurely. Rather, they should "take to their heels" and run for their lives to the next city (v. 23a). In other words, they should survive as long as they could to preach another day. God's main interest is in proclaiming His word, not in making heroes.

This rule continues to be the standing order for persecuted Christians in our day, and although its application is often ignored, it is nevertheless demonstrated for us in the Apostle Paul. He could so easily have submitted himself to martyrdom in Damascus a few days after his conversion, and saved himself a life of hardship. We are not told why he didn't, but possibly he was informed of a better way by the saints in Damascus who assured him that running from the Jewish authorities was not a denial of his faith or cowardice. We should be grateful that he ran for we would not have the treasures of one-third of the NT and the pearls of NT theology had he died in Damascus. There did come a time when Paul was advised to run again, but refused (Acts 21: 12-13). On this occasion, he had decided ahead of time that it was time for him to deliver his message to his countrymen in Jerusalem. So then, there is a time to "cut and run" and there is a time to stare fearlessly at death and not blink. Jesus' words in 10: 16-42 encompassed **both** scenarios (situations). If you can cut and run, do so, surviving persecution to preach the gospel another day. But if you can't run without denying your Lord, you must face death, remembering that you are very valuable to the Lord. The very hairs of your head are numbered, and not one of them will **eternally** perish (10: 29-30; Lk. 21: 16-18).

We should not limit the predictions of v. 17 to Christians standing before **Jewish** courts. Previous to the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's, and continuing through the Reformation and afterwards, Christians have been hauled before **ecclesiastical** (church) courts on charges of heresy. John Wycliffe was executed for his evangelical beliefs and the audacity (boldness) of translating the Scriptures into the common tongue. Jon Huss was burned at the stake for his doctrinal writings on justification by faith, and Martin Luther would have suffered the same fate 100 years later had it not been for his association with other powerful rulers sympathetic to his beliefs. One of the fiercest persecutors of the **church**—defined as the organic body of Christ, or true believers—has been the **Church**—defined as the institutional organization with authority vested in its government. The foreshadowing of this ecclesiastical persecution began with the persecution of the prophets in the OT theocracy who challenged the corrupt **priests**—the religious establishment—as well as the corrupt **kings** of Israel and Judah. We find the same phenomenon predicted in Matt. 10: 17-18 and brought to fulfillment throughout the history of the church. Christianity continues to attract the hatred of every false religion—Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.—which more often than not has the alliance of the state (the governing authorities) to carry out its persecution of the church, the body of Christ. Once again, we are not surprised at such alliances, for it was apostate Judaism which allied itself with the kings of Israel against the prophets and later with Rome in the crucifixion of Christ.

#### ***b. Persecution by political rulers (v. 18)***

Jesus' instructions, therefore, include what to do when the apostles—and the future church—are persecuted by the governing authorities. Thus, it is evident that Jesus is looking beyond the temporary restrictions of vv. 5-6 (only to "lost sheep of the house of Israel") toward the entire church age in which the whole world will be evangelized (Acts 1: 8—Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, remotest part of the earth). It was not very long after this when James, the brother of John, was "brought before governors and kings for [Jesus'] sake" (v. 18). Herod Antipas was not technically a king, but the tetrarch (provincial governor) of Galilee under Roman rule, but he was often called a king since he was the son of Herod the Great (Acts 12: 1; cf. p. 4). He has James beheaded, and Peter would have suffered the same fate apart from a miraculous deliverance (Acts 12: 1-17). Therefore, in the wise and inscrutable providence of God, Peter was spared while James was beheaded. We cannot discern why God did not spare **both** Peter **and** James, but according to His wise counsel (Eph. 1: 11b), James served His purpose through martyrdom while Peter was spared to serve the church for several more years. Both apostles fulfilled **their** purpose by fulfilling **God's** purpose. (The reader will also notice from the story that Peter did not argue with the angel about leaving the prison! Previously he had risked his life by boldly declaring the superiority of the Lord's authority over that of the Sanhedrin [Acts 4: 1-22], but given the opportunity to escape the wrath of Herod Antipas, he gladly took it!)

We learn later on in *Acts* that Paul appeared before Council of the Jews (including the high priest; Acts 23), before Felix who was governor of Judea (Acts 24), before Festus who was appointed governor of Judea after Felix (Acts 25), before "King" Agrippa, tetrarch of the Roman province northeast of Judea, and finally before Caesar in Rome (or at least a representative of Caesar; Acts 26: 32, 23: 11). All of this was a fulfillment of Jesus' predictions in Matt. 10: 18, which have been repeated thousands of times in the history of the world.

The fiercest persecutor of the church is now the **state**, human government attempting to build a tower which reaches into the heavens (Gen. 11) and armed with the power of the sword to crush the church. The Anti-Christ of *Revelation* is some manifestation of human government anti-typical (as a type) of the king of Babylon who wished to make himself as God (Isa. 14: 14). We have been warned in advance what we should expect both here in *Matthew*, in *Revelation*, and throughout the OT Scriptures. We are also assured that all of hell's alliances together will not be able to prevail against the church (Matt. 16: 18).

### ***c. The Christian's response to persecution***

Despite the power and ferocity of worldly kings, Christians are told not to be intimidated (v. 19). Though they are cross-examined by lawyers skilled in the art of logic and rhetoric (speech), they do not have to prepare any speeches, but the Holy Spirit will give them the words to speak when their defense comes (vv. 19-20). We see this literally fulfilled when Peter and John defended their faith before the Council in Acts 4 with the result that the Council was dumbfounded at their words: "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus" (Acts 4: 13). This is not an excuse for lazy pastors to forego the preparation of sermons, but simply a promise that the Holy Spirit will more than compensate for our inherent weaknesses in defending our faith.

*(1) Our relationship to Christ*

Jesus was persecuted and slandered during His ministry, essentially called the devil himself not once but probably many times (v. 25; cf. 9: 34; 12: 24; Carson, p. 254), so it is not surprising that His disciples will also be persecuted and slandered *because of their relationship to Christ* (vv. 24-25). For this reason, *they are not to fear* (the first of *three* reasons given here; Carson, p. 254; Hendriksen, p. 472). The form of the verb (“fear”) used is the aorist subjunctive used as an imperative—a command (Spiros Zodhiates, *Key Word Study Bible*, p. 1701). Thus, Jesus is *forbidding* us to fear—“Therefore do not fear them....” If people hate us or dislike us because of our relationship to Christ, this hatred should not cause us to be afraid of them. Rather, we should be thankful that we are given the privilege of sharing the reproach of Christ. It is a privilege especially because Christ is the perfect and undefiled Son of God, but we are often sinful; thus, when we are persecuted for righteousness, it is a special privilege for imperfect sinners such as ourselves who often deserve the ill-treatment we receive.

Peter distinguishes between the suffering of Christians for righteousness and their suffering which is the consequence of sin. “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God” (1 Pet. 1:20). “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong” (1 Pet. 3: 17). Peter was realistic, and he understood human nature well enough to know that Christians often suffer for doing what is wrong. There is no credit in that, but when we suffer for doing what is right, our suffering finds favor with God.

Our bearing up to the persecution of unbelievers for the sake of Christ is not a sign of *our* destruction; rather, it is a sign of *their* destruction if they remain unrepentant, for Paul says, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of *destruction for them*, but of *salvation for you*, and that *too*, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1: 27-29). After Christ suffered, He rose again from the dead, and He will return in glory to punish the wicked for their persecution of Him and His people. For this reason we should not seek our own revenge against those who persecute us, but should pray for them—particularly to pray that our response to their persecution would win their hearts to Christ, a very great responsibility (Matt. 5: 44).

If then our suffering for righteousness is the *gift* of God (Phil. 1: 29) which also finds *favor* with God (1 Pet. 1: 20), then who is there to fear? “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or *persecution*, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Rom. 8: 35). The fear of God drives out the fear of man and is mutually exclusive of the fear of man—we cannot fear God *and* man at one and the same time. “The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted” (Prov. 29: 25).

The **purpose** of being fearless is given in vv. 26b-27. If the apostles were afraid of men, they would not be able to **publicly proclaim** the message Christ is giving to them to preach, including things which they did not yet understand—things pertaining to His resurrection, His ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, etc. (Carson, p. 254; Hendriksen, pp. 469-470). These are some of the things which are now “covered” which they will be able to proclaim later from the “housetops”. (Roofs in Palestine were flat and easily accessible by outside steps leading up to them. They made a convenient platform for public speaking—Carson, p. 254). The ministry of the disciples will, in some sense, become more public than that of Christ. After His crucifixion and ascension, there were scarcely 120 committed disciples in the upper room discussing the appointment of Judas’ replacement (Acts 1: 12-26). Furthermore, Christ had appeared to 500 people after His resurrection (1 Cor. 15: 6), some of whom were probably present in the upper room just before Pentecost. Considering the tens of thousands who heard Christ preach and witnessed His miracles, this was not a very auspicious (favorable) beginning for a kingdom which would rule the world. But Jesus knew what He was doing; by investing precious time in the lives of eleven disciples, who would in turn train other disciples, He would lay the foundation of a kingdom which would not be shaken, one which would one day cover the earth.

## (2) *The security of believers*

The second reason not to fear is that men can only kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul (v. 28). This may have been little comfort to the disciples who did not yet understand that Jesus would have to die soon, much less that He would rise again from the dead. He knew that there was much in his present teaching which was going “over their heads” (not being understood). For this reason He said to them later, “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (Jn. 16: 12-13). Jesus knew that what He taught them now, though not fully understood, would be understood later by the operations of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, they would be witnesses of His resurrection which would give them the confidence that they, too, would be resurrected from the dead should they be killed. The resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit made all the difference in their future ministry.

Contrary to some teaching that the Christian should no longer fear God since He is His Father, Jesus said that His disciples **should** fear Him (God) who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 11 where the same root word is used). By “destroy”, Jesus did not mean the “annihilation” of the body and soul in hell as if the person would no longer exist after judgment (Hendriksen, pp. 471-472). This is the false doctrine of **annihilationism** or **conditional immortality** which has been taught by some renowned evangelical scholars including John Stott and Philip E. Hughes (Cf. Alister McGrath, *The J.I. Packer Collection*, “*The Problem of Eternal Punishment*, p. 223). Jesus was speaking of the everlasting punishment of the soul **and** the body in hell. As man was created as body and soul, he also has everlasting existence as body and soul. This bodily and spiritual existence will either be in heaven or hell, for there is a resurrection of the body for **both** the believer **and** the unbeliever (Jn. 5: 28-29). Since the resurrection of the body is reserved for the second coming of Christ, only the **souls** of unbelievers are now being punished, but their **bodies** are reserved for the punishment of the final judgment. (The rich man in Lk. 16: 24 experienced the physical “agony” of “flames” in hell, and while this is a parable, I



do not believe Jesus would mislead His audience about the nature of hell's misery.) Believers, by contrast, experience spiritual bliss (joy) in heaven upon the death of the body (Lk. 23: 43), and at the second coming will be reunited with their bodies to experience everlasting joy both spiritually *and* physically.

Our sojourn on earth is but a short time compared to timeless eternity. Our greatest fear, then, should be directed toward the possibility of *denying our Lord* who has the power to destroy both body and soul. This warning should not be interpreted as the possibility of a *true believer* falling away from the faith and ultimately denying Christ. Peter most assuredly stands as an example of a disciple who denied Christ before men, but who wept bitter tears of repentance and who was forgiven and restored as the preeminent apostle (until Paul). Christ, moreover, was praying for Peter throughout this whole ordeal of temptation that his faith would not *ultimately* fail, the same intercession which every Christian can count on in the hour of his temptation (Lk. 22: 32). But remember that on this occasion (Matt. 10), Jesus was speaking to all twelve of His disciples, including *Judas Iscariot*. Judas stands as an example of one who was very close to the kingdom of God, who in every sense “tasted” of the word of God and the Holy Spirit, but without true repentance (Heb. 6: 4-6). As such, he is representative of anyone who fits in the same category of would-be disciples who are so close to the kingdom but yet so far away. Like all the warnings of Scripture (e.g. Heb. 6: 4-6; 1 Cor. 10; to name but few) this one (10: 28) is intended as a *means of grace* to the true followers of Jesus Christ. We should *never* become lazy and complacent in our faith, but must press on and *run* the race that is set before us (Heb. 6: 11-12; 12: 1; 1Cor. 9: 24-27). “You will be hated by all on account of my name,” Jesus said earlier, “but it is the one *who has endured to the end who will be saved*” (10: 22).

### (3) *Our value to the Father*

The third reason Jesus tells the disciples, and us, not to fear is because of our value to the Father. The argument is from the lesser to the greater (*a fortiori*). Sparrows were very cheap—bought with the smallest of copper coins (*assarion*, one-sixteenth of a *denarius* which was a day's wage, thus, one-sixteenth of a day's wage)—and were eaten primarily by the poor (Carson, p. 255) who could not afford goats or even chickens for meat. Not one of these little, insignificant sparrows could be killed “apart from” the express permission of “your Father”. *If* the God who made the heavens and the earth is aware of sparrows and will not let them perish apart from His will, *then* God is certainly concerned for His people—made in His image and redeemed by the blood of Christ—even for every strand of hair on their heads (v. 30), not one of which will eternally perish, even if the body is killed (Lk. 21: 16-18).

The confession of v. 32 and the denial of v. 33 are continual or *persistent*, as the example of Peter demonstrates. Peter denied Christ once, but his denial was not a pattern of denial. Further, if the denial of v. 33 implies a single denial, then the confession of v. 32 must likewise imply a single confession. (In spite of the fact that different verb tenses are used.) But Christ is not speaking either of a single confession or a single denial. If this were true, Christians could confess Christ once and then live as they pleased; yet, all of us would be denied before the Father since all of us have at some point in time denied Christ by something we have done. This would be an inherent contradiction in the passage. The picture presented is that of a courtroom scene. If someone continually (“to the end”—v. 22) confesses Christ before men—before the court of

men's judgment—**both in word and deed** (in profession and action) Christ will confess him before the Father. At the risk of redundancy (saying the same thing again and again), let it be said that this confession is not a work of merit which Christ will recognize and award with eternal life. Confession of Christ is a response to His grace and to the light of the gospel revealed to us through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. "In His light we see light" (Ps. 36: 9). Likewise, the denial of Christ is **persistent** denial of His claims as Savior **and** Lord in both word and deed resulting in his conviction before the court of God's judgment—a court before which only the advocacy of Christ provides acquittal ("I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.")

### 7. *Persecution from family*—vv. 34-39

Confessing Jesus before men or denying Him before men leads naturally into the difficulties which Christians often face with members of their own families. If we are bold in our witness before strangers or casual acquaintances whom we know very little, we are often timid and intimidated before members of our own families. In Western culture where the family has become fragmented by **mobility** (the ability to move around freely from place to place and from job to job) and **individualism** (the selfish pursuit of one's personal goals at the expense of all social relationships), the desire to please one's family and to stay closely connected to it have diminished considerably. But in developing countries like Africa, the desire to maintain close relationships with kinships is still very much a part of culture—and a very desirable characteristic of Africans. What a person's extended family members think of him is very important to him which can be a help or hindrance to his relationship to Christ.

Providentially, after over 100 years of evangelism and missions in Uganda—and most of Africa—the Christian church has grown throughout the continent, making the family connection a much easier obstacle to overcome. In fact, family relationships make it easier for a person to become a Christian since so many family members are already Christians, or at least, professing Christians. This was not the case when missionaries first came to Africa, and often the tribal religions of one's ancestors stood as a formidable hindrance to a person receiving Christ as Lord and Savior. The grisly (gruesome) stories of the five young Ugandan martyrs who were roasted to death over a hot fire bear testimony to this fact. Happily, those days are now gone in most parts of Africa. By way of contrast, think how difficult it is to become a Christian in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and other Muslim countries in which a person would be, at the very least, disinherited and disowned from his family for becoming a Christian. At the very worst, he would face sure and sudden execution without a trial, sometimes directly at the hands of his family. All over the world in places like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and many other countries, Christians are in constant danger from others, often the members of their own households who have come to hate them because of their Christian faith.

This is the situation envisioned by Christ in vv. 34-39. He has already introduced the subject in v. 22 and assured them that they would be "hated by **all** on account of My name", even members of their own families. Family connections were also very important in ancient Palestine, as all the genealogies of *Chronicles*, *Genesis*, and other OT books attest (prove). *Matthew* begins with the genealogy of Christ along Joseph's line, and we have another version of this genealogy in *Luke* along Mary's line. Who a person **was**, was something defined by his ancestry, just as in

some sense today in Africa a person's identity is bound up with his tribal and family relationships and traditions. Can you imagine then, the upheaval and conflict caused in ancient Palestine when a Jew challenged the religious leaders and traditions of his day, as well as his father, mother, wife, husband, brothers, sisters, and his whole extended family, by becoming a Christian? His conversion would be a scandal and a disgrace, not only upon him, but upon the whole family. Therefore, Jesus is not exaggerating the profound impact of familial (related to the family) persecution upon Jews who became Christians, and it is in this context that we must also understand the profound impact of His warnings to count the cost of discipleship (Lk. 14: 26-33; giving up one's possessions is likely a reference to the disinheritance which came from following Christ. A Jew who became a Christian was disowned by his father.) Since Christ was also looking ahead into the distant future, He also knew that these words would be painfully relevant (applicable) to future Christians in *every* culture and in every age. To some extent, familial persecution impacts every true believer, even in cultures which have been profoundly influenced by the Christian faith. Though Christ may be given lip service in many cultures and among many families, if the believer is a serious disciple of Christ, living under His lordship and taking His commandments seriously, he *will be persecuted* in one way or another. This often takes the form of ridicule for his "strange" beliefs which he attempts to conform to the Scriptures, or he is often accused of being a Pharisee because he believes the law of God is the only absolute rule of right and wrong. This does not imply that we should be *looking* for the various ways in which we are persecuted; otherwise our paranoia (fear of persecution) can actually become a variety of Phariseeism. In this case we *become* the Pharisee we are accused of being!

With this introduction, let us take a look at some of the specifics of the text. In v. 34, Jesus denies that He came to bring peace on earth. This appears somewhat surprising given the fact that He is the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9: 6) and that the angels of heaven on the day of His birth declared to the shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace, good will toward men*" (Lk. 2: 14, King James Version and New King James Version). But as noted, this is only one translation, and other translations have more fully captured the meaning of the Greek. The New American Standard Bible (1977) translates the words, "And on earth peace among men *with whom He is pleased*" and the New International Version (1985), "And on earth peace to men *on whom His favor rests.*" The latter two translations fit well with Jesus' declaration here. It should be evident that Jesus did not come to bring peace to everyone, but only to those who repent and believe in Him. The rest are "children of wrath" (Eph. 2: 3) upon whom the wrath of God will come in the final judgment (Eph. 5: 6).

By bringing a "sword", Jesus' coming causes deep divisions between father and son, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Perhaps we should say, "especially between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law". The situation in ancient Palestine may have been similar to the way it is in Africa; the married son's mother has more weight and influence with him than even his wife—something which should not be true of a man who should have "left his father and mother" and "cleaved" to his *wife*, not to his *mother*! (Gen. 2: 24) Noting the historical context, it should be understood that these were family members living under the same roof which means that the division is accentuated (Hendriksen, p. 475). The language Jesus uses sounds purposeful rather than consequential. Did Jesus come for the express *purpose* of bringing division or did His coming simply bring about division as a *consequence*? The

meaning isn't much affected no matter how we look at it. Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, *knew beforehand* the consequences of His coming. He knew that His coming would cause division, but He came anyway. In another sense, He came to bring division. The whole world was allied with Satan's kingdom, a kingdom which had usurped (taken unlawfully) the kingdom of God among men. Christ waited thousands of years to take this kingdom back and restore it to redeemed mankind. In so doing, he came purposely to divide men between His kingdom and the kingdom of Satan. Thus His coming had both the purpose and the consequence of dividing families.

The closest loyalties a person can have are with members of his own family, but even these loyalties must come a distant second to one's loyalty to Christ—and by extension, to the body of Christ, the family of God. If our love for father or mother, wife or husband, etc. keeps us from whole-hearted commitment to Christ and His church, then we must conclude that we love them more than Christ and that we are not worthy of Christ. Following Christ involves bearing the cross of suffering and self-denial (v. 38; those who were crucified were required to carry their own cross to the crucifixion), and some of the most painful self-denial is to be in conflict with family members because of differing world-views, including world-views of morality, justice, truth, and most importantly one's view of God. The tendency is toward self-preservation which includes preserving the "peace" (often a false peace) and preserving one's reputation with his family. Few people enjoy controversy, and when our views on certain sensitive subjects—e.g. abortion, homosexuality, marriage, the church, etc.—clash with those of other family members, the temptation is to drop the subject in order to keep the "peace". In this way, our conversations generally remain superficial and unsubstantial, and we fail to witness to our family members about Christ and what it means to follow Him as Lord. This is what happens in cultures where there is "religious freedom", but in totalitarian cultures, the road of cross-bearing and self-denial is far more extreme and clearly defined—disinheritance and even death—precisely why there is less nominal (name only) Christianity in cultures where Christians are severely persecuted.

In either case, the choice is the same: no cross, no salvation (v. 39; cf. Lk. 9: 23-24). The *alternative* to self-denial and bearing the cross is *not a less committed* Christian life which does not require self-denial, but *death* (Lk. 9: 24; notice the explanatory "for" [*gar*] which connects v. 23 with v. 24). To illustrate, when the rich ruler refused to sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and follow Jesus (Lk. 18: 18-23), Jesus did not offer him the "discount rate" on discipleship saying, "Look, if you don't want to go this far, at least sell your Rolex watch and golf clubs, and come, follow me." Jesus just looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" (v. 24) Whoever "finds" his life in the relationships, associations, and wealth of this world will eventually lose not only his life but the relationships and wealth. Those who are willing to accept rejection for the sake of Christ will not only "find" a new life in Christ, but will be given new relationships within the family of God (Matt. 19: 29). Our cross-bearing is not the *means* of salvation. That distinction belongs to the cross of Christ alone. But bearing one's cross does constitute evidence that he has chosen Christ over all else. The ancient proverb, "blood is thicker than water"—that is, the "blood" of biological relationships has more substance than the "water" of baptism—is not valid for true believers. Our relationship to Christ—not our biological relationship or marriage relationship—truly defines who we are.

Given the fact that the disciples of Christ will be mistreated by so many, even members of their own families, it is understandable that Christ will certainly reward anyone who will show them the least kindness (vv. 40-42). The true believer is so identified with Christ and in union with Him (Rom. 6) that whoever receives him receives Christ, and whoever receives Christ receives the Father who sent Christ (v. 40). The context throughout this discourse demands that Jesus is speaking specifically to His apostles whom He is sending out into the world (10: 1-4), but if He is speaking to the apostles, He is also speaking to all those who believe through their word (Jn. 17: 20). We would certainly have a truncated (shortened) application of the Synoptic gospels if we personally and corporately applied only those passages not spoken *specifically* to the apostles. Jesus is speaking to them particularly, alright, but to them as the foundation of the NT church (Eph. 2: 20).

“He who receives a prophet” is a reference back to vv. 11-15 which speak of the disciples taking the gospel message to the Jewish cities and homes of Palestine. The negative aspect of their visitation has been dealt with in those verses. If they are *not* welcomed into these homes and cities, judgment will come upon those who would not receive them. Failure to welcome them and recognize the importance of their message is failure to receive and recognize Christ himself. Verses 40-42 are the positive side of their visitation. All who receive these NT “prophets”—defined as those who deliver God’s message whether they are apostles or ordinary Christians—will receive a prophet’s reward. Since the “name” of a person is synonymous with the person, receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet simply means that the prophet is being welcomed *because* he is a prophet of God (Hendriksen, p. 478). Any kindness shown to this prophet will be considered as kindness to Christ who sent the prophet and to God who sent Christ. The reward itself is eternal life as opposed to the condemnation mentioned in vv. 11-15. This is a generous reward, indeed, for such a small thing as recognizing the prophet, heeding his words by repenting and believing in Christ, and giving him the help he needs to continue his work. The same reward is given to one who receives a righteous man, one who demonstrates by his life and profession that he follows the Lord. Even something so small as a cup of water in demonstration of love for God’s people will not go unrewarded.

God *loves those who proclaim His message* by whatever means and through whatever talents and gifts they possess—personal evangelism, preaching, friendships, ministries of mercy and compassion. All of these means are included in the “prophet” and the “righteous man” although the work of the apostles is specifically in view. When people respond in faith to this message and treat God’s emissaries with kindness, God grants them the same reward as that of the one who was sent to them. When Christ comes in His glory, many unsuspecting Christians will be praised for kindness shown to other brothers and sisters in Christ. Not letting their right hand know what their left hand is doing, they will feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, invite strangers into their homes, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, without keeping any records of their good deeds. But God never forgets anything we do for His glory and in the name of Jesus (Matt. 25: 31-46; Heb. 6: 10; Gal. 6: 9-10; 1 Cor. 15: 58).

### **8. The Meaning of Verse 23b**

The following interpretations have been offered for Jesus’ enigmatic (perplexing) statement (Hendriksen, p. 466):

(1) Jesus thought that His second coming was imminent (likely to happen without delay), but was mistaken. In answer to this interpretation, it is admitted that Jesus humanly did not know the day or the hour of his coming (Matt. 24: 36; Mk. 13: 32). However, if He made no claims to this knowledge, then He could not have been *mistaken* about what He never claimed to know. Those who hold this view are almost without exception liberal and neo-orthodox theologians (e.g. Schweitzer, who first proposed this view; cf. Carson, p. 252).

(2) This verse is misplaced by Matthew who intended to include it somewhere else. But there is also no evidence for this view.

(3) Jesus was simply saying, “You will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man catches up with you.” In other words, I will be right behind you on your journeys and will catch up with you before you finish going through all the cities of Israel.” For such a casual statement as this, it would seem strange that Jesus would use a Messianic title, “Son of Man” (cf. Dan. 7). Why didn’t He simply say, “...until I come”? It is evident on the surface of things that Jesus had more in mind than catching up with them or He would not have used this title for dramatic and eschatological effect. Likewise unconvinced of this view, Carson says that the clause of v. 23b, if only talking about Jesus catching up with the disciples, would have fit very well immediately after vv. 5-6. Read along with those two verses, this would be a very natural interpretation, but not here in v. 23 (p. 250-251).

(4) More plausible (reasonable) is the explanation that Christ was speaking of the Jewish uprising against Rome from 66-70 AD which left the temple destroyed and Jerusalem in ruins. When this happened, a minority of conservative theologians believe that Christ did “come”, but not in fulfillment of all the NT scriptures concerning the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment which are reserved for some unknown future date. The same interpretation given to this verse by *preterists* (those who believe that Christ came in 70 AD) would also apply to the Lord’s prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD and His “coming” in Matt. 24 which, by Jesus’ own admission, would occur *before* the passing of the present generation to whom He was speaking (Matt. 24: 3, 34; cf. Matt. 16: 28). Because Matt. 24 is a much longer passage used to defend the preterist position, we will postpone a detailed examination of this position until later. For now, we must be content with the simple explanation that Christ, according to the preterist view, is referring to His coming in 70 AD during the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Speaking of interpretations (3) and (4), Hendriksen notes that “there is nothing in the context that in any way calls for or suggests this explanation.” Furthermore, it would be odd that the exaltation of Christ which attends the second coming of Christ would be “wholly excluded” in the third interpretation, and that the destruction of Jerusalem would be included in this context which is primarily concerned with the comfort of the disciples during a time of persecution. Hendriksen contends that v. 23 is not a prediction of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, although this is a possible interpretation (pp. 466-467).

(5) Jesus was speaking of his “coming” to the disciples immediately *after* His resurrection and *before* His ascension into heaven. In other words, before the disciples were finished evangelizing all the cities of Israel, Jesus would be crucified, buried, and risen from the dead, and would *come* to them in His resurrected state, appearing to them on a number of occasions. This interpretation fits with the context and the “for truly I say to you” clause which connects the present situation of sending out the disciples with the coming of the Son of Man (Hendriksen, p. 467, cf. Jn. 20: 19-29; Matt. 28: 16-20).

(6) Jesus was telling His disciples that “until the very moment of his glorious return” the gospel would be preached among the Jewish nation. This interpretation fits better with the

eschatological phrase “Son of Man” (Hendriksen, p. 467; cf. Rom. 11, which appears to teach a spiritual awakening among national Israel before the second coming of Christ; cf. John Murray, *Romans*).

Hendriksen (pp. 467-468) prefers a combination of the fifth and sixth interpretations in which Jesus uses the common method of “prophetic foreshortening” to speak not only of the events surrounding His *resurrection* but events surrounding His *second coming*. Thus, “until the Son of Man comes” refers not only to the resurrection (an event included in His *first* coming) but also to the return of Christ in glory, the *second* coming. The prophets of the OT commonly mix the imagery of the first coming with that of the second coming (Isa. 9: 6-7; 11: 1-10); Jesus merely does the same thing here. Using the same method in Matt. 24, He mixes the imagery of the destruction of Jerusalem with the imagery of His second coming in judgment.

Carson, on the other hand, is not happy with the theory of prophetic foreshortening and fails to see how the urgency of the first part v. 23—“for *truly* I say to you”—fits in with the judgment of the second coming which has not happened for these 2000 years (p. 251). He accepts the fourth interpretation, that Jesus is speaking of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD at which time the Jewish sacrifices in the temple cease and there is a complete break between Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews and between Christianity and Judaism. When this happens, the “age of the kingdom comes into its own” because so many of the predictions of the kingdom of God in the OT *are presented in terms of the restored Davidic kingdom, interpreted by the Jews of Jesus’ day as a political and military kingdom*. Now that the temple is destroyed, and *all hopes of a political Messianic kingdom destroyed with it*, the true and proper interpretation of the kingdom of God can prevail with His church. The kingdom of God which is consummated (completed) at the second coming of Christ is presented to the NT reader as a kingdom which “comes” in stages (Carson, pp. 252-253). The birth of Christ is one of those stages (Lk. 1: 46-55; 2: 25-32), the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus together with His miracles is yet another stage (Matt. 3: 2; Matt. 4: 17; Lk. 11: 21), the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ another (Jn. 19: 30), the coming of the Holy Spirit and the missionary expansion of the church another (Acts 1: 7-8), the destruction of the temple and the temple sacrifices being another (Matt. 10: 23). Whether Christ came in 70 AD in a visible manifestation, as some claim, is an interpretation which requires more scrutiny than we can give here.

### ***IX. The Year of Opposition—The Later Galilean Ministry***

#### ***A. Herod “Haunted” by John the Baptist whom he Beheaded—Matt. 14: 1-2; Mk. 6: 14-29; Lk. 9: 7-9***

The chronology of this event seems to be that of Mark and Luke who both place it after the sending out of the twelve. That so much space is given to John the Baptist in *Matthew* and *Mark* clearly indicates that he was a towering figure in the transitional period between the Old Covenant and the New (cf. Jesus’ assessment of his ministry in your notes; pp. 88-90). He was a prophet not only of the OT variety, but one who was given the honor of preparing the way of the Great Prophet who was promised by Moses in the wilderness (Dt. 18). Anyone who carefully studies the OT prophets will realize that they were fearless men who did not hesitate to call kings—and queens (Jezebel)—into account for their violation of the covenant stipulations

(requirements) in the Mosaic Law. The kings of Israel and Judah were not a law unto themselves, but were subject to the Law of God, a God who was their great Suzereign or Conquering King. The prophets were the covenant emissaries of the King of Kings who constantly reminded the kings of Israel and Judah that they must be obedient to the Great Suzereign or face the consequences (cf. *Third Millennium*, “The Prophets”, Richard Pratt). Amos challenged one of the most powerful kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam II. Elijah, many years before, had challenged Ahab, powerful successor to and son of Omri, and his wife Jezebel. Nathan had challenged the most revered and powerful king of all, David, at the risk of his own life. (After all, David had already murdered Uriah the Hittite and 100 of his men. What difference would the murder of one more prophet make?)

Not only this, but the prophecies of *Isaiah*, *Jonah*, *Obadiah*, and *Nahum*, as well as *Daniel*, clearly prove that God is also in covenant with the whole world, and every king, prince, or president is subject to his law. Chapters 13-24 in *Isaiah* are addressed to the **nations**, including Judah, and clearly depict a covenant lawsuit against the nations who should be subject to God’s law (cf. my “Survey of the Major and Minor Prophets”, pp. 44-47). *Jonah* is addressed to the city of Nineveh (Assyria) who must repent or suffer destruction. Years later the prophet Nahum once again prophesies against Assyria, whose repentance lasted only a few generations. Obadiah prophesies against Edom, archenemy of Israel and Judah. In the prophecy of *Daniel*, we have the stories of Nebuchadnezzar going insane because he failed to give glory to God and of his grandson Belshazzar who conveniently forgot what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and whose kingdom was weighed on the scales of God’s law and found deficient (chapter 5). Roughly 1000 years earlier, Pharaoh had refused to let Israel go at the cost of all the first-born sons of Egypt.

Clearly then, the Gentile nations and their rulers are not exempt from God’s demands just because they are not “church members”. And so it was with powerful Herod Antipas, ruthless son of the more ruthless Herod the Great (cf. your notes on the “Intertestamentary Period” above). John the Baptist had fearlessly rebuked Herod Antipas for stealing his brother Philip’s wife, Herodias, saying, “It is not **lawful** for you to have her” (Matt. 14: 4; cf. Mk. 6: 18). The verb “had been saying” is imperfect, indicating continuous action in past time (Zodhiates, *Key Word Study Bible*, p. 1702. ). This means that John had not confronted Herod only once, but many times about his unlawful marriage. Who was this rugged, uncultured peasant prophet to confront a king not once but repeatedly? He was God’s emissary confronting Herod with the stipulations of God’s universal moral law. The Baptist clearly put Herod in his place. He was only a puppet king placed in power to serve the purpose of his Suzereign, God Almighty. He had no right to do as he pleased by taking his brother’s wife unlawfully. This was adultery, plain and simple.

It is clear from the passage in both *Matthew* and *Mark* that John had confronted Herod **before** he had been placed in prison and that his preaching was the cause of his imprisonment (Matt. 14: 3; Mk. 6: 17—“on account of Herodias”). John therefore stood in the great tradition of the OT prophets who were guardians of the law of God and who did not flinch at their responsibility to confront the most powerful people on earth. He should be an encouragement to all who dare preach the gospel to a rebellious and disobedient generation. In spite of the unfavorable message, Herod somewhat enjoyed this rude, crude preacher (6: 20). Perhaps he considered John a refreshing change to all the obsequious sycophants (overly submissive people who flatter



powerful people to receive their favor) who constantly surrounded him with their boring, dishonest flattery (Hendriksen, p. 587). John, on the other hand, was a man of real courage who was not afraid to speak with conviction. Herod apparently respected that. On the other hand, his wife had no appreciation or respect for this man dressed in camel's hair (Matt. 3: 4) who dared to tell her that she was a cheap adulteress.

It is also clear from the text that Herodias would have had John executed almost immediately, but could not do so because of her husband, Herod. He was afraid of John (Mk. 6: 20), but he was also afraid of the multitudes who regarded John as a prophet (Matt. 14: 5). Notice the different emphasis in *Matthew* and *Mark*. Did Herod know enough of the OT prophets to fear this holy and righteous man standing in front of him? He was certainly aware of the terrible history of the Jews who had defied the prophets and even put them to death. After all, his father Herod the Great was of Edomite stock, enemies of the Jewish nation. Did he have some sense of the fear of God or was his fear merely fear of political inconvenience from the multitude which recognized John as a prophet? There was no need to stir up trouble needlessly. Since John had continually confronted Herod, it is likely that his nagging wife had at least influenced him to imprison John (Hendriksen, p. 587), perhaps at least to shut him up publicly. Of course, everyone already knew who she was and *what* she was.

At Herod's birthday party, Herodias, knowing well the sensual weakness of her husband—who was willing to steal his brother's wife to gratify his lust—planted her beautiful daughter in the ballroom to dance for the king and his equally lustful guests. She was the daughter of Herodias by Philip, not by Herod Antipas (Hendriksen, p. 587), and we need not feel guilty imagining what kind of dance this was—surely not a light-hearted ballet for after-dinner entertainment but an exotic display designed to inflame the sensual passions. By now the king and his guests were feeling the “buzz” from their excessive drinking, and Herod's senses were a bit on the dull side. When the whole exhibition was over, Herod spoke because he was unable to think—no doubt in an effort to impress his guests with his magnanimity (generosity). The bait had been thrown to him and he had mindlessly swallowed it hook and all.

Herod was grieved at the request of Salome (for this was her name—Josephus, *Antiquities* XVIII, p. 136; cited in Hendriksen, p. 587) perhaps for the reasons mentioned above: his fondness for John and his fear of the political consequences—even perhaps for fear of divine judgment. But his fear of his guests—lords, military commanders, and leading men of Galilee (6: 21)—was greater. He had sworn an oath and he could not take it back without losing face in front of these powerful men. Everyone, no matter how powerful, has some other human, or humans, to fear. Pilate had the power of life and death over Jesus, but he himself was subject to Caesar. Fearing the negative report of the Jews to Caesar, he decided to fear him more than God. Judging from Herod Antipas' future demise, he would have fared much better protecting this prophet of God rather than his own reputation. Herod had divorced the daughter of Aretas, king of the Nabatean Arabs, to marry Herodias. Understandably this did not sit well with Aretas who later decided to punish Herod by waging war with him. Josephus tells us that Herod's army was destroyed (*Antiquities*, XVIII, pp. 114, 116; cited by Hendriksen, p. 590).

Later on Herodias' brother Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12: 1) was promoted by Caligula, emperor of Rome from 37-41, to the title of king. Herodias was jealous of her brother's rise to power and

nagged her husband to seek a similar rank from Emperor Caligula. Herod resisted this risky business for a while but later gave in by seeking audience with Caligula. Herod Agrippa I learned of Herod's ambitious trip and quickly sent a written message to Caligula that Herod Antipas had allied himself with the Parthians in a conspiracy against the emperor, an accusation which was true. It just so happened—translated, “in the providence of God”—that the very moment that Herod Antipas approached Caligula with his request, Caligula was reading the message concerning Antipas' conspiracy. Caligula looked up from the letter and asked him if it was true, something which could not be denied considering the huge arsenal of weapons which Herod had stockpiled for the revolt (F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 248-249). So instead of receiving his kingdom, Antipas was banished from Galilee to Gaul (modern day France). Out of deference to her brother Herod Agrippa I, now King Agrippa, Caligula gave Herodias the option of keeping her property, but she chose instead to accompany her husband into exile, quite likely the only decent thing she ever did in her life (Hendriksen, pp. 590-591). The conclusion we must come to is that God loved John the Baptist, and did not take kindly to anyone who would harm him.

John's disciples were allowed to retrieve his body and give him a decent burial (14: 12). They also reported the incident to Jesus who wisely chose to remove himself from harm's way (Matt. 14: 13). When Herod heard about what Jesus had been doing, his guilty conscious led him to conclude, along with many others, that John the Baptist had risen from the dead (Lk. 9: 7; Mk. 6: 14-16). Consequently, he would have been eager to put Jesus to death as well (Chamblin, p. 103). This is, indeed, a strange conclusion coming from Herod. Did he believe in the resurrection from the dead?

Chamblin also observes that the death of John the Baptist is a foreshadowing of Jesus' death, and that John's rejection by Herod corresponds to Jesus' rejection at Nazareth (p. 103). Both the forerunner and the one he announces will be persecuted and killed, and this also is a foreshadowing of the persecution of all who desire to live righteously in Christ Jesus (Jn. 15: 8; Matt. 5: 10-12).

### ***B. The Feeding of the Five Thousand—Matt. 14: 13-21; Mk. 6: 30-44; Lk. 9: 10-17; Jn. 6: 1-14***

Prior to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the last week of His earthly life, this episode and the following one of Jesus walking on the sea are two of the few events which are common to the Synoptics and John's gospel. Because it is included in *John*, it is necessary to take into account the details recorded there. The chronology of this event is clearly given in all three Synoptics. In Matt. 14: 13, Jesus heard the report about John the Baptist and withdrew by boat to a lonely place. In Mk. 6: 30, the disciples of Jesus returned from their missionary trip (Mk. 6: 7-13) and reported the miraculous things God was accomplishing through them. This same context is given in *Luke*. In Lk. 9: 6, the disciples head out on their missionary journey following Jesus' instructions (9: 1-5) and return to give Jesus a report of what had happened (9: 10). Jesus then withdraws to a lonely place (Matt. 14: 13) which Luke identifies as Bethsaida (9: 10).

After a busy schedule of healing and preaching, both Jesus and His disciples need rest. They are not only tired from their labors, but their bodies are in need of food since the demands of the

crowd had prevented them from eating (Mk. 6: 31). Jesus recognizes this need, and He recommends a brief respite (temporary relief) from the crowds. This attempt turns out to be futile since He cannot escape the multitudes coming to Him for healing (Lk. 9: 11; Mk. 6: 33). In spite of his fatigue, He felt compassion for the people who were like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 14: 14; Mk. 34) and welcomed them (Lk. 9: 11). Thus began another busy day of healing (Matt. 14: 14; Lk. 9: 11b) and teaching (Mk. 6: 34; Lk. 9: 11a) which lasted all day until He fed the 5000 at evening (Matt. 14: 15; Mk. 6: 35; Lk. 9: 12). By comparing one account with the other, the reader will notice that the details of the story in each Synoptic account are remarkably similar, while John's account is somewhat different.

When it gets late the disciples suggest that Jesus send the multitude away to buy food for themselves, but Jesus challenges their faith, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" (Matt. 14: 16). Jesus is testing the disciples (Jn. 6: 6) to see if they had sufficiently understood what had already happened in their own ministry. They had just returned from a missionary tour in which they had been able to heal the sick and cast out demons (Mk. 6: 13). In other words, the power which Jesus had displayed in their presence had now been bestowed upon them as His apostles. Based on the recent history of their success, *they* should have been able to feed this multitude. Notice that Jesus did not say, "*I* will feed them", but gave them a command, "You *give* [aorist imperative in all three Synoptics] them something to eat." In response, the disciples point out to Him the obvious impossibility of such a demand. It would take 200 denarii (two hundred day's wages of the average working man) to feed a crowd consisting of 5000 men, not counting the women and children (Mk. 6: 37; Matt. 14: 21), and the disciples probably never had that much cash at one time anyway.

John's account does not record Jesus telling the disciples to give the people something to eat, but Jesus asks Philip particularly, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" In an attempt to harmonize *John* with the Synoptics, the following order is proposed, but not as the only solution:

- (1) Jesus sees the crowds and feels sorry for them.
- (2) He begins teaching and healing and continues this until evening.
- (3) The disciples tell Him that it is getting late, and that He should send the people away into the villages to get themselves something to eat.
- (4) Looking out at the multitudes, Jesus responds, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat."
- (5) Jesus then asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?"
- (6) Some of the other disciples add their "two shillings' worth" by saying, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?"
- (7) Having quickly done the math on this proposed solution, Philip argues, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." In other words, "What use is that?"
- (8) Jesus then asks, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!"
- (9) At His command, the disciples begin scurrying around looking for food. Andrew finds a young boy with five barely loaves of bread and two fish. He then makes his brilliant contribution to the problem by saying, "...but what are these for so many people?" It is clear enough by now that neither Philip, Andrew, nor any of the other disciples understands what is going on. That is, they still don't realize that Jesus is testing them.

So much for the test. The disciples “flunked” (made an F), and the whole episode is somewhat comical. It makes one wonder if Jesus was “tempted” to laugh. We are equally comical with our lack of faith and our proposed solutions to life’s problems. Rather than resting in the providence of God and His infinite power, we either see the situation as hopeless or we scrounge around for empty solutions.

Jesus is now going to further their education—and ours—through a different kind of miracle. He had healed the sick, made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. He had raised the dead, cast out demons, and calmed the sea (see the outline for a chronology of events up to this time). Were Jesus’ miraculous powers limited in any way? Was there anything He could not do? Feeding 5000 plus people would hardly be a challenge to Him. Not only this, but they themselves had become partakers of this power, and should not have questioned the command to give the multitudes something to eat, nor wondered how it could be accomplished. Nevertheless, the disciples were still “men of little faith” and had little confidence in the complete bestowal of Jesus’ power upon them. This lesson is followed chronologically in *Matthew* and *Mark* by another lesson which also fits thematically with this one—Jesus walking on the sea. Mark’s comment in 6: 52 exposes their lack of faith not only in that episode but in the feeding of the multitudes earlier, “for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*, but their heart was hardened.” Apparently, too, they had not gained sufficient incite from their ability to perform the same miracles on their missionary trip that Jesus had been performing. Likewise, just as Jesus walked on water, Peter was also able to walk on water as long as he had his eyes fixed on Jesus and not on the impossibility of external circumstances.

Between the twelve of them, the disciples could only come up with five loaves of bread and two fish. Frank Barker (founder and former pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama) has pointed out that these were not like the loaves we now buy from the grocery store or the bakery, loaves which are sufficient to feed several people. What the disciples actually had were five small pieces of bread and enough fish for two “fish sandwiches”. Dividing the people in groups of fifty to a hundred (Mk. 6: 40; Lk. 9: 14), Jesus then blesses the food (the divine example of thanking God for our daily bread) and begins to distribute it first to the disciples who then distribute it to the people. It would have been amusing to have watched the disciples’ faces as they continued to distribute the food. Did the food multiply while they were watching it in the basket or while they were handing pieces of it to individuals, noticing that the basket had the same amount *after* each distribution as it did *before* the distribution?

Everyone was fully satisfied and full after the meal, and there were twelve baskets of food left over (Matt. 14: 20; Mk. 6: 42-43; Lk. 9: 17). The number twelve is significant—a number signifying completion. Christ is more than able to meet all our physical needs, and He does so with an abundance left over. ***But are the physical needs primarily what Jesus had come to satisfy?*** John gives us more theological incite into this event. In Jn. 6: 2 he notes the reason why the multitudes were seeking Jesus—not for his teaching, but because of the miraculous signs He was performing. This motive degenerates (gets worse) still further after the feeding of the five thousand. After this event, they were seeking him not even because of the signs, but because their stomachs had been filled (Jn. 6: 26). Morris’ comment is to the point.

Had they come even on the basis of the “signs”...they had seen, it would have betokened some faith, however small. Faith which rests on the miracles is not the highest kind of faith, but it is better than no faith at all. But these people were crass materialists [those who believe that comfort and wealth are the highest goals in life]. They had not reflected on the spiritual significance of the sign they had seen. “Instead of seeing in the bread the sign, they had seen in the sign only the bread.” They came because their hunger had been satisfied. They were moved not by full hearts, but by full bellies (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 358).

No doubt many of these people were poor and perhaps some had not known many days in which their hunger had been so thoroughly satisfied (Matthew Henry, *John*). But this was not the result Jesus desired when He fed them, and His sharp rebuke makes it clear that their material poverty was no excuse for emphasizing the material over the spiritual, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal” (vv. 26-27).

It was another reminder that physical, material sustenance is a fleeting thing and will not last—like water drawn from a well (Jn. 4: 13-14). God had given the Israelites bread through His servant Moses—a sign from heaven—but these persistent sinners had never learned the spiritual significance of such bread—“man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8: 3b). Their descendents were now making the very same mistake. Jesus was the bread that had come down out of heaven to give life to the world through His words of saving grace (Jn. 6: 32-33). Like the manna, He was sent from God, but they were not able or willing to interpret this sign correctly. Instead, they demanded more signs as proof that He was the Messiah (v. 30). If they had believed in Jesus, they would have lived forever, for Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh....He who eats My flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (Jn. 6: 48-51, 54).

Immediately after Jesus had fed the multitude, they were ready to make Him king, identifying Him as “the Prophet” promised by Moses (Jn. 6: 14-15; Deut. 18). Jesus refused to be such a king and saw this attempt as yet another temptation from Satan to by-pass the cross of suffering and death. Quoting R. F. Bailey, Morris notes the irony of the situation.

He who is already King has come to open His kingdom to men; but in their blindness men try to force Him to be the kind of king they want; thus they fail to get the king they want, and also lose the kingdom He offers (*John*, pp. 346-347).

The next day (6: 22), the day after Jesus walks on water (vv. 16-21), the same crowd which was ready to make Him king because He gave them **bread** was now grumbling because of His **message** (Jn. 6: 41-43; cf. vv. 26-40 for context). As He continued to teach them the significance of this miracle and the sovereignty of the Father in election (vv. 44-65), the people’s grumbling degenerated into outright rejection: “As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore” (v. 66).

We should notice that John uses the word, “disciples”, indicating that besides the apostles there was a large number of people—distinguished from the “multitude” (6: 2, 24)—called “disciples”

who had followed Jesus' teaching for some time. That not all of these were true believers is evident from this passage, for many withdrew from Him, never to return (vv. 60, 64, 66). The distinction between these "would-be" disciples (including Judas Iscariot) and the other eleven apostles is indicated in vv. 67-69. Peter, as spokesman for the eleven, understood that rejection of Jesus left them no other options. He alone possessed the "words of eternal life", and if they were going to receive this life, they must remain steadfast with Him.

There are many would-be disciples, "God-manipulators", who claim to be true Christians, and these imitators are sustained in the church by preachers who dress up the gospel by eliminating any references to bearing the cross. Bearing the cross is what Jesus had to do, but now that that bit of nasty business is over we can live in the beaming sunlight of a safe and secure life devoid of suffering and sacrifice. These would-be disciples—and would-be preachers—"love" God for what they can get out of Him *in this life*, and as long as "life is good" they are satisfied to "make Him king". But press the claims of sovereignty and lordship upon these people and the necessity of laying down one's life for others, they will soon scatter—either leaving the church altogether or searching after another church where Jesus reigns as the "Bread King". Paul says of these, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, *whose god is their appetite*, and *whose* glory is in their shame, *who set their minds on earthly things*" (Phil. 3: 18-19).

### ***C. Jesus Walks on the Sea— Matt. 14: 22-36; Mk. 6: 45-56; Jn. 6: 15-21***

It is significant that this episode occurs in conjunction with the feeding of the 5000, the attempt to make Jesus into an earthly Messiah, and the desertion of many disciples. The day after the feeding of the 5000, the multitude had demanded that Jesus give them a sign, a more convincing sign which would secure their belief in Him as the Messiah (cf. Jn. 6: 14, 15-16—"when evening came", v. 22—"the next day", and 6: 30). Walking on the water was *just such a sign*, but not one that Jesus would share with the multitude or the smaller group of disciples other than the twelve. Jesus was under no obligation to perform additional miracles for those who had despised the signs He had already performed, reserving them instead for his small band of twelve disciples who would carry on the work after His departure.

Jesus had already performed two miracles upon the Sea of Galilee, the first when He allowed the despondent disciples—who had fished all night for nothing—to make a record catch (Lk. 5: 1-11). On that occasion, Peter had questioned Jesus' request to give it another try (v. 5). Fishing was Peter's area of expertise, and the sea was his second home; so it seemed a useless venture to spend more effort in the early morning hours when fishing was usually fruitless (Geldenhuys, p 182). Jesus knew how to heal diseases and cast out demons on land, but the sea was another domain, and no one could tame or predict the sea. Nevertheless, out of respect he obediently humored Jesus by letting down the nets once again, and the reader knows the rest of the story. It became obvious that Jesus, who had no experience of fishing or the sea, still knew more about fish *and* the sea than Peter. Peter appropriately responded by recognizing not only that Christ was Lord over the *land*, but over the *sea* as well. There was no square millimeter of the earth's surface which did not submit to His power and authority. It is interesting that on two different occasions Jesus employs the sea to test the disciples' faith and to expose their deficiency in faith. On both of these occasions they face the same mild rebuke, "You men of little faith" (cf. Matt. 8:

26). Likewise, a miraculous catch of fish is used twice as a metaphor for becoming “fishers of men”, once in Lk. 5: 1-11 and again after His resurrection in Jn. 21: 1-14. It would seem from the following conversation with Peter in that same incident that the second record catch is a gentle reminder to the disciples that they had better things to do than fishing—“Tend my lambs” (Jn. 21: 15-17).

A second mariner’s (seaman’s) lesson occurred when Jesus calmed the storm and the sea (Matt. 8: 18-27; cf. Mk. and Lk. and notes). The miracle of Jesus walking on the sea was yet another demonstration of Jesus’ lordship over *all* creation—a demonstration which was *necessary to secure the disciples’ faith* before the onslaught of rejection the day after (cf. discussion above in John’s gospel). As we look at all three of these three miracles, the lesson of Jesus’ authority and Lordship over creation is progressively intensified. Causing an unexplainable catch of fish is one thing, but calming the sea is another, more profound miracle. Likewise with the third “sea” miracle, Jesus demonstrates his consummate (perfect) sovereignty over the sea. It was just as natural for Him to stroll upon the sea as upon the dry land for He was God who made both (Heb. 1: 2—“through whom He also made the world”; Jonah 1: 9). Furthermore, as He calms the sea on the previous occasion with a rebuke (Matt. 8: 26), He does so here without so much as a word (Matt. 14: 32; Mk. 6: 51).

It is clear from the text that Christ was positioning his disciples for this lesson by sending them on ahead of Him to Bethsaida while he went to the mountain to pray (Mk. 6: 45; *anagkazo*—“compelled” which is also used in Matt. 14: 22). What was he praying about—possibly his confrontation with the unbelieving Jews the following day (cf. John 6: 26-71 and comments above) and the impact it would have upon the twelve? During the fourth watch of the night between 3 and 6 a.m., the wind became difficult and the disciples began to strain at the oars (Mk. 6: 48; Matt. 14: 24; Jn. 6: 18). Jesus was on the shore watching them (Mk. 6: 48) waiting for a good time to approach them—possibly after they became exhausted fighting the waves. For those who wish to “de-mythologize” this passage by saying that Jesus only *appeared* to be walking on the sea but was only walking in shallow water, two things should be noted. First, the disciples were several hundred stadia from the shore (Matt. 14: 24—“many stadia away”). A stadia is about 600 feet, and since the word, “many”, would imply a minimum of three stadia and probably five or more, the depth of the sea at that point would have been substantially deep. Second, the “de-mythologizer” would have to explain why Peter was so afraid of sinking in waste-deep water and would have to cry out for Jesus to save him (Matt. 14: 30). But none of this matters to one whose life’s purpose is to save us from the myths and fables which arose among Jesus’ disciples after his death—myths which now make up the bulk of the synoptic gospels. He doesn’t want to be confused with the facts because he is convinced *a priori* (without proof) that miracles cannot happen.

Walking several hundred feet on the open, stormy sea, Jesus now approaches his disciples, appearing to them as a ghost and frightening all of them. Offering comforting words, He says, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” The words are *ego eimi* in the Greek, “I am” or *Yahweh*. Jesus was identifying Himself as the Yahweh of the OT (Chamblin, p. 106). Jesus knew already that they were scared (afraid) out of their wits. He knows that we are afraid, too, but He does not despise us on account of this. He simply tells to “focus”—not on the difficult circumstances we face each day, but on Him. Being the impulsive sort of fellow Peter was, he requested a further

demonstration of Jesus' power, not to test Jesus, but to give evidence of his own trust. If Jesus could walk on the water, He could help Peter walk on water with Him. Peter was able to stay focused for only a short time but was soon overwhelmed by the overpowering circumstances which surrounded him. As I sit writing this commentary from my comfortable office chair in Kampala, Uganda—well elevated above Lake Victoria—I am in a good position to critique Peter's behavior as lacking in faith. His attention span was way too short, allowing him to sink in his external circumstances. Isn't this what Christ said about him—"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"?

On the other hand, I can't remember attempting anything which taxed (tried) my faith so much as what Peter did on this occasion. How far does our faith carry us? Are we willing to jump in? Western Presbyterians, like me, generally want to have all the contingency plans ironed out before taking a step of "faith". "Give me the life buoy (floating object for saving drowning victims) just in case Jesus doesn't come through." African Christians, on the other hand, are generally comfortable with the knowledge that they don't "know" what will happen when they attempt bold things for the kingdom of God. I have met Africans who are planning to start churches in Congo, Sudan, and the Western Nile region of Uganda, all of which can be very dangerous mission fields for Christians. (Two missionaries were murdered in the West Nile our first year in Uganda.) Their material resources are meager by western standards—we would call them non-existent—and they truly look to the Lord for daily bread. My hope is that their faith is not exchanged for western contingency plans—"Move out boldly, but wait for the Western money to show up to save the day." Perhaps if the Africans can resist yielding to this pressure they can teach the affluent West a fresh lesson in how Christ conquered the world since the early days of the Roman Empire. After all, with evangelical churches in the West growing so slowly, we should recognize by now that material resources will accomplish very little without faith and zeal (Rev. 3: 14-22).

"Little faith", then, must be defined as being overcome with external circumstances. These circumstances are the Philistine giants who often seem much bigger than Christ who, by comparison, appears so little. But the problem is all in our perspective, and Jesus gives Peter no excuse—"That's okay, Peter. After all, the waves were big and the wind was fierce! No need to lose any sleep over this one." But He doesn't say this. He is bigger than the sea and bigger than the wind as long as our eyes are on *Him* and not the wind and sea. Having observed His Master's works many times before now, Peter had no reason to doubt His all-sufficiency on this occasion. The same is true of us, and Jesus' word to Peter comes back often to rebuke us, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" But we still have our doubts, and our doubts are completely unfounded. Jesus' record in our behalf is impeccable (without flaw); we have seen Him rescue us from many trials, and we have no reason to doubt that His help will be insufficient in the present situation or in the future. The more we know Him, the bigger He becomes in our eyes. The following day, Peter and the other disciples would face a much bigger sea and a more contrary wind—the wind of public opinion opposing Jesus' ministry. What would they do then? As mentioned earlier, this episode seems a likely training lesson for the next day, something which would be fresh on the disciple's minds when everyone else begins to drift away from Jesus. The repetition of the miracle of calming the sea, this time without a word, would be a strong reminder of the earlier miracle.



If faith-building was the intent of this demonstration, and it surely was, then Jesus accomplished His purpose. The response of all the disciples, not just Peter, was worship, “You are certainly God’s Son!” Rather than deserting Jesus the following day, Peter would speak for the eleven by saying, “You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God” (Jn. 6: 68b-69). It was a much needed lesson, for Mark tells us, “for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*, but their heart was hardened” (6: 52). What this “insight” was exactly, we are not told, but most likely it was insight into who Jesus actually was. It is impossible to suppose that they had missed the actual miracle considering that even the multitude had understood what Jesus had done and wished to take him by force to make Him king (Jn. 6: 14-15). What they had not gained is an extra measure of conviction that Jesus was the Lord and Creator of the universe. As Yahweh had given manna in the wilderness, Christ as the God-Man had now given manna to the five thousand. Yet, it is evident from the rejection of the multitudes the next day that they had witnessed this miracle without understanding its significance. Apparently the disciples were in the “same boat” with the multitudes in their inability to understand the connection between Christ and the Yahweh of the OT scriptures. Thus, the miracle of the bread had been somewhat lost on them, and an additional miracle was needed to fortify their faith against massive unbelief the following day.

The disciples’ reaction to Jesus’ *actions* (as well as his teachings) throughout Mark’s Gospel is characterized by non-understanding. In tracing this lack of understanding to “hardness of heart” Mark indicates that at this stage in Jesus’ ministry the disciples are not essentially different from his opponents, who also fail to recognize his unique character and exhibit hardness of heart (cf. Chs. 3: 5; 10: 5)

The proper framework for understanding this unusual episode is provided by the OT. There the power of the Lord over seas and rivers, storms and wind, is repeatedly proclaimed. As the creator of the sea God subdues it and treads upon the waves in demonstration of his majesty. Because he is the Lord men do not need to be afraid no matter how the sea may rage or the wind blow. Jesus’ appearance on the Sea of Galilee must be appreciated as a reality and a sign that the living God has come nearer to men in the revelation of the Son. Jesus had no intention of simply passing by his disciples in a display of enigmatic [perplexing or confusing] glory. His walking upon the water proclaimed that the hostility of nature against man must cease with the coming of the Lord, whose concealed majesty is unveiled in the proclamation “I am he” (Lane, p. 238; emphasis his; bracketed definition mine).

The episode concludes with Jesus and the disciples crossing the northernmost part of the Sea of Galilee and coming ashore at Gennesaret on the northwestern shore (cf. also Jn. 6: 21 where the city is not named). Here, as always, He becomes immersed in the unending work of healing the sick for now after two years of public ministry He is readily recognizable by the multitudes.

#### ***D. Jesus’ Discourse on the Meaning of the Feeding of the Five Thousand—Jn. 6: 22-71***

It is clear from *John* that Jesus leaves Gennesaret the next day and makes His way to Capernaum where He is confronted by unbelieving Jews in the synagogue (cf. Jn. 6: 24-25; 59). The discourse in Jn. 6: 26-71 is one of His major discourses in *John*. Some of the highlights of this discourse are mentioned above which concludes with His being finally rejected by many disciples who had previously followed Him.

#### ***E. Jesus’ Teaching Concerning the Traditions of Men—Matt. 15: 1-20; Mk. 7: 1-23***

There is no strong temporal connection between this episode and Jesus walking on the water or His ministry in Gennesaret. This is to be expected since we know from *John* that Jesus goes to Capernaum and teaches in the synagogue there the day after He walks upon the sea. (See the discussion above.)

One of the great failings of Phariseeism was externalism. Religion consisted in outward forms which must be rigidly imposed and obeyed, and since the OT ceremonial laws and case laws did not satisfy their zeal for minute (small) detail, they made up other rules of their own to impose on themselves and others. One of those rules concerned proper washing before meals without which a person remained “impure” (Mk. 1: 2). They also cleansed themselves after coming from the market because there they would accidentally brush up against unclean tax collectors, sinners, and Gentiles (Mk. 1: 4). Mark also informs us—with an air of impatience—that there were “many other things which they have received in order to observe” (v. 4; Lane, p. 247). Proper washing was accomplished by letting someone pour clean water onto the cupped hands with the fingers extended, thus enabling the water to touch the skin between the fingers (Lane, p. 246). On this occasion, some Pharisees “from Jerusalem” confronted Jesus with His negligence in teaching His disciples the proper ceremony in their eating habits which left them defiled. Jerusalem was the primary locality of the fierce Pharisaical opposition to Jesus’ ministry, and we learn from Jn. 7: 1 that Jesus was spending His time in Galilee and not Judea because He knew the Jews were plotting to kill Him.

The traditions of the elders was serious business to the scribes and Pharisees, *equal to the law itself* since this oral tradition (eventually written down in the *Mishnah* in 200 AD; Hendriksen, p. 609) was the official interpretation of what the law meant and how it was to be applied to daily life. The oral tradition of the elders was not considered by the scribes and Pharisees to be an *addition* to the Law of Moses, but “an integral part of that Law. The oral law is considered to be *revelation from God*” (Chamblin, p. 107; emphasis his). Today, Jewish scholars insist that this oral tradition—as the application of the written law—was in existence from the time the Law was given at Sinai and is as old as the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses). For a long time, it was never committed to writing but memorized and passed down from generation to generation. This was the content of the traditions which the Apostle Paul mentions as one who had studied under Gamaliel (Gal. 1: 14; cf. Acts 22: 3).

“The Great Synagogue” was established during the days of Ezra with 120 Jewish elders, including prophets, who had returned with Ezra from exile. Its purpose was not to create *new* laws but to preserve the Mosaic Law and provide application and explanation of the Law for an era in which prophetic activity was coming to an end. The Great Synagogue and the work of Ezra served to provide a base of tradition different from the Law of Moses but a very important one which became a turning point in Israel’s appreciation of the oral tradition (Chamblin, pp. 107-108, who provides valuable bibliographic references). Such, then, was the viewpoint of the scribes and Pharisees concerning the “tradition of the elders”, one which was not shared by Jesus; and it was increasingly clear to the Pharisees and their legal experts, the scribes, that Jesus transgressed this tradition on several important issues: Sabbath observance, eating with unclean sinners, and fasting. His further neglect of ritual washing before meals was yet another offensive position which demonstrated his total disregard for the sustained oral traditions of the elders

handed down from generation to generation (Lane, p. 245, Hendriksen, p. 609). Such contempt would not be allowed to stand unchallenged.

It should be observed from both Matthew's account and Mark's account that the subject in question has nothing to do with the Law of God given to Moses, but only "the tradition(s) of the elders" (Matt. 15: 2; Mk. 7: 3). Mosaic Law did not require washing before meals. Levitical priests were required to wash their hands and feet before entering the tabernacle, and this ceremonial law provided the scribes and Pharisees the justification for demanding the practice from everyone else (Ex. 30: 19; Lane, p. 245). There were also other ritual cleansing requirements for certain situations (Lev. 15: 5-27; 16: 26; cited in Hendriksen, p. 608), but these laws had nothing to do with the normal meal. The Pharisees had made it into a moral law which any righteous person would keep. Jesus wastes no time in exposing their hypocrisy, and Matthew avails himself of every opportunity to record Jesus' contempt for them. (The word "hypocrite" or "hypocrites" is used 14 times in Matthew.)

Sometimes traditions are good and do not interfere with genuine obedience to the Law of God, but actually support it. The word "tradition" in the NT can be another designation of Biblical teaching (1 Cor. 11: 2; 2 Thes. 2: 15). At other times, tradition can actually **replace** such obedience and **preclude** it (make it impossible). Such was the case here. The Pharisees had developed a tradition called "corban" (Mk. 7: 11) or "given to God" (Matt. 15: 5) in which a man could donate anything he possessed to God or to the Temple. This sounds very pious (godly), but the condition of this generosity—according to one interpretation—was that the donation could be made posthumously (after his death). Thus, the practical affect was that the person could enjoy his wealth during his life without making any sacrifices, and at his death his money would be given to God when he no longer had need of it. Another interpretation is that by declaring his money "corban", one was not necessarily giving the money to God but merely withdrawing it from its normal use and making it unavailable to anyone else—in this case, his parents. Either way, the practice effectively sheltered him from any obligations in taking care of his parents. As indicated by Mark's account (v. 12), even if a man regretted his action and wished to reverse his vow and give needed assistance, the scribes would not permit him to do so because of his oath. If a man made an oath, he was duty bound to keep it (Num. 30: 1-2). They therefore used the law of God concerning oaths to violate the law concerning honoring one's parents (Lane, p. 252).

But Jesus would not allow them to twist the truth. To be sure, the Law said a man must be faithful to keep his vows, but he could not use this vow to violate or invalidate the express commandment of God to honor his parents. Reducing the argument to an absurd conclusion (*reductio ad absurdum*) this would be akin (similar) to a man making a vow to murder someone and forcing him to honor this vow. Murder is a violation of the law of God, and no one can make a **legitimate** vow to murder someone. His vow therefore becomes **null and void**. There was no express commandment in the Law to declare one's possessions as corban or given to God; only the appropriate tithes and offerings were required. But there **was** the fifth commandment—"Honor your father and your mother." The practice of corban was a **man-made** tradition having no relationship to the Law of God and used for selfish purposes. Consequently, Jesus throws the initial accusation of "transgressing the tradition of the elders" (15: 2) back into

their faces with his own accusation, “And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (v. 3)

We should observe here that Jesus’ understanding of “honoring father and mother” was not limited to being *respectful* to one’s parents—a subjective concept not easily measured. Respect was certainly included, and He even quotes the case law of Ex. 21: 17 which calls for the execution of anyone who curses his father or mother (cf. Lev. 20: 9; Deut. 21: 18-21). However, Jesus also includes material assistance as part of one’s obligations to his parents. If they are old, sick, or otherwise financially incapacitated, a grown child—particularly a grown male child—is obligated to help them. To “weasel out” (avoid) of this obligation was a violation of the law. Doubtless Jesus had already practiced what He was now preaching since he had taken care of His mother Mary and His younger siblings after the death of Joseph until He began His ministry at age 30. (We may safely assume Joseph died shortly after Jesus’ experience in the temple at age 12, for we hear no more about him—Lk. 2).

Paul confirms the continuation of this obligation in 1 Tim. 5: 3-4 and 8 when he says, “Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has *children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents*; for this is acceptable in the sight of God....But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.” True “piety”, then, does not consist merely in being “nice” to one’s parents, but also in “putting one’s money where his mouth is” by providing for their basic subsistence. Anything less is the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. I remember the true story of a woman in my hometown who was taken by her daughter to a nursing home. When her daughter got her registered in the home, she said to the administrator, “Call me when she dies.” She had no intention of visiting her aging mother at all, much less on a regular basis. (Lest I be misinterpreted, homes designed to assist old people and their children are not bad in themselves. My 88 year-old mother lives in one only four minutes from my sister who visits her every day, sometimes twice a day. But had it not been for her willingness to see after our mother’s welfare, I would not have been able to come to Africa.)

History was repeating itself. God’s covenant people had not changed much from Isaiah’s day when the people were going through the motions of religion but their hearts were far from God. The quotation of vv. 8-9 is taken from Isa. 29: 13, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*.” Matthew is quoting from the Greek translation of the OT known as the Septuagint (LXX), and his quotation differs somewhat from the exact text (Lane, p. 248). Nevertheless, the essential idea remains the same. While giving God lip service, they were not honoring Him with heart obedience. Their traditions had become more important than the commandments of God, and therefore, they were only pleasing themselves. When men seize for themselves the right to tamper with the original meaning and application of the law of God, they will inevitably develop a tradition made in their own image—one which has dispensed with the radical demands of heart obedience and pure motives. He who makes additions to the law of God will soon eliminate what the law requires. Chamblin sums up the problem: “The rabbis do not stop with supplementing revelation with tradition, or even with elevating tradition above revelation; they are guilty of supplanting the revelation with the

tradition” (p. 110, emphasis his). Had this been the only example of such tampering, Jesus may not have been so severe; but this was but one infraction (disobedience) among many in which they despised the Law in favor of their man-made laws (Mk. 7: 13).

From Matt. 15: 1 and Mk. 7: 14, it appears that the multitudes were not too far away while Jesus was speaking with the scribes and Pharisees. Had they not already been listening to Jesus, His last comment (Matt. 15: 10-11; Mk. 7: 14-16) would have made little or no sense to them. Furthermore, they were attempting from the beginning to discredit Jesus in front of the multitudes, a strategy which He turns upon their own heads when He shows their accusations to be self-incriminating (self-condemning). It is unclear which of Jesus’ statements the disciples were referring to when they said, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” (Matt. 15: 12) Most likely it was the quotation from Isa. 29: 13 originally delivered to the people of Judah facing Babylonian exile for being covenant-breakers and idolaters. The scribes and Pharisees were very proud of themselves as descendants of the vanguard (leaders of a movement) who had called the Jews back to the Law of Moses, but now Jesus is placing them in the same camp as the wayward Israelites who incurred God’s wrath. Such an equation was not likely to win the Pharisees any converts among the common people, and if Jesus’ teaching was understood and accepted by the multitudes, their influence would be seriously damaged.

At any rate, their hatred of Jesus was visible and made a big impression on the disciples who may have been somewhat intimidated (frightened) by these revered (respected) leaders (Hendriksen, p. 616). As if Jesus needed to be made aware of the emotional ambience (environment), the disciples dutifully pointed it out, “Jesus, we think you made them angry.” Jesus responds by saying (and if I may paraphrase again), “Who cares? Don’t worry about the opinions of people who have no future.” The Pharisees and scribes were plants which were not planted by the heavenly Father (15: 13). They were, instead, tares among the wheat which would one day be uprooted and burned in the fire (Matt. 13: 24-30; 37-43). The disciples, therefore, should not waste time—“Let them alone” (v. 14)—with such people who are like swine which trample pearls under their feet (Matt. 7: 6). Jesus is, therefore, giving them an object lesson in “swine detection”. The multitudes were like sheep who had no shepherd (Matt. 9: 36), blind men being led by blind guides who would sadly fall into the same pit (v. 14). Jesus demonstrated compassion for such sheep. The scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, were dogs and swine under whose feet the holy, precious pearls of the gospel should never be placed. They would only turn on the one who attempted to feed them and tear them to pieces. This would not be the last time the disciples faced such hatred, and they might as well get used to the idea that a slave was not above his master (Matt. 10: 24). If they hated Jesus, they would hate His disciples as well (Jn. 15: 18). No doubt they would all remember this many times until they are finally put to death for their labors in the gospel.

At this point, Mark tells us that that Jesus and the disciples left the multitudes and entered a house (7: 17), a little detail not given to us by Matthew. Peter, as the usual spokesman for the disciples, then asked Jesus the meaning of what He had said about defilement. While Jesus is never surprised or frustrated by the slowness of His disciples to comprehend His teaching, He sometimes takes the liberty to address this slowness through a mild rebuke, “Are you still lacking in understanding also?” He then proceeds to explain. The Pharisee’s emphasis on ritual washing

indicated their conviction that any food eaten with unclean hands would defile the person eating it. Jesus corrects this error by saying it is not that which enters into a man from the outside which defiles the man. Such food enters the mouth, then moves to the stomach and is eliminated as waste. (Get the idea?) But the real defilement is what is already *in* man: “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matt. 15: 19). Mark adds “deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness” (7: 22). Jesus introduces this list with His emphasis on the heart (15: 18; 7: 21), and heads the list with “evil thoughts” thus implying that the sins mentioned refer not only to the physical activity of certain sins—e.g. murder, adultery, and theft—but also to the evil thoughts which lead to them—anger, sensuality, and coveting. A brief examination of the list in Luke shows that many of the sins deal with the inner being and not the overt (external) act—e.g. coveting, wickedness, sensuality, envy, pride and foolishness. The inner thoughts and attitudes of the heart are the things by which a man is defiled, not by eating with unwashed hands. The Pharisees earned high marks for avoiding external sins, sins by which they would be disqualified as religious guides to the masses. They hated Jesus because He could not be fooled by this charade (false display) of righteousness. In reality, they were just as defiled as the open sinners they despised because of the corruption of their hearts. Therefore, Jesus perfectly describes the scribes and Pharisees who went to great lengths to “wash” these sins away with external rituals.

Mark adds a very interesting comment in v. 19 as a parenthetical statement, “Thus He declared all foods clean.” This is doubtless a conclusion which Mark came to after Peter’s experience with the house of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10), and not a reference to what Jesus actually said on this occasion. “Putting 2+2 together and coming up with 4”, Mark realized after the event with Cornelius that what Jesus said on this occasion *anticipated* the abolition of food laws and the wall of separation between Jews and Greeks. The story of the Syrophoenician woman which follows in Matt. 15: 21-28 thematically illustrates this wall of separation which is soon to be demolished (cf. Chamblin, p. 112).

As stated earlier, traditions can be good, or they can be bad—deadly in fact. The church and every individual Christian should always be watchful of traditions. Are they helpful, or do they just get in the way of the gospel? Do they, in fact, hinder the gospel? Many religious traditions may be *expressly contrary* to scripture, such as the authority and infallibility of the Roman Catholic pope. Other traditions may not be expressly contrary to scripture but may be a hindrance to more important obligations of the church, such as the support of missions or the support of local pastors. I can think of a couple of examples. The Church of Uganda, following the tradition of the Anglican Church in England, spends large amounts of money on the ceremonial ordination of bishops, but from personal communication with many lay readers in the Church of Uganda I have learned that they often receive their salaries irregularly. This is a clear violation of Scriptural teaching that pastors be supported for their labor (1 Tim. 5: 17-18; 1 Cor. 9: 1-14).

Another example is the elaborate, and often unnecessary, emphasis in the US on building programs ostensibly (on the surface of things) designed to promote the work of the church but which tie up needed funds which could be used for missions and evangelism. Churches often spend money like the individual members who make them up, needlessly and aimlessly to make life more materially comfortable. Congregations with gifted, popular preachers build bigger

auditoriums to accommodate the large crowds which come to hear them preach without considering the advantage of multiplying congregations throughout the city to reach people in different socio-economic settings. Some churches have broken away from this “tradition” of infatuation with brick and mortar, but not many. The result has been a stagnating church in the US with only a miniscule (very small) growth rate. The large churches are growing still larger, but only because of transfer growth—the transfer of membership from the small, fledgling churches—to the larger churches.

There are other examples of traditional stagnation which may be more benign (harmless) but may be getting in the way of the gospel. It is “traditional” for churches to set 10 or 11 a.m. on Sunday morning as the time for corporate worship. Setting aside the question of the fourth commandment and whether the fourth commandment requires Sunday as *the only* day of corporate worship, would there be other times more suitable for a particular culture, especially one in which workers are not given Sunday as a day off? What about having a single service on Sunday evening? In the Roman Empire before the Edict of Milan (313 AD) when Constantine gave Christianity equal status with all other religions, Christian workers were quite clearly not given Sunday as a day of rest; nevertheless, the church grew phenomenally before Christians were given such freedom. When did they worship? They worshipped whenever they could, and God obviously accepted it.

What about the *place* for worship? Do we need church buildings constructed for the specific purpose of worship, or would other locations be more conducive (contribute more effectively) to reach those who are resistant to church buildings for one reason or another? The early church, after all, had no church buildings, but met in homes and other private locations to avoid detection by the Roman authorities and for many other practical reasons. Homes provided more intimate (personal) environments for Christians to share their needs with one another than large auditoriums. (The fastest growing church in the world at present is in communist China where tens of millions of Chinese Christians gather together in homes to worship.) Large, splendid church buildings funded by Constantine, called basilicas, were built after the Edict of Milan, and *one result of such buildings was the diminishing of congregational participation* in the corporate worship service (See your notes on church history). The worship service became more formal and more “professional”, with the clerical aristocracy taking “center stage” in corporate worship.

Compare this situation with the description of the worship service in 1 Cor. 14 in which there is a very clear indication of participation from various members of the congregation. The question of whether the ostensible (conspicuous) gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, continue to be given to the church today is not relevant to the question of congregational participation. There are many contributions which members—other than the pastor or elders—can make which are edifying to the whole body—the gift of “wisdom” or “knowledge” being but two examples (1 Cor. 12: 8). But the format of worship which is usually followed in churches does not allow considerable or substantial congregational participation. This would take too long, which begs the question of the prescribed length of worship services. Most people don’t want to sit and listen for more than an hour and a half, and I personally can identify with this reluctance (hesitation). On the other hand, if some worship services were more informal and consisted of smaller groups in which people were encouraged to open up and share their lives with others,

people might consider whether a longer time of fellowship was needed. Personally I am not encouraged that the traditional worship service offers sufficient time or context for the “one anothering” demanded of believers in the New Covenant. I am not alone in this conviction, and millions of Christians throughout the world are being sustained in congregations which have informal worship services and meet in small groups. I am not suggesting that we make new “rules” for worship, especially since we are given only general principles in the NT.

Worshipping in spirit and truth and in an orderly manner is what counts, and this can be done both in small, informal groups and in large formal gatherings. But I am suggesting that we need to think “outside the box” of our own theological and ecclesiastical traditions. The wine of the New Covenant cannot be contained in the old wineskins of our own traditions, many of which cannot be supported from Scripture however adamantly and energetically some may attempt to prove otherwise.

#### ***F. The Syrophoenician Woman—Matt. 15: 21-28; Mk. 7: 24-30***

This is one of the most amazing stories in the gospels, not because of the subject matter but because of Jesus’ response to this poor woman. How can we account for this response? Both Matthew and Mark make note of the fact that she is a Gentile—“a Canaanite woman” from the district of Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 15: 21-22), a “Gentile of the Syrophoenician race” (Mk. 7: 26). Jesus has already said that “if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in [Chorazin and Bethsaida], they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt. 11: 21). He is now going to *prove* his words with the example of this woman.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Mark adds an additional detail indicating that he entered a house. This implies that the woman did not just happen to see Jesus in a public place but had heard of His whereabouts (location) and had purposely searched for him (Mk. 7: 25). The verb “asking” in Mk. 7: 26 is imperfect tense, signifying continuous action in past time. The woman did not ask Jesus *one time* to heal her daughter; she “*kept asking* Him” to do so. We are reminded of how Jesus taught us to pray in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7: 7-11)—“Ask”, “seek”, and “knock” are all present imperatives signifying continuous action in the present. “Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking. Don’t stop!” This woman didn’t hear this sermon, but she knew how to ask just the same—persistently! She also addresses Him as the “Son of David”, a title commonly associated with the Messiah (Matt. 1: 1; 9: 27; 21: 9-15; 22: 41-45; Hendriksen, p. 435). But the Messiah was promised to the *Jews*, and this woman was *no* Jew! Yet, she clearly gives evidence of one who was acquainted with this promise. But even with all her persistence, Jesus “does not answer her a word” (v. 23). He ignores her as if she were not there.

The disciples, on the other hand, could not ignore her. Ironically, they were also persistent in *their* asking. Matthew tells us that they “kept asking” (imperfect tense) Jesus to send this pesky (annoying) woman away (v. 23)! Jesus finally says something to her, but nothing to inspire the woman’s confidence. “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Interpreted, “I am only available to the Jews. You are not a Jew; therefore, you don’t qualify for my help.” What kind of answer was this to a desperate woman!? Jesus raises the widow’s son from the dead without so much as being asked (Lk. 7: 11-17), but now He tells a pleading woman that she does not qualify for help because she is a Gentile! Had He not already cured the slave of a



Gentile centurion (Matt. 8: 5-13)? God's ways are often inscrutable (incomprehensible) to us, and such would be the case here if we did not have the rest of the story. Can we not say that the misery of Job is also incomprehensible to us? Why would God treat one of His best friends in this way? (cf. the book entitled *Job, How God Treats His Friends*). Well, He does so because He has something to teach Job—and us—and He uses different people and different circumstances to teach us various truths about Himself and His ways. Had Jesus not responded the way He did, the lessons He wished to teach us would not have been as clear. It is important for us to realize at the outset that Jesus did not mistreat this woman. He is the perfect Son of God and can never be accused of sin, however bewildering (confusing) this story may seem.

One of the lessons in this story is, quite obviously, persistence. First Jesus ignores her, and then it *appears* that He also insults her. Yet, she does not allow herself either to be discouraged in the pursuit of her goal or offended. She knows what she wants, and she knows that what she wants is not something optional, but something she *must* have! Are we like this in our prayers? Do we merely *wish* to have something, or do we *eagerly crave* it? We must be careful in what we crave (earnestly desire). Are we asking according to the will of God, or is our request worldly or selfish (James 4: 1-4; 1 Jn. 5: 14)? If it is something good, we should ask in faith and with unwavering persistence (James 1: 5-6; Matt. 7: 9-11; cf. Lk. 11: 11-13). Does God wish to give us wisdom, holiness, the fruit of the Spirit? There can be no doubt that He does. And even though we do not know what God has ordained for us, we are given the liberty along with this woman to ask, without wavering, for mercy upon those we love. She was not taking “no” for an answer, she was not in any way deterred (hindered) in her request—“Lord, help me!” Reading the words 2000 years later, we can almost hear the desperation in her voice. But Jesus appears to push her farther away. “It is not good to take the children's [the Jews'] bread and throw it to the dogs”—Gentile “dogs”, a common term of derision (insult) applied to the Gentiles by the Jewish people. The offensive designation is somewhat lessened by the reference to eating from the master's table, thus distinguishing these household pets (*kynariois*—“puppies”) from the ravenous beasts which roamed the streets (Chamblin, p. 112, citing Gundry, p. 315).

At this point in the conversation, we are getting a hint of what Jesus is doing. He is not speaking to this woman from his own personal viewpoint, but from the viewpoint of the typical Jew who despised the Gentiles. He created this woman who shared His image, and He loved her. Furthermore, Jesus could not be uninformed about the promise to Abraham that he would be a blessing to the *nations*, not just the Jews (Gen. 12: 1-3). Throughout the OT period, Gentiles had been accepted into the covenant family of the Jews as a foreshadowing of the blessing of God to the Gentiles, and now Jesus was the fullest expression of this blessing. Indeed, He *was* the blessing to the nations, the Gentiles! Could it be that this woman was familiar with the history of the Jewish nation and the blessings which some Gentiles, however few, had received from their relationship with the God of Abraham? Historically, the Gentiles had been like dogs feeding off the crumbs of Jewish tables. Yet, crumbs are better than nothing at all, and she was content to exist off the crumbs if that was all she could get.

What humility! What lack of presumption and entitlement (“You owe me!”)! *Her humility was the very opposite of Jewish pride* which figured that the Messiah was *obligated* to bless them. They were, after all, Jews, God's chosen people! He owed them! And this is the very attitude we often take into our prayer room. We serve the Lord, and He owes us! But He doesn't owe

us. We owe Him, and whatever He chooses to give us, He gives us by grace and not according to human merit. We might say that the woman provides a perfect example of being “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5: 3), and we have become her pupils.

Jesus now has the response He was “fishing” for, and there was no more need for severity. The woman’s “great faith” (Matt. 15: 28) persevered and accomplished its goal, the healing of her daughter. Her faith is expressed in her answer (Mk. 7: 29—“*because of this answer* go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter”). Jesus heals without so much as seeing her daughter—a similarity with the healing of the Centurion’s slave (Matt. 8: 5-13)—and once again highlights the difference between the unbelieving Jewish nation and the believing Gentiles to whom the kingdom will one day be given (8: 11-12). Thematically, the story serves a perfect contrast with the confrontation with the scribes and Pharisees who were always testing Him (Matt. 15: 1-20; Mk. 7: 1-23).

#### ***G. The Deaf and Dumb Man and other Miracles—Matt. 15: 29-31; Mk. 7: 31-37***

The chronology of this episode is clarified by Matthew, “And departing from there...” (v.29). Matthew reports generally about Jesus healing people with various infirmities (v. 30) while Mark goes into more detail about one specific individual who was deaf and mute (unable to speak). The identity of the two episodes is borne out in Matt. 15: 31 and Mk. 7: 37. The manner in which Jesus heals the man is emphasized in the Mark passage. Jesus sticks His fingers into the man’s ears, then spits on his own fingers and places his saliva in contact with the man’s tongue. As one who fully identified with the sinners He came to save, Jesus also identified with them in their afflictions. This man was deaf and mute which means that he was socially isolated from others. Rather than *speaking* words of healing which the man could not hear, Jesus does something else which could be detected by the senses which were not impaired—his sense of touch. “Through touch and the use of spittle Jesus entered into the mental world of the man and gained his confidence” (Lane, p. 266).

The focus of both passages is the astonishment of the multitudes at Jesus’ authority to heal all kinds of afflictions. “He has done all things well” (Mk. 7: 37).

#### ***H. The Feeding of the Four Thousand—Matt. 15: 32-39; Mk. 8: 1-10***

The similarity of this event with the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14) has led some interpreters to believe that this is just another reporting of the same event. There are, indeed, many similarities, but the mention of the previous miracle in the Mark account makes it clear that they are separate miracles (Mk. 8: 19). What, then, is the purpose of a *second* feeding of the multitude? We might as well ask: What was the purpose of the repetition of so many of Christ’s miracles? For three years He was constantly healing the sick and casting out demons. On this occasion He repeats a very significant miracle which draws attention to Him as the “bread of life”. Repetition is the best teacher, and considering the slowness of the disciples to understand, repetition was necessary to get His teaching across (Matt. 16: 11; Mk. 8: 17).

But there is an important difference in this episode. It takes place in Decapolis (Mk. 7: 31) on the *eastern* shore of the Sea of Galilee while the earlier feeding of the 5000 probably took place

on the *western* shore. Decapolis was heavily populated with Gentiles and was the area in which Jesus had healed the Gerasene demoniac. Lane cautions against the notion that the multitudes on this occasion were exclusively Gentile since many of the cities in Decapolis had a large proportion of Jews (p. 266). Nevertheless, we may safely assume that there were significantly more Gentiles present on this occasion than in the feeding of the 5000 and probably in the majority. Furthermore, Lane's suggestion that both Jews and Gentiles sat down and ate together raises a serious question: Would Jews defile themselves by eating with uncircumcised Gentiles? (Lane, p. 275) While this would have been a wonderful foreshadowing of the mixed fellowship of the church which occurred later, it is doubtful that this arrangement would have been acceptable to the Jewish audience at such an early date. However, it may be possible that the Jewish audience separated themselves from the Gentiles during the actual serving of the food and thereby avoided defilement.

I'm inclined to believe that the audience on this occasion was predominately Gentile (cf. Chamblin, p. 113) and therein lies the primary significance of this second miracle. Jesus had not come to be the bread of life *only* for the Jews, but *also* for the Gentiles. Not only this; but the abundance of His blessings to the Gentiles is expressed in the miracle itself. Four thousand people were fed ("besides women and children"—Matt. 15: 38) with seven small loaves and a few fish, and seven large baskets of food were left over after the meal. ("And they ate and were satisfied"—v. 8b). It is significant that the feeding of the 4000 takes place both in *thematic* and *chronological* connection with the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter (Matt. 15: 21-28; Mk. 7: 24-30). In that episode, the Gentile woman had been satisfied with the *crumbs* falling from Jewish tables, symbolic of the limited blessings of the gospel to the Gentiles in the OT dispensation (see above discussion). But now the Gentiles need not exist on crumbs; they can enjoy a *feast* instead (!)—one that is equal in abundance to the previous feeding of the 5000. Both Matthew and Mark are preparing us for the outpouring of God's grace to the Gentiles after Pentecost.

Notice also that Jesus' *compassion* for the multitudes is emphasized (15: 32; 8: 2). They had persevered with Him for three days (a fact mentioned both in Matthew and Mark) listening to Him teach and observing His miraculous works. They had, therefore, depleted (used up) their food supplies and were now so hungry that if told to go home empty many would faint from hunger on the way—not an exaggeration. Jesus was concerned for their physical well-being. Once more we are reminded that Jesus did not come to save only the soul, but the body as well. He was intimately concerned for the physical needs of people, both Jew and Gentile, and was well aware that sin was the ultimate cause of hunger and sickness. Our mission strategy to the nations must imitate (model) this concern by producing works of mercy and charity to accompany the preaching of the gospel. If we are not concerned for men's stomachs, we are equally unconcerned for their souls.

This brings up the question of our *methods* in evangelism and missions. How do we approach people with the gospel? Africans are now accustomed to hearing some kind of presentation of the gospel, however laced (interwoven) it is with foreign elements which sometimes confuse it. If we are not careful to demonstrate the compassion of Christ with deeds of mercy, even the true message will be interpreted by our audience as yet another "peddled" (wrapped up and sold) version of the gospel designed to get something in return (2 Cor. 2: 17). So what is the best

method of evangelism? Going door to door with “evangelism explosion” techniques is not necessarily a bad method, and many people have heard the gospel with this method who would not have heard it otherwise. Yet, it would appear, to me at least, that a more effective method of evangelism is “personal” evangelism in which we are getting intimately involved with the lives of others, discovering their needs and fears and making an honest attempt to identify with those needs. In this way, the gospel becomes “incarnate” in human flesh—a real person who is not here today but gone tomorrow, but one who is there for the long term living among the people he seeks to win with the gospel.

### ***I. The Pharisees and Sadducees Seek for a Sign—Matt. 16: 1-12; Mk. 8: 11-21***

A similar craving for signs is recorded in Matt. 12: 38 and Lk. 11: 29 with a similar response from Jesus. It is not unlikely that Jesus confronted this error many times during His earthly ministry; therefore, it is not likely that this is simply a repetition of an earlier story, but a different event altogether. It is clear from the passage that the Pharisees and Sadducees in this episode were not really truth-seekers but merely “testers” who wished to find some flaw in Jesus’ ministry. While the Pharisees and Sadducees could discern from the sky what kind of weather a given day would bring, they were incapable of discerning “the signs of the times”. What exactly were “the signs of the times” to which Jesus referred?

Hendriksen interprets their demand for a sign to be a request for something “from heaven” as opposed to the strictly “earthly” signs Jesus had been performing. Perhaps they wished for Jesus to cause manna to drop from the sky, or to cause the sun and moon to stand still (Josh. 10: 12-14), or to send fire from heaven (1 Kings 18: 30-40) (Hendriksen, p. 635). Perhaps the Pharisees remembered that even the Egyptian magicians had been able to replicate (reproduce) some of the signs Moses had performed before Pharaoh (Ex. 7: 11-12, 22; 8: 7), and already they had accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan (Matt. 12: 24). Therefore, to the Jewish leadership Jesus was nothing but a false prophet capable of performing miracles, and His earthly miracles were not valid proof or authentication of His identity as the promised Messiah.

If Jesus had *only* performed miracles, their skepticism (doubting) could have been excused. According to Deut. 13: 1-2, the existence of a sign or wonder was not sufficient, *by itself*, as the authentication or proof that someone was a true prophet. According to the text, *even if* the prophet or “dreamer of dreams” gives a sign or wonder which “*comes true*”, but then entices the people to follow other gods, the people should not listen to him or follow him. ***Clearly then, it took more than miraculous deeds—signs and wonders—to establish the legitimacy of a prophet. It also took words which were consistent with all that God had revealed to Israel up to that time.*** If the words were contrary to what God had already told them through His appointed prophets and emissaries (like Moses), the signs and wonders were of no consequence or importance (cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *Deuteronomy*, p. 363).

Jesus Himself warned before His death that “false Christs and false prophets” would arise after His death who would be able to perform great signs and wonders which would mislead many people, even the elect if this were possible (Matt. 24: 24; read vv. 1-26 for context). He does not deny that these signs and wonders would be miraculous, but only that they would be “misleading”. The Apostle Paul later warns the church at Thessalonica that the “man of

lawlessness” will come “in accord with the activity of Satan, *with all power and signs and false wonders*” (2 Thes. 2: 9; read vv. 1-8 for context). The signs and wonders are not false in the sense of being fabricated or pretended, but false in the sense of purpose (Leon Morris, 2 *Thessalonians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 231). Their purpose will *not* be to draw attention to the truth of Jesus Christ, but to *deceive*; and in this sense they are false.

Since there is no clear chronological connection between this passage and its context (cf. Mk. 8: 10-11; Matt. 15: 39; 16: 1), Lane believes that the entire conversation is a continuation of a previous discourse in Mk. 3: 22-30. For thematic purposes, Mark provides the rest of the story here in Mk. 8. This thematic connection is therefore important to the interpretation of the text. Considering the OT context above and the relevant NT passages mentioned, the Pharisees and Sadducees were; therefore, not asking for another attesting miracle when they asked for a sign from heaven. They had already seen many of Jesus’ miracles and had remained steadfast in unbelief. What they demanded was proof that His miracles originated in God and not in Satan (Lane, *Mark*, p. 277). It is not clear exactly what kind of “sign from heaven” they were looking for, but it is seriously doubtful that Jesus could have given them anything which would have satisfied their skepticism.

The same concept (although not the word itself) comes up in Deut. 18: 18-22, particularly in v. 22, “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, *if the thing does not come about or come true*, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.” The “thing” mentioned was the sign or wonder predicted by the prophet which gave *proof or authentication* to his words. For example, when the “man of God” (an unnamed prophet) prophesied against the illegitimate altar at Bethel built by Jeroboam I, he gave Jeroboam a *sign* that this prophecy would come true. He had prophesied that King Josiah—who would be king of Judah 300 years later—would burn the bones of illegitimate priests who had sacrificed on the altar at Bethel (1 Kings 13: 1-2). As proof of his words, he also provides a sign which would take place shortly. Jeroboam’s altar would split in two and the ashes of the sacrifices would be spilled out. As Jeroboam gives orders to seize the man of God, his arm is paralyzed while the altar simultaneously (at the same time) splits in two—just as the man of God had predicted. The splitting of the altar verified (gave proof) his prediction. Roughly 300 years later Josiah burned the bones of the false priests on this very altar (2 Kings 23: 15-16).

Another example of a sign or wonder is found in Ezek. 12: 1-16. Before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC, Ezekiel is instructed by God to prepare baggage to go into exile. He was then to take this baggage out into the streets in full view (sight) of the exiled Jews living in Babylon. He was also instructed to dig a hole in a wall and go through the wall with his baggage in the night, pretending to escape from the city. All of this was a staged play, so to speak, as a sign to the exiled Jews already living in Babylon who entertained false hopes that Jerusalem itself would not fall to the Babylonians. Ezekiel warned them that it would certainly fall and King Zedekiah, who later attempted to flee from Jerusalem “between the walls”, would be captured (cf. Jer. 39: 1-5; 2 Kings 24: 1-7). Ezekiel’s activity was a *sign* or authenticating proof that he had spoken only what the Lord had told him to speak. Jerusalem’s fall only a few years later would prove him to be a true prophet.

At this point we should note the difference here between the Jewish leaders and John the Baptist and in the way Jesus responds to each. Both the Jewish leaders and John had their doubts about Jesus' identity as the promised Messiah. John entertained doubts because Jesus' ministry had not been attended with judgment upon the wicked (cf. Matt. 11: 1-6 and discussion above); the Pharisees and Sadducees doubted because He had not come as an earthly ruler in the likeness of King David. In deference (respect) to John the Baptist, Jesus tells John's disciples to report to him (now in prison) that "the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11: 5). In other words, all the identifying signs of the Messiah's reign mentioned in Isa. 35 and 61 were "present and accounted for". It was true that the element of *immediate, climactic judgment* was lacking in His ministry, but that was no reason to discount the *miraculous signs* of Messiah's reign which were *already* present. Such detail from the OT prophecies is given to John to evoke (call forth) his faith, and Jesus was confident that this explanation would be sufficient for him. On the other hand, Jesus was not interested in confirming His identity to unbelieving and rebellious Jewish leaders who should have been just as capable as John in discerning "the signs of the times"—namely, the fulfillment of the OT prophets in the miraculous works He had *already* performed. If they wished for any more information they could read the book of Jonah—a veiled reference which they would not be able to understand. Having said this, He walks away, leaving them in their unbelief. (Notice the emphasis in Jesus' leaving—"And He *left* them, and *went away*" (v. 4).

### ***J. Jesus Heals a Blind Man—Mk. 8: 22-26***

This event is reported only in Mark. Jesus had come from the region of Tyre (Mk. 7: 24) and had come "through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee within the region of Decapolis (7: 31) on the eastern shore where He fed the 4000. He has now come to Bethsaida. Jesus brings the blind man outside the village of Bethsaida before curing his blindness, a departure from his common practice of healing in the presence of crowds (Lane, p. 284; Mk. 1: 32-34; 3: 7-12; 6: 53-56; cited in Lane). Lane interprets this action as the means of establishing a relationship with the man to boost his confidence and to avoid the false worship which he often avoided (p. 285; Mk. 1: 35-39; cited in Lane).

Another very real possibility was that He was withholding further saving revelation from a village which had already rejected earlier revelation. Bethsaida was one among the impenitent cities which Jesus excoriated (denounced harshly) in Matt. 11: 20-24 because they would not believe in him in spite of His miracles (p. 90 of notes). In fact, Matthew records in this passage that "most of His miracles" had been done in these three cities: Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum. Immediately after promising a more favorable verdict on Judgment Day to Sodom than these three cities, he says, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight" (Matt. 11: 25-26). Jesus was under no obligation to continue showering Bethsaida's citizens with the revelation of miracles when there was limited response. Had he continued, it would have made their judgment the more severe. Having healed the man, He tells him plainly not to enter Bethsaida, but to go straight to his house (v. 26).

His method of healing on this occasion is similar to that of the deaf and dumb man in Mk. 7: 32. On that occasion he puts His fingers into the man's ears, then spits on His own fingers and touches the man's tongue. On this occasion, He spits on the man's eyes and lays His hands on him—the same kind of physical contact as before (cf. Jn. 9: 6). We are left without answers to the question: Why does Jesus heal the man gradually in two steps rather than one step as in most other healing actions?

***K. Peter's Confession—Matt. 16: 13-20; Mk. 8: 27-30; Lk. 9: 18-21***

Leaving Bethsaida, Jesus and the disciples now enter the villages of Caesarea Philippi (Mk. 8: 27; Matt. 16: 13). Luke provides no chronological context but reports the event within the thematic context of feeding of the 5000. The feeding of the 5000 is followed chronologically by Jesus' walking on the sea, His conflict with the Pharisees about their traditions, the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman, the healing of the deaf and dumb man, the feeding of the four thousand, His criticism of the Pharisee's craving for a sign, and the healing of the blind man (see the outline of the Synoptics). None of these events are recorded in *Luke*; thus, there is a considerable gap in Luke's gospel between the feeding of the 5000 and Peter's confession. In *Matthew*, Jesus specifically mentions both the feeding of the 5000 and the 4000 as separate events before Peter's confession (16: 9-10).

Peter's confession is the "first direct affirmation" of Jesus' messiahship. After the healing of the blind and dumb man, the multitudes speculated that Jesus might be the Son of David but were not fully convinced of this fact (Matt. 12: 23). The Canaanite woman expressly declared that He was such (Matt. 15: 22), but we are left in doubt about what she actually believed about the Messiah (Chamblin, p. 117). This leaves Matt. 9: 27, the desperate cry of the two blind men, which Carson explains as "extravagant devices used by desperate people, not maliciously, but in deep hope that their own needs might be met....It was possible to address Jesus with some Messianic title without complete conviction, or while still holding some major misconceptions about the nature of his messiahship [as per Chamblin], and therefore stopping short of unqualified allegiance or outright confession. If Peter had some misconception (vv. 21-23), how much more misconception would there be in disciples outside the Twelve?" (p. 365; words in brackets mine). It is because of so much misconception of the messianic reign that Jesus warns His disciples to "tell no one that He was the Christ" (v. 20). At any rate, the disciples' report on this occasion does not lead us to believe that the masses had any clear concept of Jesus as the Messiah promised in the OT.

It is quite likely that Jesus was not too concerned about the public's recognition of His identity (v. 13). It was fairly obvious even to mere human observation that the multitudes had not recognized Him for who He was—Christ the Son of God—but only as the healer and the one who gave them bread (Jn. 6: 26). The answer to the question given by the disciples yielded disappointing results (John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets), but nothing Jesus did not expect. But considering the fact that He had now lived among the twelve for about a year and a half, performing countless miracles and preaching about the kingdom of God, He was very interested to elicit (call forth) their response to the question, "But who do you say that I am?" (v. 15) Therefore, quickly brushing aside the guessing game of the multitudes, He pops the

question to the disciples. Speaking for the twelve, Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Right answer, but not one which Peter could have rendered himself without divine help.

“Flesh and blood” is a synecdoche (a part representing the whole) for the human person and, by extension, *human ability*. Such an understanding of Jesus’ identity—despite all the empirical proof supplied by miracles—demanded *supernatural* revelation, one which had not been given to everyone (Matt. 11: 25-27). Only the Father knows the Son, and only the Son knows the Father, plus those privileged people to whom the Son reveals the Father (v. 27). Such divine revelation is also at work in the opposite direction—the Father revealing the Son to whomever He pleases, and He hiding the Son from whomever He pleases (v. 25). In his gospel, the Apostle John confirms that the “children of God” are “born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God” (1: 13). The new birth is not the result of human heritage (even Jewish heritage), human will, or sexual desire. It is strictly the result of the will of God. Some 25 years later, the Apostle Paul contributed to this discussion by saying, “So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Rom. 9: 16). In fact, the connection between *faith* and the new birth is conspicuously (readily noticed) absent in John’s passage (D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 126) in order to highlight the sovereignty of the divine will.

From this point in the Matthew passage, things begin to go south (in the wrong direction) in the history of interpretation. Roman Catholicism insists on Jesus’ statement to Peter (v. 18) as the bedrock of his installation as the first pope of the Roman Catholic Church which, it argues, is the *only* authorized church. Assuming for the sake of the argument that Peter is being chosen as the first pope, we may ask where in the text we find Jesus making arrangements for Peter’s successor? Further, John the apostle is still alive when Peter is beheaded in Rome; yet Jesus, who knew what would happen to Peter and when (Jn. 21: 1), does not name John as Peter’s successor (Carson, p. 368). The other disciples, for their part, did not interpret Jesus’ statement as establishing Peter as their superior, for not too long after this they were still debating among themselves who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18: 1). The mother of James and John, on the other hand, was convinced that her two sons should be given that distinction and petitioned Jesus to let *them* sit on His left and right hand when His kingdom was realized. There would not have been a third seat for Peter (20: 20). But Jesus never planned on establishing a hierarchical system in which some of his disciples could lord it over others (20: 25-28; Hendriksen, p. 647) but made it plain to them that the servant-leader was the only valid model of spiritual leadership for His kingdom, a model which Peter himself heartily endorsed in his first epistle, calling himself a “fellow elder” (1 Pet. 5: 1-3). Finally, the Apostle Paul did not recognize Peter as the supreme pope of the church, much less the *infallible* pope, since he challenged him face to face in the presence of the Galatian church for being wishy-washy (hypocritical) in his fellowship with the Gentiles (Gal. 2: 11-14).

Thus, if the Roman Catholic Church wanted its first pope from apostolic stock, it should have chosen Paul instead of Peter. But then, what do we do about the rift (sharp disagreement) between Paul and Barnabas in which the two missionaries split up over a disagreement about Mark (Acts 15: 37-41), a disagreement in which Paul may have proved a bit hasty in his opinion of Mark (cf. Col. 4: 10; Philemon 24; 1 Pet. 5: 13; the same Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark)?



The traditional Protestant interpretation is that Peter's confession is not his alone, but the common confession of the other eleven disciples. Consequently, when Jesus is speaking to Peter, He is not speaking to Peter alone but Peter as representative of the twelve. Further, since the twelve are the foundation for the entire church in any age—along with the NT prophets (cf. Eph. 2: 20; Hendriksen, *Ephesians*)—then the confession of Peter is one which belongs to the whole confessing church of Jesus Christ and not to Peter alone. Jesus does not build His church upon poor Peter standing by himself—a shaky foundation, indeed, considering his denial of Christ less than a year later. Nor does He build it upon Peter standing with his so-called official successors (the popes of the Roman Catholic Church), many who have proven to be the worst specimens (examples) of human debauchery (godlessness) in the history of Christianity. Christ builds His church upon the ongoing confession of the **believing community** that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Just as Peter, along with the twelve, are given the keys to the kingdom of heaven and the power of binding and loosing (v. 19, this same authority is given to the church in Matt. 18: 18-20).

Nevertheless, there are several considerations which force the reader to take a closer look at Peter as the **primary recipient** of Jesus' address only three of which will be mentioned here. (1) It would be unnatural to apply the pronoun "this" from the phrase, "this rock", to any antecedent (the noun which corresponds to the pronoun) other than Peter, whose name means "rock". It is unconvincing to argue that while "this rock" is the Greek word *petra*, a feminine word, Peter's name is the masculine *Petros*, for his name had to be changed to a masculine form appropriate to his sex (Hendriksen, pp. 646-647; Chamblin, p. 118). Hendriksen also argues that *petra* and *petros* do not always have a different meaning; and, besides, Jesus was probably speaking in Aramaic anyway and used the word *kepha* both times in His address, "And I say to you, you are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my church" (pp. 646-647). Carson argues that were it not for the Protestant reaction to the Roman Catholic interpretation of this verse, "it is doubtful whether many would have taken 'rock' to be anything other than Peter" (p. 368). (2) Secondly, it is evident that Peter is the first among equals with reference to the rest of the disciples. In every listing of the twelve disciples, Peter's name always comes first. This is not the only time Jesus singles him from the rest out for special consideration, but does so again after Peter's failure and before His ascension into heaven (Jn. 21: 15-17; Hendriksen, p. 649). The first twelve chapters of the Acts of the Apostles are dominated by Peter's presence and ministry except for the death of Stephen and the conversion of Saul, and his name is mentioned more than 50 times in these chapters (Hendriksen, p. 648). It is Peter who preaches the sermon on the Day of Pentecost in which 3000 people are converted to faith in Christ (Acts 2).

(3) Third, it cannot be argued convincingly that having addressed Peter ("And I also say unto you that you are Peter") Jesus is now finished talking to Peter. The **second person singular pronoun** "you" is used in v. 19 which is accompanied by **second person singular verbs**—"I will give **you** the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever **you bind** on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever **you loose** on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." The pronouns and the verb forms are clearly referenced to a singular person, namely Peter (Hendriksen, p. 645-646).

In the opinion of Carson, Hendriksen, and Chamblin, Jesus is addressing Peter as the rock upon which He will build His church. But this does not imply that Peter is the pope of the church or that Jesus is establishing any kind of *ecclesiastical hierarchy* or that Jesus is addressing Peter to the exclusion of the other apostles. Peter is being addressed as an apostolic witness and confessor of the gospel (Chamblin, p. 119), the *first among equals*. Second, Jesus is not addressing Peter as he was by nature, a faltering (uncertain) nature which proved to be unreliable on the night Jesus was betrayed, but Peter as he would become by grace (Hendriksen, p. 647). Third, Peter is never considered as the *primary foundation stone (or rock)* of the church. Metaphors are often mixed in the Scriptures, the same metaphor being applied in different ways. In 1 Cor. 3: 11, Christ is declared the one and only foundation of the church upon whom everything else must be built while in Eph. 2: 19-20 the apostles and prophets are given this distinction, Christ being the cornerstone of that foundation. Here, Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, but in 1 Cor. 10: 4, the rock from which we drink is Christ. In Matt. 16, Peter is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but in Rev. 1: 17-18, Jesus has the keys of death and Hades, and in Rev. 3: 7 the key of David. In Matt. 18: 18, the same binding and loosing power given to Peter is given to the church, implying that the church possesses the keys to the kingdom. These differences do not imply contradictions in Scripture, but different ways of looking at the church and at Christ. All metaphors have to be interpreted in their context, and none of the metaphors of the NT give any impression that somehow Jesus is eclipsed (hidden) or supplanted by Peter or anyone else as the only foundation of His church (cf. Carson, p. 368).

Further, Jesus explicitly identifies Himself as the builder of the church (“*I* will build...”, not “*You* will build...”), and the church He is building is identified as “*My* church”, not “*Your* church”. Again, there is no mistaking who is the predominant figure in the passage. Jesus’ sovereign ownership of His church is never in question, and we do not have to ignore or distort the exegetical facts to protect the church from ecclesiological hijacking.

It is the church which is built upon Peter (considering all the qualifications mentioned above) that will storm the gates of hell (v. 18b). “Gates” are a synecdoche (part for the whole) for a city’s total fortifications, and if the gates are breached the city is lost. “Gates of Hades (or Hell)” considered together is a metonymy in which one thing is used to represent another, in this case Satan and his demonic forces (Hendriksen, p. 649). It could also mean “the powers of death” (Carson, p. 370) considering the fact that the last enemy which Christ shall put under His feet is death (1 Cor. 15: 22-26) and considering that death has come into the world through man’s sin occasioned by Satan’s temptation. The picture given is not the church on the run attempting to *defend* itself, but the church on the *offensive* with Hades (hell) attempting to defend *itself*. It is Hell, not the church, which is struggling to survive in this picture, and Christ has already foreseen Satan’s demise when His disciples came back with glowing reports of demons subject to their demands: “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning” (Lk. 10: 18). While the church in any particular locality or nation or denomination may fail, and has failed (Rev. 1-3; Gal. 4: 11); the church of Jesus Christ cannot, and will not, fail or be overpowered. It is the visible “outpost in history of the final eschatological community” (Carson, p. 370), of His will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus calls the believing community His “church” (*ekklesia*—*ek* (out) plus *kaleo* (call) or “called-out ones”)—those who have been called *out of* the world to be *in* the world but not *of*

the world (cf. Jn. 15: 19; 17: 6, 11, 14-16). This “called-out” church stands in continuity with the faithful remnant of the assembly of Israel in the OT (Carson, p. 369, citing Ladd, *NT Theology*, p. 110). Jesus does not conceive of His church as an *organized* institution, but rather as a living and breathing *organism* capable of nourishing its own members with the same sacrificial love with which He loved His church (Jn. 15: 9-12; Eph. 5: 25-27). This organism which Paul calls the “body of Christ” (Rom. 7: 4; 1 Cor. 10: 16; Eph. 4: 12) expresses itself *visibly*, not primarily through organized institutions, presbyteries, general assemblies, synods or dioceses—even less through brick and mortar, some of which has become the sole habitation of pigeons and lizards—but through works of faith, love, mercy, teaching and preaching by the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4). It is *this* church which will overpower death and hell, not the general assembly of the PCA, the PCU, the Church of Uganda, or any other denomination whose faith may one day cease to have any works (James 2: 14-26; Matt. 25: 31-46; Gal. 1: 8-9).

To Peter as the first among equals is given the *keys* to the kingdom of heaven and the binding and loosing power of that kingdom. Roman Catholicism again has misinterpreted this passage with an extreme *sacerdotalism* in which the decisions of the church hierarchy on earth, made in the present, are *ratified* in heaven in the future. Part of this error is due to the translation of the verbs in the future tense; thus, “whatever you shall bind on earth *shall be bound* in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth *shall be loosed* in heaven.” This makes it sound as if the decision of binding and loosing in heaven is contingent (dependent) upon the church on earth, and Jesus simply rubber-stamps whatever decision is made. But while it is true that “shall bind” and “shall loose” are subjunctive aorist verbs which can be translated as future (though not necessarily so; cf. NAB, 1995 and NKJV, 1982), the perfect participles in the sentence should not be translated as futures. The NASB of 1977, which translated them “shall be bound” and “shall be loosed”, corrected this error in 1995 by using the future periphrastic perfect (don’t get your brain in a knot about this term), “shall have been bound” and “shall have been loosed”. Carson notes that the verb “loose” (luo) has a variety of forms in the NT and that Matthew could have used a verb which demanded a future translation of “loose” which would have also applied to “bind” which does not have the same wide range of forms in the NT. In other words, Matthew purposely used a verb form which *could not be limited to a future translation*. (Was the Holy Spirit responding preemptively to the error of sacerdotalism?)

Carson finds “substantial help” in resolving this complex issue by comparing the context of Matt. 16: 19 with Lk. 11: 52, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the *key of knowledge*; you yourselves *did not enter*, and you *hindered* those who were entering.”

Clearly, then, by their approach to the Scriptures, Jesus says, they are making it impossible for those who fall under the malign [evil] influences of their teaching to accept the new revelation in Jesus and enter the kingdom. They take away “the key to knowledge.”

In contrast, Peter, on confessing Jesus as Messiah, is told he has received this confession by the Father’s revelation and will be given the keys of the kingdom: i.e., *by proclaiming “the good news of the kingdom”* (4: 23), which, by revelation he is increasingly understanding, he will *open the kingdom to many and shut it against many*. Fulfillments of this in Acts are not found in passages like [Acts] 15: 10 but in those like [Acts] 2: 14-39; 3: 11-26, so that by this means the Lord added to the church those who were being saved (2: 45), or otherwise put, Jesus was building his church (Matt. 16: 18). *But the same gospel proclamation alienates and excludes men; so we also find Peter shutting up the kingdom from men* (Acts 4: 1-12; 8: 20-23). The

periphrastic future perfects are then perfectly natural: Peter accomplishes this binding and loosing by proclaiming a gospel that *has already been given* and by making personal application on that basis (Simon Magus). Whatever he binds or looses *will have been bound or loosed, so long as he adheres to that divinely disclosed gospel*. He has no direct pipeline to heaven, *still less do his decisions force* heaven to comply; but he may be authoritative in binding and loosing because *heaven has acted first* (cf. Acts 18: 9-10). Those he ushers in or excludes have already been bound or loosed by God according to the gospel *already* revealed and which Peter, by confessing Jesus as the Messiah, has most clearly grasped (p. 373; emphasis mine).

Thus, we see that binding and loosing are decisions which *have already been made in heaven* according to the strict parameters (boundaries) established in the gospel. The *application* of binding and loosing—accepting men into the kingdom of God or forbidding them to enter—occurs *on earth* and is carried out by the church as God’s representatives who participate in proclaiming the kingdom. It is *not* as if God is *ratifying decisions made on earth*, but that we as representatives of the kingdom of God are *enforcing the entrance requirements* handed down to us. The entrance requirements to the kingdom are fixed and will not be altered by apostate churches or church leaders who have lost contact with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Carson’s interpretation above makes good sense when the Matthean passage is compared with Jn. 20: 23, “If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins have been forgiven* them; if you retain the sins of any, they *have been retained*.” In this verse, the “Greek perfects must be taken as retaining their normal force as perfects, because both verbs have acceptable present and future tenses used elsewhere...” (Carson, p. 372). In other words, if John had wished for a *future* meaning (“their sins *will be* forgiven”) he would have used a future tense to express a futuristic forgiveness of sins in heaven to correspond to a present forgiveness of sins on earth, as if forgiveness in heaven was dependent upon forgiveness on earth. But since John used a perfect tense, he intended to convey the idea that the action of the verb “to forgive” has already taken place *in the past in heaven* with *continuing results on earth in the present*.

Thus, far from presenting His kingdom as presently fulfilled with Himself sitting on the throne in Jerusalem as the Davidic king, Jesus is now entrusting His kingdom to mere mortals until the consummation of the kingdom at a future date (Carson, p. 373). The request of James’ and John’s mother that her sons be seated on the left and right of Jesus is not only inappropriate, but premature. First they must be willing to drink of the same cup of suffering that Jesus was willing to drink. Suffering must come before glory, and this is the same order which applies to every disciple of Jesus Christ.

***L. Jesus Foretells His Death and Second Coming; Peter’s Recession—Matt. 16: 21-28; Mk. 8: 31—9:1; Lk. 9: 22-27***

The connection between Peter’s confession and this passage is most clearly presented in Luke. As soon as He warns His disciples not to use the words “Jesus” and “Messiah” (or “Christ”) in the same breath for fear of arousing misconceptions, He begins to show them that their own conception of His messianic reign is confused. He will not immediately enter into the consummation of His kingdom, but must first suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and even be killed (Matt. 16: 21; Lk. 9: 22). Mark tells us that He was “stating the matter plainly” (v. 32). Such a dismal scene was not according to the disciples’ expectations of the messianic reign, and Peter’s rebuke of Jesus indicates that Jesus’ prediction of his death was

“radically new” to them (Lane, p. 304). They often argued about who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and shortly after Jesus reprimanded Peter on this occasion, they were still arguing the question (Matt. 18: 1) even up to the time of His betrayal (Lk. 22: 24). “...a rejected Messiah was incompatible with Jewish convictions and hopes. Peter’s reaction was therefore understandable but presumptuous, and it is not allowed to stand” (Lane, p. 304).

But Peter’s statement is far more menacing (threatening) than a simple misunderstanding of Messiah’s reign since it forms an implicit alliance (agreement) with Satan who tempted Jesus to enter into His messianic reign *without* the necessity of suffering and death (Matt. 4: 10). Yet, Jesus knew that His Father’s interests in His suffering and death must be fulfilled according to the Scriptures (Lk. 24: 44) so that His death would atone for the sins of His chosen people. Through atonement—not political and military conquest—God would create a new humanity zealous for good works (1 Pet. 2: 9; Eph. 2: 10) and capable of His original intention for mankind—godly dominion (Gen. 1: 26-28). The building of His kingdom would take place by planting the “grain of wheat” in the ground and letting it die (Jn. 12: 24), not by the normal man-made procedures of kingdom-building. The same Peter who is the “rock” upon whom Jesus will build His church becomes a “stumbling stone” (*skandalon*) of temptation to the Savior who dreads the thought of separation from His father necessitated in the crucifixion. And just as Peter now becomes a stumbling stone of temptation to Jesus, Jesus’ suffering and death will be *the* stumbling stone of the cross to the Jewish nation—“but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a *stumbling block* and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Cor. 1: 23).

The reference to “man’s” interest rather than “God’s interest” doubtless uncovers Peter’s selfish concern for personal glory in Christ’s kingdom—hence his, and their, great interest in who would be greatest in the kingdom.

In the verses which follow, Jesus “cuts to the chase”, effectively discouraging the Twelve from any ambitions of immediate promotion in the kingdom of heaven. Those who dare to follow him should not be “seeking great things” for themselves (Jer. 45: 5), for their lot in this life will be the same as the Master whom they follow. The cross was not a symbol of majesty and glory, but ignominious (demeaning) death, and just as Jesus voluntarily chose the cross as his instrument of death, so also His disciples must choose to deny themselves and take up their own crosses, not forcefully but voluntarily. As Lane soberly reminds us, by the time Mark wrote his gospel taking up the cross was not a metaphor, but a harsh reality. The condemned criminal would often be required to carry the cross-beam of the cross upon his own shoulders to the place of execution (Lane, p. 307; cf. Lk. 23: 26). Jesus made it clear that no one could take his life away from Him by force, but that He would lay down His life voluntarily (Jn. 10: 15-18). By using the expression “take up his cross” Jesus refutes the modern notion that *all* of our suffering is cross-bearing. Everyone suffers in this life, but not all suffering is the voluntary suffering of the cross by which we make conscious decisions about following Christ which may lead to depravation and suffering. By taking up the cross, we consciously and willingly give up something for Christ’s sake—money, power, popularity, friendship, time, personal goals, comfort, or even life itself. Without this conscientious, voluntary denial of self and self-interests there can be no following Christ as His disciple, for He demands our total allegiance.

In the paradoxes (seeming contradictions) which follow (Matt. 16: 25 and other references), Jesus, furthermore, makes it clear that there is **no alternative middle ground** for those who desire a less rigorous commitment to Him. The alternative to **loosing** one's life for His sake is **forfeiting** one's soul, not a lesser place in heaven (v. 26; cf. Lk. 9: 23 and Mk. 8: 34, in which all three verbs are imperatives or commands, not polite suggestions). Although there are rewards in heaven for faithful service (1 Cor. 3: 14; 1 Cor. 9: 17; Col. 3: 24), there is no heaven without self-denial. On one occasion Jesus set before the rich ruler the choice of following Him in self-denial or keeping his share of the world (Lk. 18: 18-25). When he decided to hang on to the world, Jesus did not go after the man with less rigorous demands: "Well, how about if you only sell half of your possessions? What about a fourth?" The issue was Lordship. Was **his money** Lord, or was **Jesus** Lord? Jesus does not have to ask the **same thing** from **everyone**; but He has the right to ask **anything** from **anyone** who wishes to come after Him. But whatever it is that we have to give up for His sake, the rewards for giving it up more than compensate for the loss, as Jesus would later indicate (Matt. 19: 27-30). For now, Jesus concentrates on one reward—a man's soul. How valuable is this? It is more valuable than the entire complex of the material world which can be gained only during one's short lifetime. There is **no profit** in the temporal gain of a material universe (with its material lusts) that is vanishing away (Matt. 5: 18; Mk. 13: 31) and one day will be burned up and replaced by another restored material universe in which only the righteous gain admittance (2 Pet. 3: 10-13; Rom. 8: 18-25; Rev. 22: 14-15). (There is little value in polishing the brass on your boat if it has a gaping hole and is sinking to the bottom of the ocean.) If these two alternatives were clearly understood—the world or one's soul—there would be no difficulty in choosing between the two. Jesus states the matter plainly by saying, "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" as if to say, "Do you really understand the two alternatives?"

As the example of the rich young ruler shows, the imperatives (commands) of taking up the cross and following Jesus are not limited to a few "special forces" troops who become real disciples, but to everyone hearing Jesus' message. The Marcan account says that the crowds were summoned to Jesus along with the disciples on this occasion and that all these words were said in their presence (8: 34). One is either a cross-bearing disciple or he is a non-believer in danger of losing his soul.

Beginning in Matt. 16: 27 (Lk. 8: 26; Mk. 8: 38), Jesus makes the transition from the **humiliation** of the cross to the **glory** of his coming. Mark and Luke make it plain that Jesus understood the humiliating implications of the cross to those listening to Him who would be ashamed of any association with a crucified Messiah: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words..." (Lk. 9: 26). However, He does not leave them with only a dead Savior, but assures them that one day the "Son of Man" would come again with all the glory which belongs to Him. His identification of Himself as the Son of Man was nothing new on this occasion but one He commonly used of Himself (Matt. 8: 20; 9: 6; 11: 19; Lk. 6: 5, 22; 7: 34). In some contexts His use of the designation was associated with His **humiliation** while in other contexts it is associated with His **exaltation**. The Son of Man has no permanent dwelling (Matt. 8: 20), is going to suffer (Matt. 17: 12), be put to death (26: 24), and be buried (12: 40). But He will rise again from the dead (17:9) and sit on His glorious throne (25: 31) (cf. Hendriksen; pp. 405-407). The context in which He now employs it is one of exaltation. No longer homeless on earth, He will come "in the glory of His Father with His angels" (Dan. 7: 9-13) and in judgment: "and will

then recompense every man according to his deeds” (Dan. 7: 11-12, a reference to the judgment upon Satan’s dominion). He would also employ the Daniel reference before the inquisition of Caiaphas who would interpret it as a blasphemous claim to deity and a justification for crucifixion (Matt. 26: 64-65).

But how is it that every man will be recompensed (repaid) for his “deeds” since salvation is by grace through faith alone apart from the works of the law (Rom. 4: 4-6)? There is no contradiction here, only *the acknowledgement that true faith is registered in good deeds while lack of faith is registered in bad deeds*. There will be rewards for faithful discipleship consisting of the primary reward, eternal life, along with secondary rewards (Matt. 19: 27-30). In the Matt. 19 passage, Jesus answers Peter’s question: “what then will there be for us”, not with a stern rebuke for desiring a reward but with a straightforward answer in which He distinguishes between “eternal life” and additional rewards: brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and houses (or farms) which also will be given for following him, as well as the distinguished honor of “judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (to be discussed later; cf. Mk. 10: 28-30; Lk. 18: 28-30). The Apostle Paul said, “For we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed *for his deeds* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5: 10). Neither Jesus nor the apostles considered justification by faith and the final judgment and reward upon our works as irreconcilable, as the following verses will attest (Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 276, some passages cited in Barnett).

Matt. 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *he who does the will of My Father* who is in heaven *will enter*. 22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'”

Jn. 14:15 “If you love Me, you will *keep My commandments*.”

Jn. 15: 10 “If you *keep My commandments*, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.”

Jn. 5: 28-29 “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the *good deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the *evil deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.

Lk. 6:46 “Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and *do not do* what I say?”

Rom. 2:5-11 “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS *DEEDS*: to those who by perseverance in *doing good* seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and *do not obey the truth*, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who *does evil*, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who *does good*, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”

Rom. 14:10 “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For *we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.*”

Eph. 6:7-8 “With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will *receive back* from the Lord, whether slave or free.”

Col. 3:25 “For he who does wrong will *receive the consequences* of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.”

Rev. 2:23 “ ‘And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your *deeds.*’ ”

Rev. 20:12 “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their *deeds.*”

Rev. 22:12 “ ‘Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to *what he has done.*’ ”

Concerning retribution, the judgment of evil deeds, certain crimes in the OT were punishable by death and others by less extreme punishments, then we should expect those who are guilty of extreme sins in this life to be judged accordingly in the next life. Joseph Stalin, Premier of the Soviet Union during the 1930’s and 40’s, was responsible for the death of 30 million Soviet citizens. We should expect him to receive a harsher sentence in hell than someone who killed only one person, or someone who lived a very moral life but never repented of his self-righteousness. In Luke 12: 47 Jesus speaks of servants receiving many lashes or few on the basis of prior knowledge—the more knowledge of the master’s will, the greater number of lashes for disobeying his will. He also reprimands the three impenitent cities for not believing in him in light of all the miracles he had performed in them, warning them that it would be more tolerable for Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for them (Matt. 11: 20-24). Just as there are degrees of reward in heaven, there also will be degrees of punishment (Hendriksen, p. 658).

The interpretation of Matt. 16: 28; Mk. 9: 1; and Lk. 9: 27 has been diverse. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, pp. 659-660) believes that Jesus is referring to the *whole complex of salvation events* including His resurrection, the coming of His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, and His ascension with power to the Father’s right hand. By means of Christ’s rule in heaven and the power of the Spirit, the church goes forth with the message of the kingdom by which the Gentiles are converted to the gospel, a series of victories which would include the whole book of Acts extending over 30 years after His death (Matt. 28: 19-20; Acts). The day of which He speaks is most assuredly not the second coming, the timing of which He admitted ignorance (Matt. 24: 36; Hendriksen, p. 659).



Another interpretation (Lane, pp. 313-314) takes Jesus' statement as a reference to the Transfiguration event *six days later*, but as Carson has observed, Jesus' introduction is somewhat dramatic for an event which will occur so soon—"Truly, I say to you, there are some of those standing here *who shall not taste death* until..." If the transfiguration was the event in question, He could simply have said, "Some of you will see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." The promise of continued life until this event occurred would seem unnecessary in light of its immediate fulfillment. In favor of Lane's interpretation is the fact that Christ has just warned that some of those listening (including the crowds) would be ashamed of Him when He is delivered over to be crucified, and, by implication, would be tempted to deny *Christ* rather than denying *self*, which may result in persecution and death (Mk. 8: 34). Christ then encourages them by saying that some of them would not suffer a martyr's death until they saw clear evidence of the Messiah's power and glory. This interpretation is plausible (believable), but it still does not sufficiently answer the objection that the transfiguration of Christ is "not far enough off" to justify a reference to some tasting death (Carson, p. 380).

Carson also disagrees with part of Hendriksen's view for the same reason. The resurrection, the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as well as the conversion of many Jews in the days which follow Pentecost will occur too soon for Jesus to talk about *some* being able to see it happen before dying. Other than Judas, practically *everyone* will be witness to these events in some way. Instead, Jesus is speaking in a generic (general) way of all the dynamic events which will follow in the wake of His resurrection, ascension, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, including the conversion of Gentiles all over the Roman Empire as a result of Paul's ministry (Carson, p. 382). This position is close to Hendriksen's, leaving out any reference to the resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost.

### ***M. The Transfiguration—Matt. 17: 1-13; Mk. 9: 2-13; Lk. 9: 28-36***

The first problem we encounter with the transfiguration is when it happened. Was it six days after Peter's confession (Matthew and Mark) or was it eight days later (Luke)? Luke is probably including the day of Peter's confession plus the day of the transfiguration itself while Matthew and Luke omit these two days in the timing of the event. Thus, there is no contradiction (Geldenhuys, p. 282, footnote). Another possibility is that Luke, a Greek, is rounding the figure off as about a week, which in Hellenistic culture consisted of eight days (Carson, p. 384; also Liefeld, p. 926).

There are also other differences in details. Luke leaves out the verb "transfigured" (*metamorphoo*) but makes note of Jesus' face being different. All three Synoptists make note of His clothes being a brilliant white. Matthew and Mark record that the disciples, upon hearing the voice out of heaven, were terrified, and only Matthew that they fell face down to the ground. The change in Jesus' face is registered in the verb, *metamorphoo*, which means a change in form. In this case, Matthew tells us what this change consisted of: "His face shone like the sun" (v. 2). This phenomenon (an unusual experience) also occurred with one other person in the OT who serves as a type of Christ, Moses. At the second writing of the Law in Exodus 34, Moses descended from the mountain after 40 days and 40 nights with his face shining because he had been speaking with Yahweh (v. 29). Although Peter, James, and John had been overcome with fatigue and were sleeping, they woke up in time to see Jesus' "**glory** and the two men standing with Him" (Lk. 9: 32). The significance of the transfiguration, which consisted in His *face and*

*clothes shining as the sun* (Matt. 17: 2), along with the presence of the *cloud* (cf. Ex. 33: 9-10; 34: 5) would not have been lost on the three Jewish disciples. (Luke, writing to Gentiles, does not mention His face shining, but only being “different”, since the shining of His face would have meant nothing to his Gentile audience unfamiliar with the history of Moses.) Peter and the other two disciples would doubtless have remembered the glory of Moses’ face whenever he appeared before the Lord.

Coming as it does shortly after Peter’s confession and Jesus’ self-disclosure of His suffering and death, the transfiguration is a significant confirmation of Peter’s confession that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God. As Moses spoke face to face with God as His friend (Ex. 33: 11)—something no one else could do—so Jesus speaks face to face with God, not merely as a friend, but as the One whom God calls “My beloved *Son* with whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 17: 5; cf. Matt. 3: 17); “My Son, My chosen One” (Lk. 9: 35). There is no *equality* with Moses or with Elijah, something the voice from heaven makes clear; there is definite *superiority* which is demonstrated by at least three things in the text. First, frightened out of his wits, but nevertheless always having something to say, Peter suggests building *three* tabernacles, one for each of the three distinguished men, possibly in commemoration of the glory of God shining in the face of Moses during the “tabernacled” history of Israel, or as a commemoration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Carson, p. 385). Mark notes that Peter didn’t know *what* to say, and Luke that he didn’t *realize* what he was saying. Possibly Luke means that Peter didn’t *understand the significance* of what he was saying which may have been, in part, *justification* for what God says. At any rate, Peter is interrupted while the words are still in his mouth (Matt. and Mark), and God says, “*This* is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to *Him!*” Risking an interpretive paraphrase, “Be quiet, Peter! There is no need for three tabernacles to bestow *equal honor* upon these three men. This Jesus is *uniquely* My beloved Son, superior to both Moses and Elijah, the Law or the Prophets, and He is *uniquely* the One in whom I am well-pleased.”

Chamblin (pp. 126-127) notes that throughout the passage the focus of attention is clearly upon Jesus rather than Moses and Elijah. Aroused from their sleep, the disciples are confronted not by the glory of Moses and Elijah, but by the glory of Christ (Lk. 9: 32), and after being stricken with terror and then assured of their safety, they see no one but Jesus (Matt. 17: 7-8; Mk. 9: 8). When reflecting upon the transfiguration later in life, Peter remarks upon those things which left an indelible (cannot be erased) impression upon his mind, “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses of His majesty*. For when He *received honor and glory from God the Father*, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain” (2 Pet. 1: 16-18; cited in Chamblin). As the glory of Christ alone is highlighted in the Synoptic accounts, Peter does not even mention the glory of Moses and Elijah on that occasion, a glory totally eclipsed (hidden) by the glory of Christ (Chamblin, p. 127).

Peter has just confessed Jesus to be “the Son of the living God” (16: 16); now God declares, “This is my Son....” (17: 15). So while the transfigured Jesus recalls Moses on the mountain, he also recalls *Yahweh on the mountain*. The brilliance which shines forth from Jesus is not (as with Moses) a *reflected* glory but an *inherent* glory, the glory of Yahweh himself (cf. Jn. 1: 14). Moses, Elijah and the disciples are with Jesus as

Moses was with Yahweh. As both Moses and Elijah conversed with Yahweh on Sinai, so here too both of them converse with Jesus, Yahweh incarnate and now disclosed in glory. “Moses meets ‘God with us’ on a new cloud-covered Sinai just as he met God on the old cloud-covered Sinai” (Gundry, 344). There is an important difference, however. In face of the disciples’ (quite predictable) fear over the awesome presence of God, Jesus—God incarnate—*comes* to them, *touches* them and *speaks* to them to dispel their fear (v. 7)....Jesus, “God with us,” bridges the gap between the terrifying majesty of God the Father and the frail human beings trembling with fear before him on the mountain (Chamblin, p. 127, emphasis his).

Secondly, the disciples are not instructed to listen to Moses or Elijah—the Law or the Prophets—as the definitive (final) communicators of God’s will; instead, they are instructed to “listen to Him”, Christ, as the conclusive Word who fulfills the Law and the Prophets. Writing some years later, the author of *Hebrews* sets the transfiguration in theological perspective: “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the *prophets in many portions and in many ways*, in these last days *has spoken to us in His Son*, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the *radiance of His glory* and the exact representation of His nature....” (Heb. 1: 1-3a). Both verbs are aorist, indicating God’s definitive action of speaking in the prophets “long ago” but now in “*the last*” days definitively in the Son, having *superseded and fulfilled* the communication through the prophets. While the prophets—including Moses and Elijah—spoke in types and shadows, the Son fulfills the types and shadows and is the “substance” of all that was communicated in the OT revelation (Col. 2: 17). Besides, it is the Christ of whom Moses spoke when he informed the Israelite nation that God would provide another prophet like him (like Moses) from among their own countrymen, and that they must “listen” to everything he says to them (Deut. 18: 18-19; cf. Chamblin, p. 126; Carson 386).

Therefore, the transfiguration event serves to concretize (to make specific in an observable way) the deity of Christ and His status as the promised Messiah, His superiority to all other prophets and prophetic pronouncements, and His fulfillment of all the prophets. It also serves, as Chamblin has pointed out, to distinguish between the restrained and prefigured grace of the Old Covenant and the magnified grace of the New Covenant in which God’s people can now appear boldly before the throne of grace to find help in time of need (cf. Heb. 4: 14-16; 12: 18-24). The means to this new administration of grace is mentioned only in Luke who records what the three were speaking about: “His *departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem*” (v. 31). The salvation accomplished in the “departure” (His resurrection and ascension) would also accomplish salvation for Moses, Elijah, and all other believers in the OT economy who looked forward to the once and for all sacrifice for their sins. It is this “accomplished departure” to which all the prophets of the OT were looking as they attempted to understand the prophetic utterances given to them by the Holy Spirit: “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow” (1 Pet. 1: 10-11).

Matthew and Mark report that Jesus instructs the three disciples to tell no one what had happened until He had risen from the dead, and Luke that they obeyed His orders. It is doubtful that the prohibition included the other disciples, but only the multitudes which would be tempted once again (Jn. 6: 15) to make Jesus their earthly king, thus bypassing the atonement He came to accomplish. Nevertheless, whatever Jesus was now whispering in His disciples ears would one day be proclaimed upon the housetops (Lk. 12: 3). For now, the multitudes must be sheltered from truth they would not understand; but after His resurrection, the same truth could be used to

confirm the fact that Jesus was, in fact, the One He claimed to be. Even the three disciples comprising the “inner circle” of the Twelve did not understand “what rising from the dead meant” (Mk. 8: 10); thus, there is little doubt that such important truth would be lost on the multitudes until the resurrection was an established fact.

The disciples’ confusion about the coming of Elijah is as follows. Malachi 4: 5-6 predicts the coming of Elijah who “will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers....” before the Messiah’s reign. If Elijah must come first, and if his ministry produces the restoration promised in Malachi, then why was it necessary for Christ to die? In response to this question, Jesus first quotes Malachi as originally spoken in the future tense (“will restore”) and then interprets its fulfillment. Elijah, figuratively speaking, has already come in the person of John the Baptist, and by preaching the kingdom of God faithfully, he accomplished his mission. However, his faithful preaching was rejected, and John the Baptist was executed. In this way, John prefigures exactly what will happen to Jesus. How, then, did he accomplish his mission of restoring the Jews? Instead, did he not utterly fail? Not at all. Had the Jews accepted John’s message, they would have not have rejected Jesus, and He would not have been crucified for the sins of His people. Thus, in quite an unexpected and unforeseen way, John the Baptist accomplishes his mission of restoring the people of Israel precisely by being rejected, even as Jesus was rejected (Chamblin, pp. 127-128; see also Carson, p. 389; Lane, pp. 324-327).

As Christians, we often ask the same question when suffering and rejection come our way. Why is my suffering necessary when Jesus has already accomplished salvation? The answer is that Christians complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions (Col. 1: 24). This in no way implies that there is anything lacking in the efficacy (effectiveness) of Christ’s atonement, but there *is* something lacking in the application of this atonement to individuals throughout the world. As self-sacrifice was the means by which God objectively saved the world from sin and death in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, self-sacrifice continues to be the most effective way of pointing people to the sacrifice of Christ in a subjective, person by person basis. Nothing but the atoning work of Christ can explain why so many people are willing to deny themselves for the sake of others.

***N. The Healing of the Demonic—Matt. 17: 14-21; Mk. 9: 14-29; Lk. 9: 37-43a***

Mark gives us the clearest context and the most detail for this episode. Jesus and the three, Peter, James and John, come down from the mountain to the rest of the disciples. They had been surrounded by a crowd and a group of scribes who had come to investigate this incident for the purpose of finding evidence against Jesus (Lane, p.330; cf. 3: 22-30; 7: 1-5; cited in Lane). A man brings his son to Jesus for healing whom he had originally brought to the nine disciples who were left behind when Jesus and the inner circle of three were on the mountain. From the description of the son’s symptoms presented in Mk. 9: 18, he had the condition of epilepsy and was presently having a grand mal seizure. Doubtless this would be the final conclusion of many modern interpreters who question the existence of demon possession. But the text leaves no doubt about the source of the boy’s problems, however similar to epilepsy. (Satan is not very original, and the demonic possession was apparently manifesting itself in the very form of epilepsy.) Something about demon possession may be learned from this episode. While the

purpose of Jesus' coming was to save mankind and to restore him to the original image of God in righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4: 24), Satan's concern is to destroy this image by destroying man (Lane, 331). Notice that the demon would often throw the boy in fire or water. In his helpless condition of unconsciousness, such measures would have killed the boy on any number of occasions had it not been for the constant diligence of his father. The physical exhaustion from the spirit's presence was so great that the boy appeared dead as the spirit left him (Mk. 9: 26).

Immediately Jesus rebukes and casts the evil spirit out of the boy (Matt. 17: 18; Mk. 9: 25-26). The twelve disciples had previously been able to cast out demons (Mk. 6: 7-13). The present episode stands out in the Synoptics because it is the only reported failure, and the disciples desired to know the reason. Jesus rebukes not only the demon, but the disciples, as well, in very harsh terms which are recorded by all three Synoptists—including Matthew who was among the nine rebuked: "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" Doubtless the rebuke is directed also to the now skeptical father who had lost confidence in Jesus' power because of the disciples' failure (Mk. 9: 22; Lane, p. 332). For almost three years now Jesus had been healing the sick and casting out demons, and He was weary of the unbelieving "generation" of Jews whom He had come to save. He was ready to go home to His father.

The reason they had been unsuccessful in casting out the demonic spirit was because of the littleness of their faith, primarily an assessment of the poor character of their faith since faith even the size of a mustard seed can "move mountains". Moving mountains was a common proverb for overcoming seemingly insurmountable difficulties (Carson, p. 391; cf. Isa. 40: 4; 49: 11; Matt. 21: 21-22; 1 Cor. 13: 2; cited in Carson); thus, we should understand the expression as an intended figure of speech rather than a literal promise. The Marcan account has Jesus adding another reason for failure, the lack of prayer (v. 29). Some manuscripts add "and fasting" to v. 29. In the Matthean account, some ancient manuscripts do not include v. 21, "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." The best manuscript evidence does not include any reference to fasting, but to prayer alone. ***The reference to prayer is the key to understanding why the disciple's failure deserved such a sharp rebuke.*** Having been given the gift of exorcising evil spirits, they had begun to assume—to their present embarrassment—that the gift operated automatically (Carson, p. 392). But they were mistaken. The gift bestowed was the gift of God through the divine medium of Jesus Christ, and if they were able to cast out demons, they must always petition God to ***help*** them do it. Otherwise, they had no power to accomplish the task. Thus, Jesus explains their failure on the basis of prayerlessness and foolish independence, as if by their own abilities they had been able previously to cast out demons. Given this interpretation, the application to Christian ministry is obvious. ***Past success cannot guarantee present success.*** Whatever "success" we have in ministry—and we often cannot distinguish between success and failure—is not the result of our own abilities, but the willingness of God to condescend by permitting us to be used at all. Human ministry, therefore, is grace in action.

All three Synoptists report this episode as happening immediately after the transfiguration. Jesus descends from a glorious "mountain-top" experience to the dark realities of Jewish unbelief, even the unbelief of His own disciples. Considering the similarity of the transfiguration and the

baptism of Jesus, along with the voice from heaven on both occasions—“This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased” (cf. Matt. 17: 5 with 3: 17)—it is likely that this event is paralleled with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. “The return from the glory of the transfiguration to the reality of demonic possession serves to reinforce the theme that Jesus enters into his glory only through confrontation with the demonic and the suffering this entails (cf. 9: 19)” (Lane, p. 329). The strong reaction of the Apostle Paul to the triumphalism (overestimation of one’s success) of the Corinthians—basking in their spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 4: 6-9)—is, thus, understandable. If Jesus was never afforded the earthly privilege of moving from victory to victory with unimpeded progress, it is pure presumption to believe that any of us will be able to do so. There will be victories, but there will also be the stern reality of demonic opposition attempting to demolish every spiritual edifice we build.

***O. Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection—Matt. 17: 22-23; Mk. 9: 30-32; Lk. 9: 43b-45***

There is no clear connection in *Matthew* or *Mark* between these verses and the verses which precede them, but Luke includes them in connection with the preceding miracle: “But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples....” It would appear that after the interruption of the demoniac boy, Jesus simply picks up the discussion with the disciples which he left off just before the transfiguration (Carson, p. 393). It is clear that the disciples do not yet understand anything about the resurrection, but it is beginning to sink in that Jesus is going to die, a fact that causes them severe grief.

***P. The Miracle of the Tribute Money—Matt. 17: 24-27***

Matthew and Mark help us to link this episode to the argument among the disciples about who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. It takes place after they had come to Capernaum (Matt. 17: 24; cf. Mk. 9: 33-34). The two drachma tax was a temple tax collected for the continuing maintenance of the temple (Hendriksen, p. 678; Ex 30: 12-14, cited in Hendriksen). It amounted to about two days’ wages. Those who collected this tax first approach Peter who then asks Jesus about the tax. The response given and the miracle which follows are continuing evidence to Peter that Jesus is the Son of God, although Peter probably did not understand their significance until later. The “kings of the earth” collect various kinds of taxes from their subjects, including customs taxes and poll taxes to maintain their kingdoms, but they do not require their own sons to pay such taxes since they enjoy a special relationship to them. In the same way, God requires His subjects, the covenant people of Israel, to pay the temple tax but not His only begotten Son who enjoys a unique relationship to the Father. Consequently, Jesus is declaring himself exempt from the temple tax.

However, so as not to give unnecessary offense in this matter, Jesus agrees to pay the tax. On the other hand, he pays it in such a manner that discloses his complete freedom and voluntary action in paying it. Rather than paying it directly, He performs a miracle demonstrating that God the Father will provide the tax for Him without personal cost. His humility in paying the tax at all rather than disputing with the tax collector serves as a transitional pericope (short story) to His teaching of humility in chapter 18. His disciples will argue among themselves about who among them is greatest in the kingdom of heaven; yet, the Son of God is willing to humble Himself by paying the temple tax not only for Himself, but Peter as well (Carson, p. 395).

***Q. The Fourth Great Discourse in Matthew—Matt. 18: 1-35***

Matthew 18 should be interpreted as a complete unit comprising the fourth great discourse of Matthew's gospel (Chamblin, Hendriksen, and Carson). It is concluded in 19: 1 with the words, "And it came about that when Jesus *had finished* these words..." which is a characteristic closing of the discourses of Jesus in *Matthew* (cf. 7: 28; 13: 53; 11: 1). Carson entitles it "Life Under Kingdom Authority" (p. 395) while Chamblin opts for "life in the Christian community" (p. 132). Throughout the chapter Jesus is highlighting those vital areas which are essential "for the health and growth of the new community....the *character* and the *attitudes* of the persons comprising the church, leaders and members alike" (Chamblin, p. 132). The discourse begins with the proper model (Chamblin) of the kingdom citizen.

***1. The Little Child (Christ's Model of a Kingdom Citizen)—Matt. 18: 1-6; Mk. 9: 33-37; Lk. 9: 46-48***

This pericope (short passage) is introduced in three different ways. Matthew indicates that the disciples came to Jesus with the question: "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Mark tells us that Jesus approached *them* with the question, but that they remained silent. Luke tells us that Jesus knew that they had been discussing this question along the way to Capernaum. The discrepancies are easily reconciled. Along the way to Capernaum, the disciples had been arguing among themselves about who was the "*big man*" among them. Jesus, of course, knew what they had been talking about and gives them an opportunity to confess openly about their carnal ambitions. Although they were ashamed to say anything at first, they had to admit to their discussion since Jesus knew their hearts anyway. Thus, Matthew's condensed version of the story.

The debate about who was the greatest is certainly strange in light of Jesus' self-disclosure of His impending death which illustrates just how much in the dark the disciples were. Had they completely forgotten the discussion, or had they successfully blocked it out of their minds? At any rate, there appears to be little concern over Jesus' fate but much concern over their own (cf. Hendriksen, p. 687). Such futile discussions continue until the very evening before His crucifixion (Lk. 22: 24). Accustomed to using object lessons and parables, Jesus summons a child to Himself to illustrate one central truth. Since the discussion at hand is about a person's *status in the kingdom of heaven*, He selects someone who has no pretense of status, not merely in the kingdom of heaven, but even in normal Jewish society. The "little child" was possibly Peter's little child since they were probably visiting in Peter's home in Capernaum (Matt. 4: 13, 18). There was nothing great about this child. He was born into a humble home, and he had not yet reached the age of maturity whereby he could be recognized as an adult with certain social privileges. "The status of the child under Jewish law is reflected in the common rabbinic triad 'deaf and dumb, weak-minded, under age'" (Chamblin, p. 133, citing Jeremias, *NT Theology*, p. 227, n. 2). Yet, Jesus says, unless a person recognizes his humble estate and is willing to admit that he has nothing to offer God by way of position, rank, or achievement, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is not occupied by those who promote themselves or push themselves to the front of the line but by those who are willing to take the last place and most humble positions.

Jesus is not addressing those who are now outside the kingdom of heaven and desiring to enter, but those who are professing members of the new community, his disciples (18: 1; no one else seems to be in the audience throughout the address in chapter 18). Nothing is to be taken for granted. Unless these same disciples who have followed Jesus for almost three years humble themselves as this little child, they not only will not occupy any grand place in the kingdom, they will not enter the kingdom at all (Chamblin, p. 132). It becomes clear in the remainder of the discourse that “little ones” is not a designation limited to literal children, but a reference to anyone, child or adult, who embraces his lowly estate (v. 4). Greatness in the kingdom will be judged according to the supreme example set forth by the Lord Jesus Himself, who, although the very essence of God, humbled Himself by being born in the likeness of men with all their frailties, yet without sin (Phil. 2: 6-7). Greatness in the kingdom, therefore, is not defined as arrogating (seizing without right) to ourselves privileges and status which are not ours, but in laying down the privileges and rights we presently possess in order to serve others and elevate others in the sight of God (Mk. 9: 34). John the Baptist summarizes this kingdom philosophy when he says of Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3: 30). But this same philosophy must also be applied to *others* in the community of faith, not just Christ: “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...” (Phil. 2: 3-5). It is clear from Christ’s personal identification with His little ones (see below) that when we decrease in our self-estimation for the sake of others, our estimation of Christ is increasing.

## **2. Protecting His Little Ones from Sin—Matt. 18: 5-11; Mk. 9: 42-50**

The prevailing interest of Christ throughout the chapter is His love and care for His “little ones”, a love and care which must be shared by anyone *responsible* for the future well-being of these little ones. Thus the object of Jesus’ address, though generally to the whole community of professing believers, is particularly to the disciples (v. 1) and, by extension, to any *future leaders* of the church who must care for others. Recently Peter had been rebuked individually for failing to put his mind on God’s interests and, instead, putting them on man’s interest—particularly as it related to the question of his preconceived notion of the nature of the Messiah’s reign (Matt. 16: 23). The Messiah’s reign must come through self-denial and death as opposed to military victory and emancipation from Roman rule, the typical Jewish misconception. Now the disciples as a whole group have been rebuked for thinking in terms of personal promotion in the kingdom of heaven. ***Their whole orientation to the kingdom of heaven was selfish and self-serving, the important consideration being what they would receive as Christ’s disciples rather than what they could give.*** On the other hand, Christ’s orientation has been from the very first a matter of what He would *give*. The disciple’s whole orientation and world-view, as well as their interpretation of the kingdom, must change for them to be effective leaders in Christ’s new community. Unless they change, they will be incapable of taking care of Christ’s little ones. In fact, they must first see *themselves* as Christ’s little ones before they will be capable of caring for such.

Jesus so identifies with His little ones that whatever treatment they receive from others is the same treatment given to Him (vv. 5-6). If they are well-received, so is Christ; but if they are



treated with contempt and caused to stumble in faith, Christ is also thus treated (cf. Matt. 25: 31-46). The seriousness of the offense in causing anyone who believes in Christ to stumble is presented in graphic language. It would be better for him—before being guilty of such an offense—to have had a huge donkey-drawn millstone tied to his neck and drowned in the sea. Exactly what kind of offense would elicit such a violent warning?

It is noted first that the offense is toward little ones “who believe in me”. Stumbling is a reference to sin; thus, the offender has caused or enticed the believer to fall into sin. The threat of enticement can come from *within* the church or from *without*, but the evidence seems to suggest that Jesus was speaking more of enticements from within (inside the church) since the entire chapter is devoted to life within the community of faith (Chamblin, p. 133). And since the directives given here are particularly suited to the disciples and other leaders in the church, Jesus must be addressing primarily those leaders who cause others to sin because of what they *teach* or by the substandard *life* they live (cf. 1 Pet. 5: 2-3). It is inevitable that stumbling blocks (enticements) will come as temptations to believers. To avoid them we would have to go out of the world. God has sovereignly ordained the presence of temptations, but woe to those through whom they come, for God’s sovereignty does not eliminate man’s responsibility (Acts 4: 27; 2: 23; 27: 24, 31).

It should be expected that the more potent temptations to sin would come from other believers, particularly those esteemed by the congregation. It is an easy thing for a well-known leader who has the reputation for knowledge (deserved or not) to influence a new believer, especially if the leader has a very winsome, dynamic personality. About two years ago I saw a TV documentary about a young woman who was seduced by her pastor twice her age. He had convinced her that sexual sins did not apply to him, and that he lived on a higher spiritual level which was beyond such sins. It was, therefore, permissible for her to have sex with him. To top it all off, the affair went on for several years. It is difficult for those who have grown up with a Christian heritage to understand how this woman could be so thoroughly deceived, but we have to realize that there are many professing believers throughout the world (some of whom are true believers) who are not well-versed in the Christian life-style or world-view. They can easily fall prey to such self-seeking, self-serving theology, a fact which Paul notes in his final letter to Timothy: “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy....**holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power**; avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and **captive weak women** weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3: 1-2, 5-7). In another place, Paul calls such people “savage wolves” which “will come in among” the flock, men who arise from among the church (possibly from the elders themselves), “speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20: 29-30).

The offenses do not have to be sexual in nature, but can span a broad spectrum of sins. The health and wealth preachers who are tempting people to believe that it is God’s priority for all of them to be prosperous and healthy tempt people to believe in a god who exists only to satisfy our material needs, not God who is making a kingdom of priests and a holy nation zealous for good works. Thus, they are leading people into the worship of a god made in man’s image, the god of self disguised as the God of the Bible. What will befall such preachers of a false gospel? It

would have been better for them to have had a millstone tied around their necks and to have been drowned in the sea long before entering the pulpit.

Having addressed stumbling blocks *external* to the little ones, Jesus now addresses *internal* stumbling blocks (Chamblin, p. 134). Little ones must not only be on their guard against those who will entice them into sin, but they must beware of *self-enticement*. We often give the devil far too much credit, as if he is personally behind every sin we commit wielding irresistible temptations—“The devil made me do it.” The Apostle James (Jesus’ half-brother) believed otherwise and warned, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by *evil*, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by *his own lust*. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1: 13-15). Notice that James does not say that God cannot be tempted by the *devil*—which is also true—but by *evil*, the same evil which tempts us. (The Greek word in James is *kakon*, evil thing, whereas in Matt. 6: 13 it is either *ponerov*, evil thing, or *poneros*, evil one, a reference to the devil or an evil man.) Most of our sin is not the result of full frontal assaults from demonic powers—as we would like to claim—but self-enticements from evil which is always present around us and in us. Much to our dismay, our worst enemy is often ourselves.

So what do we do with such internal enticements? As in the Sermon on the Mount (5: 30), radical surgery of a spiritual nature is necessary. Literally cutting off the hands and feet and plucking out the eye would do little good since we can just as easily sin with one of each. With one eye we can lust; with one hand we can steal or embrace another man’s wife; with one foot we can limp our way to do evil. The subject at hand is the presence of stumbling blocks which entice us to sin. Thus, drastic measures are appropriate and necessary to remove ourselves as much as possible from tempting situations. “Take drastic action in getting rid of whatever in the natural course of events will tempt you into sin” (Hendriksen, p. 303). Hendriksen goes on to mention several other lessons from this text and that of Matt. 5: 29-30 (cf. quotation from Hendriksen on Matt. 5: 27-32; p. 64).

Having said that we cannot make a literal application of this text, we may without qualification say that it would be better *literally* to go through life lame, crippled, and blind in one eye or both than to be cast into hell. Can we all agree on that one? Were it possible to remove all temptations from ourselves with such literal measures and, thereby, ensure the certainty of standing firm in our faith, then we would, or should, seriously consider self-mutilation—like the church father, Origen, who castrated himself. Thankfully, Jesus has not left us to ourselves, and there is further teaching in John’s gospel and throughout the NT epistles that the divine method of saving us from self-enticements and ensuring our sanctification and final glorification is *not* self-mutilation (or self-works) but the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and enables us to obey the truth. It is not subtraction, but *addition*, which saves us—the addition of the Holy Spirit who is God in us “to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2: 13). Left to ourselves, none of us would endure to the end (Matt. 10: 22). Stumbling blocks both external and internal would most certainly destroy us. What Jesus is emphasizing here is *not* that we must sanctify ourselves and save ourselves from sin, but that the believer must not be *passive* in this struggle, but *active*. Christians who believe—and have been taught to believe—that they do not have to struggle against sin by availing themselves of the means of grace (prayer, Bible study, fellowship, corporate worship, etc.), but that God will do all the work of sanctification for

them mystically and miraculously, are being deceived and are deceiving themselves. Commenting on Phil. 2: 12-13, John Murray explains the dynamic between divine and human involvement.

God's working in us is not suspended because we work, nor our working suspended because God works. Neither is the relation strictly one of co-operation as if God did his part and we did ours so that the conjunction or coordination of both produced the required result. God works in us and we also work. But the relation is that *because God works we work*. All working out of salvation on our part is the *effect of God's working in us*, not the willing to the exclusion of the doing and not the doing to the exclusion of the willing, but both the willing and the doing. And this working of God is directed to the end of enabling us to will and to do that which is well pleasing to him....*The more persistently active we are in working, the more persuaded we may be that all the energizing grace and power is of God* (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 148-149; emphasis mine).

The additional statement in Mk. 9: 48, "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" is a reference "Gehenna" ("hell") of Mk. 9: 47 and Matt. 18: 9. Gehenna is the Greek form of the Hebrew words "ge hinnom" or "Valley of Hinnom", a valley on the south side of Jerusalem which was used during Judah's apostasy for a place of human sacrifice to Molech (Jer. 7: 31; 19: 5-6; 32: 35). The practice was abolished by King Josiah (2 Kings. 23: 10). Later on the valley came to be used for burning animal carcasses and human waste; thus, the fires of the Valley of Hinnom never went out nor was there ever any lack of worms decomposing the dead carcasses. The valley came to symbolize the place of divine punishment (Wessel, *Mark*, p. 708). The mention of Gehenna, a place of *physical* destruction, fits well with Jesus' warning about using members of the human body—the hands, feet, and eyes—for sinful purposes. It would be better to cut off these members—if indeed this would keep us from sinning—than to have the *whole body* suffer the eternal flames of hell.

The salting with fire of Mk. 9: 49 is a reference to the salt used for purification in the Levitical sacrifices (Lev. 2: 13). But rather than being purified by salt, the "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12: 1) of Jesus' disciples will be purified through the "fire" of persecution (1 Pet. 1: 7; 4: 12). Very soon the church in Rome would be subjected to the fires of Nero's persecution, and this verse would be an encouragement to them that suffering for the gospel was not unique to them, but something all believers would experience in one degree or another (Liefeld, p. 709).

As an important preservative in the ancient world, salt was "good"; and Jesus had earlier said that Christians are the salt of the earth, the preserving agents of mankind. However, salt which has become tasteless or unsalty is worthless (cf. Matt. 5: 13). The salt mined from the Dead Sea area was not pure salt and would eventually lose its quality as a preservative (cf. commentary on Matt. 5: 13). If this happened to a disciple, he also would be worthless as a disciple. But how can a disciple lose his saltiness? Christ has already defined true discipleship in terms of absolute commitment to Himself and the gospel. If we wish to save our lives we will lose them, but if we lose them for the sake of Christ and the gospel, we will find them. We must never be ashamed of our commitment to Jesus (Mk. 8: 35, 38). Earlier, the disciples had been arguing among themselves about who was greatest in the kingdom of heaven, thus, stirring up strife among themselves. Jesus makes it clear that the quality of saltiness (commitment) will distinguish a true disciple in the kingdom of heaven, not presumed rank or recognition by anyone other than Himself (Lane, p. 350).

### 3. *The Father's Love for His Little Ones—Matt. 18: 10-14*

Moving from the little ones' responsibility for themselves back to those who are entrusted with their care, Jesus says, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (v. 10). The verb "despise" literally means "to look down on". Thus, the idea is not hate but a **condescending attitude** in which the little one is considered **insignificant or unimportant**. A common temptation in the ministry is the temptation of concentrating one's efforts and attention upon those members who are deemed important and significant to the life of the church. The most carnal (fleshly) manifestation (expression) of this problem is when pastors and elders shower attention upon those who are the biggest financial contributors to the ministry while ignoring those who cannot contribute so abundantly. The apostle James addresses this problem in his epistle and condemns such favoritism with the harshest terms, calling it a form of murder (James 2: 1-13).

Another manifestation of "despising" members of the church occurs when fellow Christians in the church, particularly elders who are responsible for spiritual oversight, pay little or no attention to those who are showing signs of spiritual and moral apostasy. This "oversight" (pun intended) is a mistake easily made especially when the church member is not well-known either by the leadership or anyone else in the church. He or she easily "slips through the cracks," so to speak, and drifts away from the church. Months later people look around and say, "Hey, where did Bill go?" when Bill has been long gone. He may have fallen into serious sin, or he may have been the victim of a series of spiritual set-backs which caused him to question his faith and finally reject it altogether. Had Bill been more "popular" in the church, more intellectually stimulating, a more promising candidate for church leadership, etc, perhaps his slip into error would have stirred up more interest. As it was, he was just another insignificant sheep among the one hundred (or three thousand) who goes easily unnoticed.

Another manifestation of poor oversight—for this is what it is—is when a member demonstrates chronic immaturity in his life, but is never challenged to grow in grace. He continues in this way for years without showing any signs of growing up, but since he has not drifted into serious sin and continues to attend church, his immaturity is ignored in hopes that one day he will magically grow up and become a mature believer. His sinful immaturity is never challenged by his close friends, by leaders in the church, by anyone, and the chronic deficiencies in his life continue to be untouched and unresolved until they cause bigger problems. While the Bible teaches us to be forbearing and patient with fellow Christians, and that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4: 8), there is a fine line between **being patient** with people and **despising** people. If we truly love someone, we should not rest content with even minor behavioral or doctrinal errors which turn into harmful **patterns** of thinking or acting. To use one example from Scripture, occasional laziness can be overlooked if it does not turn into a pattern of behavior in which a person is chronically (persistently) lazy and refuses to work. At that point, he must be confronted by others and even disciplined by the whole church if necessary to prevent further damage to himself and to the whole body (2 Thes. 3: 6-15).

While the care of little ones is officially entrusted to the elders of the church, none of us should entertain the notion that we have no responsibility in such matters. Later in this discourse, Jesus

will call for the personal involvement of every believer in the sins of their erring brothers (18: 15-17). He will not dump the entire load of responsibility upon elders for the simple reason that elders cannot know the spiritual struggles of every member and must rely on each member to share the load of spiritual oversight (Gal. 6: 1-3, a passage not directed to elders in Galatia but to the whole church, as is 1 Cor. 5). Elders to not have eyes in the back of their heads, and they cannot transform themselves at night into flies perched on the walls of member's homes and workplaces seeing everything going in their families, marriages, and businesses. Thus, although spiritual leaders are given special responsibilities for spiritual oversight, every believer must take care not to despise their brothers or sisters by ignoring them.

Far from despising any of His little ones, God has shown the utmost concern for them by assigning the administration of their care to angels: "...their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven" (v. 10b). This verse has been pressed into service to prove that one specific guardian angel has been assigned to each believer to look after him and protect him, but there is no warrant for this interpretation. The epistle to the *Hebrews* addresses the error of worshiping angels and makes clear not only that Christ is superior to angels (Heb. 1: 6-13), but that angels are all "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (v. 14). Therefore, in some sense, angels are even inferior to God's people whom they serve. God never made any provision for the salvation of fallen angels but left them in their rebellious state for future destruction (Heb. 2: 16; 2 Pet. 2: 4; Matt. 25: 41). The Bible seems to indicate that the angels in heaven are generally employed for the welfare of all believers as ministering spirits; that they rejoice in heaven when one sinner repents (Lk. 15: 10); and that they will be employed in the gathering of the elect from around the earth at the end of the age (Matt. 24: 31). Even as Christ was helped by angels when he was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4: 11), angels minister to God's people and protect them in various and sundry ways which are invisible and unknown to them.

If indeed the verse is used to prove that only *one* guardian angel is assigned to each believer, how can this believer receive the angel's protection while he is in heaven beholding the face of God? (Carson, p. 401) Better to have thousands of angels looking after us rather than just one! I don't agree with Carson's interpretation, following B.B. Warfield, that these angels in Matt. 10 are the departed spirits of believers, nor do I accept Chamblin's interpretation that they are *interceding* for these little ones (p. 135). There is no explicit mention of intercession in the passage, and I can't think of a single passage in the Bible which explicitly mentions the intercession of angels before God's throne (unless this one can be proven to be such), a task reserved for Christ and the Holy Spirit. (Daniel 10: 12 mentions the angel coming in response to his prayers, but not that the angel interceded for Daniel.) At any rate, we can be comforted that although many of us fall through the cracks and off the radar screen of the elders and even the general membership of the church, if we are true believers the angels in heaven are assigned the task of looking after us. John Calvin says of this passage, "...it is no light matter to despise those who have angels for their companions and friends....We ought therefore to guard ourselves against despising their salvation, which even angels have been commissioned to promote....The care of the entire Church is committed to angels, to assist each member as his needs require" (*Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, quoted from Hendriksen, p. 694).

Considering the care of angels, we might conclude that human help is superfluous (unnecessary). But we would be wrong, as the rest of the passage clearly indicates. The context of v. 10 is the lost sheep which goes astray (v. 12). (We can safely ignore v. 11 since the best manuscript evidence indicates that this verse was a later scribal addition influenced by Lk. 19: 10. Thus, we can deal with it later in Luke.) The content of v. 10 flows freely into v. 12. Let no one despise even one of these little ones, for the Father in heaven is not willing for even one of them to perish. Like a good shepherd, He leaves the 99 sheep and does not rest until the lost sheep is found and safely returned to the fold. Verse 12 is presented in the form of a rhetorical question demanding an affirmative (yes) answer. If a shepherd loses one sheep, does he not leave the 99 in order to find the lost one? Answer: “Of course he does!” When he finds it, he rejoices over this one single sheep more than over the 99 he left grazing in the mountains. Should we expect less from the Heavenly Father? The conclusion is given in v. 14. It is not the Father’s will to lose even one single sheep.

God doesn’t play numbers games or percentages with His people, as if He is satisfied if *most* of them make their way to heaven. Some churches are like revolving doors, especially some of the bigger churches in which people participate as consumers looking for a church with the best products to satisfy their needs. While some of these people are coming in one side of the revolving door, others are exiting the other side, like fresh and stale air. As they come and go, no one takes much notice as long as the membership stays consistently high, the pews are mostly filled, and the budget is met. It is comforting to know that God does not look at us as congregations, but as individual sheep with names; and when one of us is missing, He knows. Such is the care that should be afforded each member of a local church. When he is missing; when he is hurting; when he is sinning; someone knows, and someone cares. Intimate knowledge of each member of the congregation, by someone who is responsible, is the assurance that not one of them will perish. While it is true that the angels in heaven are given to their care, and that no man shall pluck them out of the Father’s hand or out of Christ’s hand (Jn. 10: 29-30), it is clear from the entire text of Matt. 18 that God is taking care of His sheep primarily through *human* means—the church made up of people, fallible people at that. There is a note of contingency (conditionality) found in this text that is not found in the Lucan version of the parable of the lost sheep (Lk. 15: 4-7). In that passage, Jesus says, “**When** he [the shepherd] has found it...” (v. 5), while the Matthean version says, “**And if** it turns out that he finds it...” (v. 13) (Chamblin, p. 135). In this particular context, Jesus is highlighting the possibility of human failure in finding the lost sheep which has wandered astray, for the emphasis in this passage is not upon the Father’s sovereign *ability* but upon human *responsibility* and *initiative* in finding the lost sheep. This interpretation is further supported in the verses which follow.

#### ***4. Pursuing the erring brother (Matt. 18: 15-20)***

In Phil. 2: 1-4 the Apostle Paul says, “If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ***do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.***” This is

what we call the *community* of the body of Christ and this is what Matt. 18: 15-20 is all about—community.

Many people don't like this passage in Matthew because Jesus talks about judging church members as if they were "Gentiles and tax-gatherers"—i.e. as if they were unbelievers. A large number of evangelical churches which claim to believe that this is an inspired text do not actually practice the kind of discipline Jesus gives us here. What happens more often is that the church chooses to ignore the sin problem, hoping that the problem will just go away. They also ignore this passage, hoping that this passage will go away. But this passage isn't going away, and the problem of sin in the church is also not going away simply by ignoring it.

Sadly, the problem of sin just gets worse by ignoring it. It gets worse for at least three reasons: *First*, because the one who is sinning keeps on sinning without being confronted, and will eventually drift away into total apostasy and unbelief if left to themselves. The problem gets worse, *secondly*, because other people in the congregation get the impression that since the church and its *leaders* are not serious about sin, then *God* must not be serious about sin either; and sin spreads through the congregation. As Paul also says in 1 Cor. 5, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough"; in other words, sin spreads through the congregation like yeast spreading through bread dough. The problem gets worse, *thirdly*, because God's name is dragged through the mud since people on the outside of the church see this sinful activity going on in the church and no one is doing anything about it. They then draw the conclusion that people in the church are really no different from them, and are, perhaps, worse sinners than they are. So why should they become Christians if the Christians can't live any better?

So you can see that this is a very important passage for the life and community of the church, the body of Christ. Some say that the passage is unloving and harsh. I would strongly disagree. Think about it. Would Jesus call upon his church to do something unloving and harsh? It doesn't make sense, does it?

The first thing we notice from the passage is that Jesus will not let us ignore sin which is taking place in the church. "And if your *brother* sins go and reprove him." Jesus is not talking about someone *outside* the church but someone who professes to be a Christian. We may be able to correct our unbelieving friends privately, but we can't bring up the matter before the church because they do not belong to the church. What we know for sure is that Jesus is talking about professing believers who fall into sin. Already we see that God provides a special measure of grace for His people within the church. Believers are not left to themselves to keep on sinning—harming themselves and others—but are under the protective umbrella of the church who must care for each individual member of the body of Christ.

Some translations of the Bible insert two more words in v. 15. The KJV and the NIV add the words, "against you" so that the verse reads, "And if your brother sins *against you*." This is a very important addition which is based on the use of different manuscripts of the original Greek text. In the parallel passage, Lk. 17: 3, the phrase, "against you" is also left out in some versions but it is included in 17: 4. "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins *against you* seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." Even if some versions of the Bible leave the phrase out, it is

still implied in the text. Christ presents us a method of dealing with a fellow Christian—at least a professing Christian—who sins against us personally.

On the other hand, the text may also be used in *more general situations* in which a Christian has fallen into sin which *may not be against me or you personally*. We would be mistaken to limit the application only to personal situations, because the text has a much wider application. I don't think Jesus would have advised us to ignore sin in the church that was not directed specifically against us personally. There is a sense in which any sin in the church is a threat to the whole congregation, not just one person. In some sense any sin in the congregation is a sin against everyone in the congregation, not just against a particular person. And this is why the final step in the disciplinary process is to expel the unrepentant sinner from the congregation as if he were an unbeliever.

So then, what do we do when a brother sins against us? Notice that Jesus breaks it down into three distinct steps:

**1. First, you go to your brother and reprove him or correct him in private.**

This seems pretty simple, doesn't it? But it must not be too simple because Christians fail to follow this procedure all the time. So let us leave, for now, what Jesus actually says and deal with what He does *not* say.

*(a) First, He does not say, "Ignore the offense and move on with your life."* This tells us something about the kind of offense Jesus is dealing with. It tells us that the offense, in His estimation, is a serious offense. It is also a serious offense in our estimation if we are concerned about it enough to confront our brother. There are offenses against us that we should be able to forgive without making such a fuss about them. We should not use this text for every offense, only something which is serious or something which has become serious as a repeated sin. Why do I emphasize this?

In 1 Cor. 13: 4, Paul tells us, "Love is patient, love is kind..." and in v. 5 he tells us that love "is not *provoked*" (i.e. a loving person is not easily offended), does not take into account a wrong suffered" (i.e. a loving person does not keep records of how people sin against him). Jesus is not talking about minor offenses which a Christian should be willing to overlook for the sake of love. In his first epistle Peter states the matter well when he says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love *covers a multitude of sins*" (1 Pet. 4: 8). Love is willing to be offended and to overlook the offense if it is only *minor* and if it is not a *persistent* sin which can damage other people—including the sinful person.

Let's face it. All of us can be annoying to one another to some degree or another, and often we just have to overlook things in others just as they overlook things in us. If Jesus were talking about *every single* minor offense, Christians would be spending all their time just confronting one another. "You did this and this." "Yes, but you did this and that." We'd end up correcting one another all the time and not get anything else done. So, we must learn the difference between *major* offenses and *minor* offenses. Sometimes, we just need to let things go. They're



really nothing, and we don't need to make something out of nothing. Life is just simpler this way.

On the other hand, in Matt. 18 the offense *may* lead to the offending person being removed from the church, indicating that this is something more serious which cannot be ignored. While Paul and Peter admonish us to “cover” minor offenses with patience and love, in this situation Jesus *commands* us to confront our brother. Unless we know the difference between the two situations, we might make the mistake of believing that Peter and Paul are contradicting Jesus while they and Jesus are really talking about two different things. But having made this qualification, is it not true that even *minor* offenses which are often repeated may become major offenses? For example, if a person is in the habit of slighting you in public, saying little demeaning things about you to others which are disrespectful and painful, you may be able to overlook this a few times, but what if he keeps doing it? As a Christian you may make every attempt to put this behind you and forgive him, but you just can't. After a while you begin to feel bitter against this person. So what do you do? What people often do is that they continue to internalize the offenses—to stuff the offenses inside. More offenses keep coming and they keep stuffing until they are *really* stuffed—so stuffed that they become bitter against this person. We all know many situations in which little sins against another individual continued to pile up *without being resolved* until finally *one more minor* offense ended the relationship. It was a case of the last straw being put on the camel which broke the camel's back.

This is how relationships fall apart. This is how marriages fall apart. Sometimes little arguments and little disagreements are not resolved and they *become* major issues in a relationship. If even little offenses continue building up in your mind and heart and you can't let them go, it's time to confront your brother or sister, who may be your husband or wife, or your best friend. Deal with these issues before your relationship falls apart, or before a friendship falls apart. But if it's a more serious sin from the beginning, you are commanded by Christ to confront your brother face to face, because unresolved sin is dangerous for you, your brother, and for the church. We are commanded by Christ to head it off, to stop it before it damages the community of the body of Christ and before it leads to a professing believer being cut off from Christ's church.

*(b) Secondly, Jesus does not say, “Go tell someone else about your brother's sin.”*

“Go tell George, or Elizabeth, or Paul, or even your pastor.” Telling someone else is not the *first* step, but the *second* step. None of these people, even your pastor, have anything to do with this problem, at least not yet. The sin of your brother—at the present moment—involves you and him and no other human being. Why do I emphasize this? It's obvious isn't it? Because the first thing we often do when we have a conflict with another individual is to share our grievance with someone else, and not directly with the person: “Do you know what he did to me?” It is entirely possible that the offending brother may not even know that he has sinned against you, but the way he finds out is that *someone else* tells him: “George told me that you did this to him.” But this is not how Jesus told us to handle personal problems with other people.

The normal procedure in African culture is not to confront the person face to face but through another person, a mediator. The African will air his grievance with another mutual friend who will then be commissioned by this person to go tell the offending brother his grievance. In this

regard African culture can be very similar to American culture, because this is precisely the way Americans often do it. Even though Americans are much more likely to confront someone directly, we will often use another person to confront the offending brother. We'll say something like this, "Do you know what Jim did to me the other day? I think he should apologize, don't you?" Secretly we are hoping that this person will then take this message back to Jim.

There are many problems with this approach. The main problem is that this is not how Jesus told us to do it. He says, "And if your brother sins against you, [*you*, implied] go and reprove him *in private*." Notice the words, "in private". Jesus does not leave us in any doubt about the method here. Right now, this is a private matter between you and the other person. I'll mention just two things—among many—which demonstrate why this is the best method. *First*, and most important, *because Jesus says that this is what we ought to do*. That alone should be enough, but often we question Jesus' way of doing things. After all, Jesus lived at another time and in another culture so His method won't work in my time and my culture or in my situation. Such is our thinking. But we should remember that the Bible is written for all times and for all cultures and for all situations. The best thing we can do is just to keep quiet and pay attention to what it says. But we often don't do this, so I will give you one other reason why this is the best method.

*Second, Jesus' method forces us to clarify the offense.* Jesus assumes here that a real offense has taken place, and that the offense is a serious offense. We know this because of the conclusion in the text. Jesus takes us all the way to the public excommunication of the sinful member. But He does not jump to this conclusion right from the start. The removal of the member from the church is only the last step in the process, not the first step. The first step helps us to clarify the offense in person with the offending brother. There may be a serious disagreement between the two of us about what was actually said and what actually happened, and this disagreement may be cleared up in this first confrontation—in private without involving anyone else. If it turns out that you are the one who needs to repent, the first private meeting with your brother will give you the opportunity to repent. Or it could be that you have overestimated the offense—"made a mountain out of an ant hill". This may become clear as well.

Before coming to Africa, the church our family attended had a congregational meeting about the possibility of moving the church facility to another location. As it turned out, some of the members, including most of the elders, wanted to move to a different location, and other members wanted to stay where we were. In the congregational meeting I stood up and gave my opinion of why we should stay where we were and not move. What I *said* on that occasion, and what a few of the elders *thought* I said were entirely two different things, and what they thought I said deeply offended them. This took place in October, 2003. A few months after Fran and I got to Africa, the church split into two different churches. Some of the membership stayed at the old location and some moved to a new location. Our membership, of course, was still with the first church which was supporting our work in Africa very substantially.

In April of 2005 we got a letter from the missions committee saying that the church had dropped our support. The reason given was the inability of the church to continue supporting all their missionaries, and they had to decide who to drop. The problem with this explanation was that many of the missionaries they kept supporting were not members of the church as we were. It

became clear only nine months later that our support was dropped not because of what I had said that evening, but because of what the elders thought I said. None of the elders ever contacted me in private about my statements in the congregational meeting, and they allowed themselves to be embittered. Finally, two years after the church meeting, a friend of mine who had recently become an elder in the church told me what the problem was. I wrote the elders a letter explaining what I actually said and why I said it, and the matter was cleared up. Our support was reinstated, but we had lost several thousand dollars of support due to a simple misunderstanding which had not been resolved. Now, if this can happen with elders and missionaries, it can surely happen to anyone else in the church.

As far as the text is concerned, Jesus is assuming that one brother has a justifiable grievance against another brother. The method he gives, however, will work even if you are the one at fault, or even if you have overestimated or misinterpreted the offense. Jesus makes no attempt here to give us an example of every possible situation. To do this would take another Bible. He just wants to give us a general method for dealing with sin in the church which will work properly in every situation if we let it work properly. Going to the person first in private can solve many conflicts without making them worse by involving other people. Involving other people in the conflict can potentially make matters more confusing. Failing to clarify the grievance can also be very confusing.

Following the text itself, let's assume you have a legitimate grievance against your brother, and you go to him in private. What happens next? ***Now we come, finally, to what Jesus actually says.*** "Go to your brother in private and reprove him." Notice that the number of times you should go to your brother in private is left indefinite (Hendriksen, p. 698). It may be necessary to go to him several times in private before you take along someone else. We should give the offending brother enough time to repent and ourselves enough time to clarify the offense. The urgency of the situation would naturally depend on the nature of the sin. If your brother is sleeping with your wife, you're not going to spend too much time tolerating his sin or clarifying the offense. Some sins would require more immediate attention than others. Some sins are also more clear-cut and more easily interpreted than others.

***If your brother "listens to you," Jesus says, "you have won your brother".*** What does this mean? This means that your brother has come to the same conclusion that you have—that he has offended you—and has asked for forgiveness. In response, you have granted him forgiveness. But where do we find this in the text? We don't find it directly in the text, but in the context. Notice what Peter says in v. 21 immediately after Jesus' explanation. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Peter's interpretation of what Jesus says in v. 15 clarifies what Jesus is talking about because Jesus does not correct Peter's interpretation, but answers it, "Not seven times but seventy times seven." Verse 21 is strong evidence that the words, "against you", should be implied in the text of v. 15. Peter assumes Jesus is talking about a brother who sins "against him".

***If the first step succeeds, there is no need for the second step.*** There is no reason to take one or two more people with you to confront your brother. The matter is resolved. You have confronted your brother in private, and he has confessed his sin to you and asked forgiveness. You, on the other hand, are obligated to grant him forgiveness. This much becomes very clear in the ***parable***

*of forgiveness* presented by Jesus in vv. 21-35. By forgiving him, you have agreed to drop the matter and not bring it up again, and if you keep bringing it up it or become embittered by it, this means that you have not sincerely forgiven him. Of course, the question always comes up: “What if my brother keeps sinning against me?” Peter brings this question up in v. 21 and Jesus answers it in the parable. The Jewish Rabbis taught that a brother should be forgiven three times but on the fourth time there was no forgiveness. Peter considered himself generous by offering to forgive seven times (Carson, p. 405), but Jesus was not satisfied with measuring out forgiveness in precise quantities. His answer to Peter was that *we continue to forgive our offending brother in the same way God continues to forgive us—repeatedly*. We never stop forgiving our brother because God never stops forgiving his children who *sincerely* repent.

How many times does God forgive us when we sincerely repent—seven times? What about 70 times 7 which equals 490 times? Would 490 times just about cover it? Have any of us sinned more than 490 times? Of course, all of us have—more than 490,000 times if we live long enough. Then Jesus tells the parable of the *unforgiving servant* which has one central truth: If we are *unforgiving* people, it proves that we have *never experienced the forgiveness of God*. Forgiven people are constantly forgiving others. If they refuse to forgive others, they are not forgiven; that is, they are not true believers. The heavenly Father will not forgive such a person, not because the person has failed to earn salvation by forgiving others (a misunderstanding of v. 35), but because he has failed to turn to Christ in repentance and faith to receive forgiveness (so also Carson, Hendriksen, and Chamblin).

What Jesus does not cover in vv. 21-35 is the *nature of true repentance*. If our brother *sincerely* repents, you must forgive him (Lk. 17: 3; notice the word “if”). But if he *keeps sinning* against you repeatedly with the same offense, you may legitimately question the genuineness of his repentance. What if your brother is stealing from you, and you confront him once, twice, five times. He says that he is sorry every time, but he continues to steal from you. Is this repentance? *Repentance is a change of mind which produces a change of action*; thus, if there is no change of *action*, then there is no change of *mind*.

Jesus does not cover the nature of *true repentance* in the parable, but only the nature of *true forgiveness*. He is not commanding us to be gullible or naive—to believe anything anyone tells us. This particular subject is outside the scope of the parable. Furthermore, we should not understand Jesus’ insistence on forgiveness to the point of *eliminating the practical effects of the disciplinary procedure in the passage* (Carson, p. 405). What if the person is committing adultery, and you confront him? He claims to repent, but he continues to sleep with this woman who is the wife of another man. Suppose you confront him again and again with the same result? Each time he says he is sorry and will not do it again, but the next night he is back in bed with her. Should this continue indefinitely? If this is what Jesus meant by continual forgiveness in the parable, *then the disciplinary process in vv. 15-20 is impossible*; you will never get to step two or three. If our interpretation of a text of Scripture leads us to ridiculous conclusions, our interpretation is surely suspect, for the Bible never leads us to absurd conclusions. The whole disciplinary process which concludes in taking the problem before the church would never take place if we are forced to accept insincere repentance.

So much then for the first step. But what happens if your brother clearly *does not* repent?

***2. The second step is this: you take along one or two more people with you as witnesses against the sin of your brother.***

Jesus quotes from Deut. 19: 15, “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.” If your brother refuses to listen to you, his guilt must be confirmed by more than one witness. The reason for this is obvious since it is easy to make accusations against others, but much more difficult to prove these accusations. Jesus is putting the ***burden of proof*** upon the one accusing another brother of sin. At this point, you are going to have to convince one or two other brothers that you have a ***credible, believable*** case against your brother. They should then be careful to determine whether or not the facts are as you have stated them to be. Are you making this up to slander your brother, or do you have just cause against your brother? Did you get the facts right the first time or did you miss something? ***Proverbs 18: 17*** says, “The first to plead his case *seems* just, *Until* another comes and examines him.” Have you ever noticed this? Someone tells you a story and then you get an entirely different version of the story from someone else? You would think that it wasn’t even the same event. There’s almost no resemblance.

We can see right away how this second step is a ***safe-guard*** to the whole process. ***First***, it puts the burden of proof upon you, the accuser, so that an innocent man is not eventually judged by the church in the third and final step of the disciplinary process. ***Second***, this requirement may give you good reason to reevaluate your judgment and withdraw it. Do you really have a just grievance against your brother, or are you actually “making a mountain out of an ant hill?” Will you be able to convince one or two others that your brother has seriously sinned against you, or will you only embarrass yourself in front of these two other brothers?

On the other hand, after careful examination of the evidence, the other brother or the other two brothers may be as equally convinced as you are that a serious offense has occurred and when they stand with you before the offending brother, every fact of your testimony may be confirmed as true (cf. Deut. 19: 15; 2 Cor. 13: 1). The other two people add weight to your testimony, and it may be that their presence alone is enough to convince the offending brother that he has been justly accused and that he needs to set things right. There is no use of pretending any more that he did nothing wrong.

If the brother repents, then there is no reason to take the process any further. Repentance is offered, which implies that he is willing to do whatever is necessary to make things right. If he has stolen anything, he is willing to pay it back. Once again, it should be emphasized that sincere repentance is required. If he has stolen something, it is not sufficient to say, “I’m sorry.” He must also return the money with interest. If he is sinning against you in other ways, he must agree to stop such activity. Genuine repentance is a change of mind and heart which leads to a change in activity. If there is no change of activity, there is no corresponding change of mind and heart. However, when he publicly repents, his repentance has to be received at face value until proven otherwise. You are obligated to forgive him. If the offending brother does not repent with the second step, the third step is taken.

### ***3. In the third step of the disciplinary process, we take our grievance to the church.***

In the second step you already have the beginning of *corporate* confirmation of the person's sin. Two people have agreed with you that this brother has sinned against you and needs to repent. So far, nothing has worked to bring the brother to repentance, so you go before the church. What does this involve? Some have interpreted Jesus to mean that you take the matter before the church elders *only* without going before the whole church body. I would agree with this interpretation only if you are talking about the *initial part* of step three. In other words, out of respect for the authority of the elders of the church, you would have to consult them *first*. You would not bring up the matter in front of the church without ever going to the elders. Going to the elders first would also be a further confirmation of the person's guilt, or they may be able to convince you that your grievance is not justified. Once again the process in Matt. 18 has many checks and balances, many opportunities for clarification and evaluation.

If indeed your cause is justified, the elders of the church must bring the matter up before the whole church. Some church leaders would *limit* the third step to the elders *alone*, but Jesus did not say, "tell it to the elders" but "tell it to the church"—the locally organized fellowship of believers (cf. Hendriksen, p. 700; Carson, p. 403). This is also confirmed in 1Cor. 5 in the instructions Paul gives to the church at Corinth on how to deal with a member of the church who was committing incest with his stepmother. It is clear from that passage that Paul orders the *entire congregation* to participate in the removal of the impenitent sinner from their midst. In this way Paul gives dignity to the whole body of Christ and credits the whole body with sufficient maturity to discipline the erring member.

The *effectiveness* of step three depends upon the whole congregation who must be willing to correct the erring member. Otherwise, if only the elders are involved, the sinner will not be brought to shame for his sin simply because he may have the emotional support of a significant portion of the congregation. If he has no such support, he may be reduced to shame and come to repentance. Of course, what often happens is that the offending member's friends come to his "rescue" and take issue with the official decision of the church, not necessarily for Biblical reasons but for personal reasons. If they are successful, they short-circuit the beneficial results of church discipline by diluting its judgments. Many Christians simply do not understand church discipline or the benevolent effects it can have on an erring brother. Wishing to extend grace to their erring friend, they are actually dispensing cheap grace which will not help him. When step three is implemented, and the erring brother refuses to repent, he is to be treated as a "Gentile and a tax-gatherer". Matthew is writing to Jewish Christians who understand these terms for pagans who are outside the covenant. In other words, the erring brother is to be treated as an unbeliever. As such, he is no longer entitled to the Christian fellowship and association of other believers in the congregation. They should no longer treat him as a brother in Christ, but as a person who has rejected Christ and all association with the covenant family. This doesn't mean that the church treats him cruelly, but firmly, in hopes that he will see the error of his ways and repent.

Then, in v. 18, Jesus uses the same language of Matt. 16: 19. In that passage Peter, as representative of the disciples and the whole confessing church, is given the "keys of the kingdom of heaven." Keys are used for opening doors and locking doors. ***Binding*** and ***loosing***

are Rabbinical terms for *forbidding* and *permitting*. Peter and the disciples forbid entrance into the *church on earth* to those whose beliefs or practices are *contrary* to the teaching of Jesus and the word of God. To that same extent these people *have already been forbidden* entrance into *the kingdom of heaven*. The connection between Matt. 16 and Matt. 18 confirms that Jesus is also giving the *church*—along with His apostles—the power of admission into the kingdom of heaven or rejection from it. But this does not imply that heaven is simply ratifying decisions made by the church on earth. The decision of binding and loosing *has already been made* in heaven according to well-defined standards of truth and error (cf. the commentary on Matt. 16: 19 which determines the meaning of the present passage).

Church discipline is, therefore, a *very serious matter*, and the person disciplined by the church cannot simply join another church and think that the effects of excommunication are no longer valid. If he is still living in sin, and if he has been duly excommunicated by his church on *Biblical* grounds—i.e. for Biblical reasons—he is still under God’s judgment and has been forbidden entrance into the kingdom of God. The only qualification of this judgment is that it must be in accordance with Scriptural teaching. Jesus assumes the validity of the judgment in v. 18, and any excommunication from the church which has *no Scriptural support is ineffective, null, and void*. (One hundred years before Martin Luther formally initiated the Reformation, Jon Huss was excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church and burned at the stake for preaching justification by grace alone. It goes without saying that his lack of admission into the kingdom of heaven had *not* already been confirmed in heaven and that his excommunication by the Roman Catholic Church was rendered null and void as the angels in heaven rejoiced at Huss’ arrival.)

In vv. 19-20 Jesus assures them that if even two or three agree on earth about “anything” or “any matter”, it shall be done by the Father in heaven. This verse must be interpreted in connection with the previous verse. Jesus is not talking specifically about prayer meetings with two or three people. He is talking about disciplinary or judicial procedures involving erring members of the church (Carson, p. 403, who points out that the Greek word *pragma* [“matter”] is the same word used in 1 Cor. 6: 1 which concerns judicial cases). Jesus’ words are a further confirmation of the fact that whomever the church binds or looses has already been bound or loosed in heaven. Jesus himself is there in their midst agreeing with their decision to excommunicate an unrepentant member of the church, and He will only make this promise if His words are being faithfully carried out. Likewise, when the Apostle Paul is commanding the Corinthian church to excommunicate the incestuous man, he makes a similar comment, “In the name of the Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (vv. 4-5).

This brings us to this question: *Is this the loving thing to do to a brother or sister in the church?* Some Christians may think otherwise: “I’m not sure I want to belong to a church like this—a church in which the individual members are held accountable for their behavior by other members and in some instances, even by the whole church. If I fall into sin, I don’t want someone snooping around my door telling me to shape up and quit sinning. My life is my business and not someone else’s. It is most certainly not the business of the whole church.”

If someone thinks this way, he can certainly find other assemblies in any city—Kampala, New York, or any other—which will have much lower standards of conduct—assemblies which pretty much let you live your life in isolation and will not disturb you when you fall into serious sin. You can sleep around all you want without being married. You can steal from your employer. While you are living your immoral life, the leaders in the church may find out; but they won't say anything to you, especially if you keep putting substantial amounts of money in the offering plate.

***But assemblies like this, for all they pretend to be, are not really churches.*** Only Jesus can define what a church is, and only Jesus and His appointed NT apostles—now in heaven—can set the standard for what a church must be and do. He is the one who commands us to go after the erring brother, and if we wish to be a true church, we can't refuse Him. There are many assemblies out there which are called churches, but many of them are not shepherding the sheep who belong to them. And this is really what this text is all about—shepherding the sheep.

The context of vv. 1-14 demands this interpretation of vv. 15-20. In vv. 1-4, He makes it plain that you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless you humble yourself like a little child. It becomes clear from vv. 4-6 that whoever humbles himself as a child and believes in Christ becomes one of His "little ones". In vv. 6-7, Jesus warns anyone who would place a stumbling block in the way of his little ones. Finally, in vv. 12-14, Jesus uses another metaphor to describe his people. We are *sheep* who belong to his flock. The number 100 signifies a complete number—10 times 10. If even one of that number strays from the flock what does Jesus, the Good Shepherd do? He does not say, "Oh well, what's one sheep? I still have 99. No, Jesus the Good Shepherd leaves the 99 in the fold and goes to look for the sheep which is lost.

The very next thing we find in the text is Jesus' instructions about correcting the brother who sins and instructions about church discipline. The brother who sins against you is the lost sheep that Jesus intends to find. He is the little one that Jesus intends to protect. But as mentioned earlier, you and I as concerned and responsible members of the body of Christ are the ones Jesus sends to find him. Jesus isn't going after this sheep. He's in heaven seated at the right hand of God. Instead, He sends the church, the continuation of His incarnate ministry on earth, to find His lost sheep. He is going to use His church to protect His little ones from false prophets, apostasy, and immoral behavior which leads to perdition.

The whole text of Matt. 18: 15-20 emits the aroma of God's everlasting love and affection for His church, His little ones, His sheep. There is really nothing negative about this text except the sin of the offending brother. According to the context of this passage, the discipline of the church has one major purpose—the protection of God's people from spiritual ruin and everlasting damnation. If we understand this, we will look upon it as one of the very important means of grace given to His people. Wouldn't you rather be a member of a congregation where fellow Christians are looking out for one another? Think about it this way: Suppose you were hiking in the Rwenzori Mountains with a group people, and after a few days of hiking you're getting pretty tired, and you begin to fall back several hundred feet from the rest of the pack. You then take the wrong trail because you didn't see where they went. Shortly, the trail you took is no longer a trail, and you then have to hack your way through heavy brush. After about an hour of flailing through the forest, you are very lost.



Now consider the group you were with. What kind of people do you want them to be? What if they say to one another, “You know, we haven’t seen Richard for about three hours. Do you think we should check on him?” And several of them say, “Nah, he’s a strong hiker. He can take care of himself. Let’s move ahead to the next camp site and get a bite to eat.” And so they do, and you are abandoned, lost and alone in the Rwenzori Mountains. Several weeks later a search party finds your starved and frozen body. And why are you dead? Because the party you chose to hike with did not sufficiently care for your well-being.

Are these the kind of people you want to hike with? No. You want people who will look out for each other and care for one another. If you get lost, you know that these people will do whatever is necessary to find you. That’s the kind of people I want to be with in the church, because one day, I may lose my way, and I may need someone to find me. I may not even know that I’ve lost my way, and when you find me you may even have to take two people with you to convince me that I really don’t know where I’m going. I may not like it, but I’ll need you to tell me the truth, whether I like it or not.

### **5. *The unforgiving slave (Matt. 18: 21-35)***

The central truth of this parable has been covered in our treatment of the erring brother. Jesus teaches this parable in response to Peter’s question: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” His question, in turn, is a response to Jesus’ remark in Matt. 18: 15. If you reprove your brother and he *listens* to you—that is, he agrees that he has sinned against you—*then* you have won your brother. Peter reflects upon this statement for a few minutes and knows that in an imperfect world, reconciliation is not always this easy. There are times when someone shows signs of repentance but keeps sinning against you either in the same way or different ways. What then? How many times should you forgive your brother? As indicated in the commentary above, in the parable which follows Jesus is only dealing with the question of forgiveness, not the question of the true nature of repentance. If someone is truly repentant, we should not measure out forgiveness in precise quantities, keeping records of how many times we have forgiven this person. (If the Apostle Paul had been able to read a copy of Matthew’s gospel by the time he wrote *1 Corinthians*, perhaps his great chapter on love reflects the Lord’s idea of not keeping an account of a wrong suffered [1 Cor. 13: 5].)

In the parable itself, two slaves owe money. The first slave owes the king ten thousand talents, the equivalent of about 10 million US dollars or 17 billion Ush—a debt impossible to repay by someone who was a slave. (Some estimates of this sum have run as high as a billion US dollars. The major point is that the debt cannot possibly be repaid.) It was customary for indebted slaves to be sold for the repayment of debts, and in the case of so large a sum, this man’s whole family was to be sold in repayment of the debt. The average price of a slave was 500 to 2000 dinars, but the slave owed the equivalent of 100 million dinars. The sale of the whole family, therefore, could hardly even begin to cover the debt. Hence, the king’s actions were not designed to recoup his losses but to demonstrate his wrath (Chamblin, p. 140). Jesus is using the *reductio ad absurdum* argument (reducing one’s argument to an absurd conclusion). The slave’s suggestion to the king that he should have patience with him until he could repay the debt is absurd (ridiculous).

The other slave owes this particular slave 100 denarii or the equivalent of 100 days' wages (currently 20 US dollars or about 34,000 Ush—a large sum in the ancient world but one which realistically could be repaid given enough time). The king forgives the debt of the first slave, an insurmountable sum of money, while the forgiven slave refuses to forgive the much lower, repayable sum of the other slave. Word gets around soon of how this forgiven slave had refused to extend mercy. The king is enraged and changes his mind, handing him over to be tortured and imprisoned until the debt is repaid—a repayment which will never occur, leaving the man in prison for the rest of his life. It may be important to note that while the enraged king hands the man over to be tortured and imprisoned, he does not do the same to the man's family.

The characters in the story are easily identifiable. God is the King who owns all of us as His subjects, and there is not one of us who does not owe the King an insurmountable debt of sin too huge to repay in a million life-times. Our sins are too big and too numerous for self-atonement (self-repayment). If they are forgiven, they must be forgiven by grace. We are, therefore, at the mercy of the King who has the power of life and death over us. However, those of us who have begged for mercy from the King have been forgiven of our debt of sin. He is a gracious king who will not refuse to forgive those who humble themselves in repentance and have faith in His mercy.

On another level, we not only owe the King for our debt of sin, but other people owe us for their sins against us. What are we supposed to do with such debts? Considering how much we have been forgiven, the King's graciousness to us should soften our hearts toward those who have sinned against us, and we should be more than willing to forgive their comparatively small debt of sin against us. But if we fail to forgive others, we prove that our hearts have not been changed by God's grace. ***People who are forgiven of their sins become forgiving people, but those who fail to understand forgiveness will not extend forgiveness to others.*** Jesus is not implying in the parable that God will forgive us on the grounds of our forgiveness of others, as if our forgiveness of others is a work of merit by which we *earn* God's forgiveness. In the parable, the unforgiving slave ***had already been forgiven*** his debt, but he refused to forgive his fellow slave, and the king reversed his decision and rescinded (took away) the slave's forgiveness.

Theologically, this presents a problem, but only if we illegitimately press the details of the parable to prove that a person can be genuinely forgiven by God, but that God will take back His forgiveness if the person does not forgive others. This is precisely what happens in the parable but only for the purpose of filling out the story, but we err if we attempt to prove the false doctrine that a person can be truly saved but can lose his salvation by refusing to forgive others. Besides, this mistaken interpretation fails to consider the fact of God's omniscience—that He already knows whether a person's repentance is sincere or not, something the human king in the story could not know. ***The point of the parable is that a person who is genuinely forgiven of his sins becomes, by that same grace, a truly forgiving person.*** His life is changed by grace, but if there is no change, he has *never* been forgiven in the first place. His hard-heartedness toward others proves that he has not actually received God's pardoning grace and that he will suffer the consequences of his unforgiven debt in hell—the unmistakable meaning of v. 34. The conclusion to the parable is given in v. 35, "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, *if* each of you does not ***forgive*** his brother from your heart." Contrast this statement with the petition of the Lord's prayer, "And forgive our debts, as we also ***have forgiven*** our debtors" (Matt. 6: 12) in

which “have forgiven” is aorist indicative, simple action in past time viewed as actually occurring (cf. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*). Thus, there is no doubt in the Lord’s prayer about our forgiving others. In v. 35, however, the verb “forgive” is aorist subjunctive indicating the *possibility* of forgiveness but not as actually occurring (Dana and Mantey). Thus, the verb of Matt. 6: 12 indicates that our forgiveness of others is not left in any doubt, but has already occurred, while the verb of Matt. 18: 35 is only potential, leaving some doubt about whether the forgiveness of others will actually take place. This presents a stern warning to those who are stingy or grudging in their forgiveness. In the same way their forgiveness of others is doubtful, their forgiveness by God is likewise doubtful.

On a practical level, how do we apply this important passage on forgiveness? How do we forgive people who have wronged us? In an unpublished sermon preached in Uganda, Pastor Bruce Sinclair (missionary with Mission to the World, Presbyterian Church of America) presents six helpful steps:

1. **Feel the pain**—Acknowledge that you have been hurt by this person without attempting to suppress or deny the pain you feel toward him.
2. **Accept the loss**—Forgiveness requires you to be willing to accept the loss someone has caused you, whether stolen money, a stolen reputation through slander, etc. In the parable, the king was willing to accept the loss of a huge amount of money through bad debts.
3. **Gain perspective**—Compared to the debt of sin which God has forgiven you, the debt of sin which you are forgiving others is small, indeed.
4. **Let it go**—Whether or not the person ever apologizes or makes restitution, you have to let it go. Otherwise, you will allow the wrong to embitter you and possibly destroy you.
5. **Close the book**—In 1 Cor. 13: 5, Paul tells us that love (personified) does not take into account a wrong suffered; in other words, love does not keep a record book of wrongs committed against it. As much as possible, love attempts to forget the wrong.
6. **Repeat as necessary**—As long as you live in this world, you will be wronged repeatedly and will have to forgive people over and over again.

#### **6. The intolerance of the disciples—Mk. 9: 38-41; Lk. 9: 49-50**

This short discourse is not found in Matthew but occurs within the same time frame as the fourth great discourse of Matthew. In Mk. 9: 33 and Matt. 18: 1 the question of who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven is introduced. This sets the context for Jesus’ discourse about humility in which he takes a child in his arms and sets forth the model for a kingdom citizen. Mark 9: 37 corresponds to Matt. 18: 5; receiving a child in the name of Jesus is the same thing as receiving Jesus Himself. The Marcan account goes a step further, reporting Jesus as also saying, “and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.” But here is where the order between Matthew and Mark diverges. In Matthew’s account, Jesus begins His warning to all those who would cause His little ones to stumble. It would be better if a millstone were hung around his neck and thrown into the sea (Matt. 18: 6). The same reference does not occur in Mark’s account until 9: 42. The remainder of the discourse in Mark 9: 43-48 is roughly equivalent to Matt. 18: 7-9 with the exception that Matt. 18: 7 does not occur in *Mark* and Mk. 9:

44, 46, and 48-50 do not occur in *Matthew*. (Mark 9: 44 and 46 are not included in the best ancient manuscripts, but they are repetitive of 9: 48.)

It appears, then, that the material of Mk. 9: 38-41, 48-50 as well as the material of Lk. 9: 49-50 is spoken within the time-frame of the fourth great discourse of Matthew's gospel, but it is difficult to know exactly where it occurs. John's interruption and Jesus' response to John (Mk. 9: 38-41) seems out of place, interrupting the thought from Mk. 9: 37 to 9: 42. We will just have to live with the mystery. On the other hand, as it stands in *Mark* and *Luke*, the short passage is quite in context with what Jesus says about receiving a child or little one in His name (interpreted as receiving anyone, adult or child, who believes in Him). It is conceivable that when John heard Jesus say this, he is immediately reminded of an incident which he and the other disciples observed firsthand—a man who was not a member of the Twelve casting out demons in Jesus' name. Since he was not part of the Twelve, they had attempted to hinder him in performing this miracle.

Jesus corrects their thinking. The conflict between Jesus and Satan is a cosmic struggle between good and evil which is not confined to a select few disciples. Anyone who is willing to call upon the name of Jesus to defeat the powers of darkness is welcome to participate in this struggle without belonging to an elite club. Whoever is not against Jesus is for Him, and whoever believes in Him and calls upon Him by faith is not likely to speak evil against Him. Ironically, nine of the disciples who had forbidden this man to cast out demons had themselves recently failed in this task (9: 18) (Lane, p. 343). Who, then, were they to forbid someone else from doing it by the same name, the name of Jesus? The inability of the Jewish exorcists of Acts 19: 13-17 to use Jesus' name as a magical formula proved that He would not lend His name indiscriminately to anyone whose only goal was self-promotion. Furthermore, even among those who had been able to cast out demons in Jesus' name, that ability alone did not guarantee entrance into the kingdom of heaven, but must be accompanied by a righteous life produced by genuine faith (Matt. 7: 21-23).

Rather than forbidding the man from carrying on his mission of exorcism, the disciples should have extended him a helping hand. Giving a cup of water to one of Jesus' followers, even this one who was not a member of the Twelve, will receive a reward. Thus, Jesus teaches us that there are many ways to participate with Him in His mission. The front-line disciples, exorcists, pastors, etc. will not be the only ones who receive rewards for their efforts, but those who support them with any measure of kindness.

The pericope (short passage) serves to highlight a very important point—there are really only *two* sides in the conflict between Christ and Satan (Lane, p. 344). If someone is on the side of Christ, he cannot be on the side of Satan at the same time. This should go without saying, but often Christians draw their swords against one another as if they are on opposing sides of this cosmic struggle. Theological controversies among genuine Christians are inevitable and have occurred regularly throughout the history of the Christian church. Much of the controversy, in the kind providence of God, has had the positive result of purifying the church of errors which were of a soul-damning nature (e.g. the Council of Nicea in 325 AD). On the other hand, there have been other controversies which have been harmful to the unity of the church and its witness in the world, proliferating (producing) countless denominations and local congregations which can scarcely justify their existence. Only Biblical knowledge and the wisdom to apply it can

prevent us from dissipating (spreading too thin) our efforts against the enemy by aiming our weapons at each other. Healthy and charitable dialogue between differing Christian camps is useful in clarifying issues; but if we are “trigger-happy” over less fundamental elements of Christian truth (baptism, the millennium, Sabbath observance, to name a few), we will not have sufficient ammunition to shoot at the potent forces of modernism, post-modernism, secularism, Islam, and other philosophical fortresses which aim to destroy us. The question, of course, is: What constitutes a difference which may be harmful to the Christian gospel? Sometimes the answer is sometimes not an easy one.

### ***X. The Year of Opposition—The Judean and Perean Ministry***

#### ***A. Luke’s Narrative of Jesus’ Teaching as He Travels To Jerusalem—Lk. 9: 51—19: 44 Matt. 19: 1-2; Mk. 10: 1***

At this point in the Synoptics, Luke takes his departure from Matthew and Mark, and we are confronted with many passages in *Luke* which do not have a clear-cut parallel in the other two Synoptic Gospels (cf. Carson, pp. 408-410 for a thorough discussion).

Jesus departs from Galilee and comes into the region of Judea and Perea on the east side of the Jordan. The section is formally known as the “travel narrative” of *Luke*, now better known as the “central section” of *Luke* (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 408). It is not a chronological account in which one episode follows the other in strict succession, and very little is said about Jesus traveling from one place to another (Liefeld, p. 931). Rather, Luke orders the material thematically and theologically—as do all the Synoptists to one degree or another—and there are very few temporal connections. Most of the material in the central section is preserved in *Luke* alone, particularly many of the parables: the good Samaritan, the friend at midnight, the rich fool, the watchful servants, the rich man and Lazarus, and many others (for a complete listing of parables unique to *Luke*, see Guthrie, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 581).

On the other hand, the reader will recognize that some of the narrative’s content is found elsewhere in other gospel accounts. These are possible *doublets*, repetitions of stories and Jesus’ discourses found elsewhere, recorded by Luke at strategic points in the narrative to accomplish a theological purpose—e.g. the blasphemy of the Pharisees and their insistence upon a sign (Lk. 11: 14-32; cf. Matt. 12: 22-45; see commentary above). Matthew places this story *before* the transfiguration (Matt. 17) while Luke places it *after* the transfiguration (Lk. 9). The same historical event cannot happen both *before* and *after* the transfiguration which occurred only once; furthermore, the details of the story are too similar (in my opinion) in *Matthew* and *Luke* to be two separate events. So, why does Luke include the blasphemy of the Jews in this “central section” as Jesus is “going to Jerusalem” six months before His crucifixion when the actual blasphemy occurred much earlier? Possibly, the story serves to illustrate that the opposition of the Jews to Jesus’ ministry was nothing new in the last six months of His earthy ministry but merely a continuation of persistent rejection from the very beginning. But this is only one possible explanation.

Older commentators have argued that *none* of the apparent parallels in Luke’s account from 9: 51 to 18: 15 are derived from the same stories in *Matthew* and *Mark*, which means that all of

them are different historical events. Carson acknowledges that this is *possible*, but *unlikely* since Luke usually organizes his material *topically rather than chronologically and geographically*. It is more likely that he also uses this same approach in the central section. Carson believes that Luke uses certain historical journeys to Jerusalem theologically as a framework to highlight Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and His crucifixion and that each pericope (story) with parallels in *Matthew* and *Mark* must be evaluated separately to determine whether it is the same story or a different historical event. Determining whether they are the same event is difficult and sometimes impossible (Carson, pp. 408-409). The problem is compounded by the fact that although He was preoccupied with the events surrounding His death, resurrection, and ascension Jesus "did not make one continuous journey from Galilee to Jerusalem" (Liefeld, *Luke*, p. 931-932).

In my opinion, unless there is *overwhelming similarity* between the parallels which *demand their identity* as doublets, they should be regarded as *separate* historical events. Why should we have any trouble believing that Jesus *repeated Himself* many times or that similar events occurred on many different occasions? For example, Jesus taught a model prayer at least twice (Lk. 11: 1-4; cf. Matt. 6: 9-15). These two recordings of the Lord's Prayer clearly take place on two different occasions and in different contexts (see commentary below). Another example is the discourse of woes pronounced upon the Pharisees. In Lk. 11 Jesus is having lunch with a Pharisee but in Matt. 23 He is speaking openly to the multitudes and His disciples (Lk. 11: 42-44; cf. Matt. 23: 1).

The only temporal connection of the central section with *Matthew* and *Mark* is found in the above references (Matt. 19: 1-2 and Mk. 10: 1) after which Luke takes a different course. Four passages serve to set the narrative apart, all with some reference to going to Jerusalem (9: 53; 13: 22; 17: 11; and 18: 31; cited by Geldenhuys, p. 291). Although the "central section" of Luke's narrative does not end until Lk. 19: 44, Luke *rejoins* the narrative of *Matthew* and *Mark* in 18: 15 with the story of Jesus receiving the little children. By comparing *Matthew* and *Mark* with *Luke*, we will notice that this story is followed by the story of the rich young ruler in all three synoptic gospels. In both *Matthew* and *Mark*, the story of receiving the little children is preceded by Jesus' discourse on divorce.

### ***1. The Misplaced Zeal of James and John—Lk. 9: 51-56***

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus prepares to spend some time in a Samaritan village. It was common for Samaritans to act hostilely to Jews who were traveling through their villages on their way to worship in Jerusalem. The reason for this was that the Samaritans had their own worship center on Mount Gerizim (Geldenhuys, p. 292) which incorporated the worship of Yahweh along with a syncretistic mixture of other religions, a syncretism which the Jews abhorred. Jews traveling through Samaritan territory would shake off their sandals after passing through to avoid defilement by Samaritan dust. The Samaritans were equally hostile. Offended at this hostility, James and John (whom Jesus called "sons of thunder"—Mk. 3: 17) were ready to call down fire from heaven in the likeness of Elijah (2 Kings 1: 9-11). Jesus rebukes them for this attitude. What He said to them cannot be certain since v. 55b and v. 56a are not included in the earliest manuscript evidence. At any rate, they are rebuked; and it is a lesson to all of us that our zeal for the honor of God can often lack the self-restraint and compassion of Christ who knows that sinners often act out of ignorance (Lk. 23: 34).

## **2. *The Cost of Discipleship—Lk. 9: 57-62***

This passage is treated under the same title above in Matt. 8: 19-22. As stated in that discussion, Luke may be placing the story here to highlight the sending out of the 70 disciples in chapter 10. In contrast to the three who refuse to drop everything and go, the seventy obey the voice of Jesus (Leifeld, p. 937).

## **3. *The Sending Out of the Seventy Disciples—Lk. 10: 1-20***

Almost all the material in this section is contained in the Second Great Discourse of Matthew (Matt. 9: 35—11: 1) and the section on the “Unrepentant Cities” (Matt. 11: 20-24). See the commentary above on these passages. However, the sending out of the Twelve and the sending of the Seventy were two separate events, and it should not be surprising that Jesus’ instructions on both occasions are similar. According to Geldenhuys, this event takes place only six months before Jesus’ crucifixion, and He is in a hurry to reach many of the cities and villages in the Transjordan (the region west of the Jordan River, including Perea) which had been heretofore neglected in His ministry (p. 299). Thus, more laborers are necessary who are chosen from among the more general following of “disciples” who were not among the twelve (cf. Matt. 8: 21). The number itself signifies a complete number— $10 \times 7 = 70$  (but some manuscripts record the number 72 instead of 70). At this time in history, the common belief was that 70 nations existed in the world; thus, the number 70 would be inclusive of the Gentiles (Liefeld, p. 937).

This brings us to other differences from the instructions in Matt. 10 and Lk. 9 when the Twelve are sent to the Jews only (cf. Matt. 10: 5-6). On the present missionary journey, when the 70 (72?) disciples are received into certain houses, Jesus tells them to eat whatever is put in front of them, presumably without any regard to ceremonial purity. There were many Gentiles in the Transjordan region, and the Jews living there were not as scrupulous (careful) about eating only foods prescribed in the Law. Any command for the disciples to go *only* to the Jews is noticeably absent in the instructions of Lk. 10. “The Old Dispensation of outward ceremonies was passing away and there was no longer any time or room for fastidiousness [intense concern for what is proper] in connection with such matters. Without any conscientious scruples they must eat whatever is set before them.” There is also no time for the “long-winded salutations” that are common in the East. Nothing, even cultural courtesies, should hinder them in their mission (Geldenhuys, p. 300).

Jesus’ condemnation of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum is repeated on this occasion; Luke is not borrowing from Matthew (cf. Matt. 11: 20-24). He had already been rejected in those Galilean cities (see study Bible map), and He is now simply repeating His denunciation of their unbelief as an object lesson of what will surely happen in the Transjordan cities if they follow Chorazin’s, et al, example of unbelief. Jesus is zealous about His kingdom, and He will not allow the gospel of the kingdom to be carelessly trampled under foot without serious consequences. Obeying the gospel is not voluntary, but a command which is ignored only at the peril of those who reject it (cf. quotation above in Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours*). Listening to the message of the seventy disciples is the same as listening to Jesus, but rejecting them is the same as rejecting Him and the Father who sent Him (v. 16). Often,

Christians are afraid of witnessing for fear of rejection. This fear is selfish, for the rejection they receive is not personal rejection, but more importantly, rejection of Christ Himself. We should be more concerned, therefore, that those who reject our message are calling down God's terrible wrath upon themselves.

When the disciples return after an undisclosed period of time, they come back rejoicing that even the demons are subject to them in the name of Jesus (v. 17). Jesus had come down from heaven to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn. 3:8) and to reclaim the souls of men captivated by Satan's evil usurpation (taking unlawfully) of God's kingdom on earth (cf. Matt. 4: 8-9; 2 Cor. 4: 4). Scarcely six months from now, Jesus would ascend to His Father while leaving the uncompleted task of destroying Satan's kingdom to His disciples (the church) which the gates of hell cannot resist (Matt. 16: 18). In Rev. 12: 7-9, Satan and his fallen angels are depicted as waging war with the angels in heaven who defeat Satan (the dragon) in battle. Satan and his angels are then thrown down to the earth where they wage war with the church (see rest of chapter). Here, Jesus is referring to the initial beginning of Satan's fall. The promise in Gen. 3: 15 is that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent on the head, a wound from which he will not recover. The missionary expansion of the church until the second return of Christ continues the task of crushing Satan under Christ's feet, and in union with Christ, under the feet of the church itself (Rom. 16: 20).

Nevertheless, the true grounds for the disciples' rejoicing are not found primarily in successful ministry on earth but in the fact that their names are written in heaven (v. 20). Likewise, our greatest joy is that we have an inheritance in the new heaven and earth alongside our Savior and Lord and with countless other believers. No amount of "success" in ministry—however this may be defined—can compare with the promise of eternal life. Believers (like Jeremiah and many other OT prophets) who are not given the privilege of enjoying the fruits of *faithful* ministry should not despair that they have seen few results, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints" (Heb. 6: 10). God's only command is that we are faithful to the gospel and obedient to the implications of the gospel for holy living; the results belong to Him. On the Day of Judgment, there will be many who wish to present Him the results of their ministries, but their "success" will not suffice as a substitute for lack of genuine faith and holiness (Matt. 7: 21-23). Faith without the "works" of holiness is worthless (James 2: 14).

"At that very time" Jesus rejoiced in the work which had been accomplished by the seventy. Thus, the words which follow from the *successful* completion of the disciple's mission (vv. 21-24) are repetitive of what He had said on a previous occasion when *His mission* in Galilee had been *rejected* (Matt. 11: 25-27 and Matt. 13: 16-17; see commentary above on these passages).

#### ***4. Pharisaism Contrasted with the Good Samaritan—Lk. 10: 25-37***

This well-known story is found only in *Luke*, but the manner in which Jesus deals with the lawyer is similar to the way He deals with the rich young ruler in Matt. 19: 16-26 (see commentary below). Furthermore, the incident in Lk. 10 is not the same as the one in Matt. 22: 34-40 or Mk. 12: 28-34 in which a lawyer asked Him a *different* question, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (cf. Mk. 12: 28). On this occasion, the lawyer asked,



“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life”, a question Jesus was doubtless asked on many other occasions not recorded in the gospels. Furthermore, in *Luke* the lawyer answers Jesus’ question: “What is written in the Law?” with a quotation of the summary of the Ten Commandments, while in Matt. 22 and Mk. 12, Jesus Himself quotes the summary. This is obviously *not* a doublet (a restatement of the same story).

In answering the lawyer’s question, Jesus appeals to the Law which promises life to those who keep it. (For a more thorough treatment of this subject, and the impossibility of keeping the Law, see below on Matt. 19: 16-26). After the lawyer answers with a summary of the Law, Jesus, far from accusing him of legalism, says, “You have answered *correctly*; do this and you will live” (v. 28, quoting Lev. 18: 5 and Ezek. 20: 11). The problem with the Jews—and this lawyer—was *not* that they *misinterpreted* the Law to promise life through obedience (a common “misinterpretation” by reformed scholars). It did just that (cf. Matt. 19: 17). Their problem was not misinterpretation but *presumption*. They presumed that they were *capable* of keeping the Law unto salvation. *In the face of this presumption stood the countless OT animal sacrifices which, in essence, represented their inability by showing another way of salvation—humble trust in God’s substitutionary provision for the sinner.* Anyone who presumes his capability in keeping the Law for salvation must always dilute (water down) the extreme requirements of the Law in order to bring law-keeping within his reach. Thus, when the Law says, “You shall not commit adultery”, it must be interpreted only as actual, physical adultery and not lusting after another woman in one’s heart. In this way, it is relatively easy to be guiltless of adultery. But Jesus has already demonstrated the futility of such reasoning in the Sermon on the Mount. The Law, rightly observed, is much more demanding than external observance requires.

Attempting to interpret the Law in such a way that he could be excused, the lawyer says, “And who is my neighbor?” hoping that “neighbor” would have a very limited definition suitable to his own apathy (lack of concern) toward anyone he didn’t like. Jesus’ reply in the parable of the good Samaritan corresponds not only to the question: “Who is my neighbor?” but “What is the requirement of the Law in regard to loving my neighbor as myself?”

The road “going down” from Jerusalem to Jericho, even by the normal dangerous standard of travel in the ancient East, was especially treacherous. The road meandered (curved this way and that way) through 17 miles of rocky terrain presenting thieves many good opportunities to prey upon unwary travelers (also Liefeld, p. 943). According to Luke’s normal “rule of three” (Liefeld, p. 943), Jesus tells the story of three travelers who meet a beaten man left for dead along the way. The first is a priest responsible for making sacrifices in the temple. The second is a Levite responsible for maintaining the services in the temple. In other words, both men were Jews. It is not a fair explanation to say that both were afraid of ceremonial defilement with a man they believed already dead. The priest is “going down” from Jerusalem to Jericho which implies that his priestly duties were already done. Ceremonial defilement was only significant when one was actually in the performance of ritual duties, not afterwards (Liefeld, p. 943, following Jeremias). The same can also be said of the Levite; thus, both men are without excuse for their inaction.

In stark contrast to the unfeeling Jews in the story who know the Law well, the despised Samaritan—who most likely knows it less—feels compassion for the man. Making no

assumptions, and asking no questions about the man's identity as Jew, Gentile, or Samaritan, he goes to great inconvenience and expense to save the man's life. Contrary to the allegorization of this parable, the good Samaritan is not Christ, and the inn is not the church. The Samaritan is "every man" and the beaten traveler is "anyone". Rather than attempting to narrowly define the word, "neighbor", Jesus instructs the lawyer to **be** a neighbor to anyone who needs his help, regardless of ethnicity, tribe, or personal affinity. Repeating the command of v. 28b, Jesus says, "Go and do the same." True keeping of the Law does not consist of Pharisaical "hairsplitting" (endless theorizing) about who *is* and who is *not* my neighbor, but deeds of mercy. Rather than identifying neighbors, we must **be** a neighbor; and to be a neighbor, we have to **do** something!

We are not told that the man walked away sadly like the rich young ruler, but the demands Jesus makes upon him are the same, "for *it is* not the **hearers** of the Law *who* are just before God, but the **doers** of the Law will be justified" (Rom. 2: 13). And herein lies the most important purpose of the parable. The primary purpose is not to teach us how we can be good neighbors, though the parable is certainly instructive to that end. The primary purpose is to disabuse the lawyer, (and us) of self-righteousness, thus leading him to grace. Considering his brother's teaching years later, James warns, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who **delude** themselves" (James 1: 22). Thus far, the man had simply deluded himself, and now the delusion is dispelled. He will now have to face the cold reality—just as the rich ruler—that he is a law-breaker rather than a law-keeper. Hopefully (we are not told) he came to the conclusion that he must cast himself upon the mercy of Christ rather than his ability to keep the Law, for this is just the conclusion Jesus was fishing for. Perfect neighborliness is not a possibility for fallen sinners; nevertheless, we must come face to face with the fact that we have, indeed, fallen short of the glory of God reflected in His law (Rom. 3: 23). We, therefore, need His forgiveness. As in the story of the rich young ruler, Jesus uses the Law in the way it was designed to be used—to kill our hopes of self-righteousness and force us to flee to the cross. If we do so, we will not be excused for ignoring our neighbor, but we will be given a new desire and ability to do him good. Only those whose sinful, selfish lives have been touched by the Savior will have the desire and compassion to assist those in need and will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 25: 31-46).

### 5. *Mary and Martha—Lk. 10: 38-42*

In this story, all of us can identify with Martha; and all of us, likewise, can be convicted by its message. We go astray if we use the story to justify laziness, as if our desire for interaction and fellowship with other believers, or study of the Bible, is an excuse to let others do the work we despise doing. Being lazy does not make us more holy, but less so, and a life of quiet contemplation on spiritual things can become an excuse for lethargy. Jesus admonishes Martha to beware of another form of self-righteousness—the "martyr's malady". **Self-denying service** for Christ's sake is necessary, but **enjoying** Him as one's Savior is equally necessary and is the prerequisite (prior requirement) for the former activity. Intimate communion with Christ is necessary for us to find meaning and enjoyment in all our labors, even the preparation of food. Without this communion, the ordinary demands upon us will quickly overwhelm us, producing a "So what?" mentality—"So what is the meaning of everything I do?" (cf. Col. 3: 23-24) While not condemning the labor of helping others—after all, this story follows the parable of the Good Samaritan—Christ warns us that we can often become so consumed with serving that we miss out on the joys of fellowship and intimate communion with Himself and others. The meal can

wait! Whenever there is opportunity for learning and fellowship—and those opportunities can be scarce—we need to grab them while we can.

The most important part of our religion is the spiritual exercise of communion with our Redeemer. When things are right in this respect, we shall also in our practical life be actively busy in His honor. It is certainly one of the most difficult lessons to learn, to maintain the right balance between the life of quiet worship in spirit and in truth and the practicing of our religion in active service. And, indeed, it is only the Word of God that this comprehensive form of religion is taught. Extra-Biblical religions lapse into either excessive contemplative forms of religion, or into dry outward formal religion. But Jesus calls us to a life of worship as well as practical service (Geldenhuys, pp. 316-317).

### 6. *Instruction about Prayer—Lk. 11: 1-13*

There is no clear temporal connection between this pericope and the incident with Mary and Martha. In fact, most of the stories have no chronological connection with the other but are grouped together thematically.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had presented a more complete version of the “Lord’s Prayer” as a helpful contrast to meaningless repetition (Matt. 6: 9-13; see commentary above). The context here is different, namely, the request of one of the disciples: “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.” The “Lord’s Prayer”, in a somewhat different version, is now given in response to this request along with a parable (found only in *Luke*) and other instructions (vv. 5-13) found elsewhere with some differences (Matt. 7: 7-11; see commentary above). That the prayer is not exactly the same as the one in Matt. 6 indicates that Jesus had no intention of giving us a prayer which should be repeated in mechanical, rote fashion (Geldenhuys, p. 319). After all, this is what He was teaching *against* in Matt. 6: 7-8! This, of course, does not mean it cannot be used liturgically as long as it is used meaningfully. Further, it is very likely that the prayer was repeated on many occasions, in different versions, along with the other instructions on the necessity of persistence in prayer (vv. 9-13), again, in different versions. Repetition is the best teacher.

The cultural and economic situation of the ordinary Jew living in Palestine may help us understand the reluctance of the man to help his friend at midnight. The typical Palestinian home consisted of one room with no furniture serving as the living room, dining room, and sleeping quarters. At midnight, the friend would already be asleep on a floor mat along with the rest of his family which may consist of several children. It would be quite an ordeal for him to get up, light a candle or lantern, negotiate past all the sleepy heads lying all over the floor, and find three small loaves of bread (Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message*, p. 45; cf. Liefeld, p. 948). So, let’s give the guy a break! Nevertheless, his reluctance is inconsiderate, yet necessary to the parable for demonstrating the importance of persistence in prayer. Even though the man will not get up and give his friend bread because he is a friend, he will do it because his friend is refuses to go away without getting what he needs. The argument is characteristically one from the lesser to the greater. If a friend will give you what you need, not because he is your friend, but because of your persistence alone, the heavenly Father, who is not a reluctant friend but a caring Father, will most certainly respond to persistent prayer.

There is another interpretation based on an alternate translation of *anaideian*—shamelessness or shameless boldness. It is difficult to determine whether the word describes the man making the

request or the friend who is fulfilling the request. Liefeld offers the interpretation that the word describes the man in bed who wishes to avoid the shame of not fulfilling the friend's request. In the same way "God will always do what is honorable and consistent with his character" (p. 949). I prefer the traditional interpretation which applies the description of shamelessness to the friend who needs help. He is "shamelessly bold" in his persistence to receive help, not concerned at all with maintaining any pride or dignity with his repeated requests.

The traditional interpretation fits better with the context of the passage. Jesus continues to teach the importance of persistence in the remainder of the passage (vv. 9-13; cf. Matt. 7: 7-11 and commentary). All the verbs of v. 10 are present participles indicating continuous activity—"For everyone who keeps asking...keeps seeking...keeps knocking..."

**7. *The Blasphemy of the Pharisees and Their Insistence upon a Sign—Lk. 11: 14-32; Matt. 12: 22-45; Mk. 3: 22-30***

Luke 11: 14-32 has been explained above under Matt. 12: 22-45 while Lk. 11: 33-36 has been explained in the Sermon on the Mount. However, vv. 33-36 could have been repeated on a number of occasions in different contexts.

**8. *Jesus Pronounces Woes Upon the Pharisees—Lk. 11: 37-54***

This pericope is found only in *Luke*, but some of the language is repeated on another occasion in Matt. 23 (see commentary below). Guthrie places it chronologically after Matt. 12: 45 (*ZPEB*, p. 558), but if this is true, then it must also have occurred after Jesus' address concerning His mother and brothers which Matthew and Mark place immediately after His denunciation of the Pharisees (cf. Matt. 12: 46-50; Mk. 3: 31-35). After Jesus speaks about His "mother and brothers", He goes "out of the house" (cf. 12: 46, 47; "outside"). Presumably, Jesus was inside the house speaking to the multitudes, and His mother and brothers were outside. He then goes out of the house and begins teaching the multitudes in parables sitting by the sea (Matt. 13: 1; Mk. 4: 1). The wording of Lk. 11: 37 seems to place the pericope immediately after His denunciation of the demand for signs (including 11: 33-36)—"Now when He had spoken..." It is almost impossible to be sure where to place this passage chronologically.

Jesus often had lunch with Pharisees (cf. Lk. 14: 1). On this occasion He purposely omits the customary ceremonial washing before the meal, an unnecessary Pharisaical addition to the Law. Only the priests were required to wash before officiating at the altar (Ex. 30: 18-21). Their supercilious (arrogant) posture about proper washing was representative of many other *externalisms* which dominated Pharisaical tradition, thus pushing aside the deeper, internal requirements of the Law. Knowing this trait, Jesus condemns them for being punctilious (very careful in every detail) with external obedience—"the outside of the cup and of the platter"—but careless of the "inside" (cf. Matt. 23: 27). The "wickedness" mentioned in v. 39 is a general term which could include many types of sins. The Pharisees were known for divorcing their wives for frivolous reasons (See commentary on Matt. 19: 1-12 below). On the other hand, the "robbery" is specific and could be referring to the Pharisees' mistreatment of their own parents by refusing them monetary assistance (Mk. 7: 11; see commentary above) and their mistreatment of widows (Lk. 20: 47). Widows were regular contributors to the Pharisees for the purpose of

facilitating their studies in the Law, and often the Pharisees would use manipulative means to extract these contributions (Geldenhuys, p. 518). Had they applied themselves to the weightier matters of the law and true charity and love toward others—including generosity—then they would have been clean without all the ceremonial washings (v. 41; cf. Geldenhuys, p. 342).

The woes pronounced upon the Pharisees and lawyers on this occasion (in Perea, the Trans-Jordan) is similar in language to that of Matt. 23 delivered against the scribes and Pharisees during the Passion Week in Jerusalem, the longest discourse against the Pharisees in the Synoptics. We will therefore postpone the treatment of vv. 42-52 until we get to Matt. 23.

The pronouncements upon the scribes (lawyers) and Pharisees in Perea are indicative of future confrontations with them during the Passion Week. Knowing that He sees through their superficial religion and that He is a threat to their authority and influence over the common people—as well as their income—they are increasingly intent on getting rid of Jesus (vv. 53-54).

### ***9. Further Instructions to His Disciples—Lk. 12: 1-12***

Most of this discourse is found within Matt. 10, the commissioning of the Twelve (see commentary above), and is now repeated in a different context, ***the opposition of the scribes and Pharisees*** (Lk. 11: 37-54). Jesus knew that in the immediate future (before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD) the religious rulers and teachers of Israel would be the fiercest opponents of the Christian faith. Following in the footsteps of their religious forefathers who persecuted and killed the prophets (Lk. 11: 48-51), the scribes and Pharisees would hunt down and persecute Jewish Christians (Acts 7-9). After his conversion to Christ, the Apostle Paul would be beaten “times without number” (he lost count), imprisoned, five times receiving thirty-nine lashes, beaten with rods three times and stoned once—all from his Jewish countrymen (2 Cor. 11: 23-25). Not surprisingly Jesus would say, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (12: 1), not just on this occasion, but many times (Matt. 16: 6).

Notwithstanding (in spite of) Jewish persecution, whatever the disciples have heard from Jesus in privacy and “whispered” among themselves “in the inner rooms” would be proclaimed in the public square and on the housetops (12: 2-3), and they would not be afraid of proclaiming the gospel no matter what dangers they faced (v. 4). Jesus’ prophecy was abundantly fulfilled in the fearless preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, the death of Stephen (Acts 7), the martyrdom of all the apostles, and the martyrdom of thousands of Christians throughout the history of the church. There have been more Christians who have died for their faith in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the other 19 centuries since the resurrection of Christ, combined.

Not only this, but the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees was embraced by many leaders of the institutional church who put Christians to death for believing the true gospel which was opposed to their false gospel of salvation by works and blind obedience to church leaders who dominated the Church. As always, one of the fiercest opponents to the ***church*** (the body of Christ) is the ***Church*** (the institutional Church) which usurps Christ’s authority over the souls of His people and places them in bondage to a false gospel of legalism, antinomianism, formalism, existentialism, liberalism, etc.

## 10. *The Parable of the Rich Fool—Lk. 12: 13-34*

### a. *The context—vv. 13-15*

This parable is found only in *Luke* and is occasioned by “someone in the crowd” who wishes Jesus to adjudicate (to judge in a dispute) between him and his brother over the family inheritance. In Jewish culture, a double portion of the inheritance was given to the first-born son (Deut. 21: 15-17), and this man apparently wanted his elder brother to divide that portion with him. Rabbis were often consulted in legal matters, and in later years they traveled from city to city rendering legal decisions. Jesus certainly had the moral right and the ability to judge this man’s case, and His refusal to do so does not indicate that He was not concerned about ethical issues which affected one’s life (Liefeld, p. 961). However, Jewish law was very well-defined on this matter, and it is unclear why the man thought Jesus might be willing to overturn an established practice.

At any rate, the man had been present while Jesus was speaking of *much more serious matters*—matters of life and death, heaven and hell, and ultimate sacrifice for His name. The instructions of vv. 1-12 had been directed to “His disciples” (a designation larger than the Twelve), but a large “multitude” had overheard His teaching (v. 1). The intruder was part of this large multitude and had apparently *no interest* in the eternal things of which Jesus spoke (Geldenhuys, p. 354). He saw Jesus not as a Savior, but as an opportunity to acquire material goods from his brother. It was not the man’s question alone which provoked Jesus’ response (vv. 14-15), but the question in this particular context of Jesus’ teaching about heaven and hell and ultimate sacrifice. Jesus’ time on earth could not be devoted to such trivial matters—trivial in comparison to eternal life—but even in light of these weightier issues affecting one’s eternal destiny, the man was interested only in money.

And is this not the tragically sad state of so many in our day, regardless of the culture and regardless of the financial status. Both the rich, middle-class, and poor alike are consumed with material concerns, but not with the weightier issues of heaven and hell. We are not told to which socio-economic class this man belonged, but Jesus selects the rich as the subject of His parable, and for good reason. If the essence of one’s life does not consist of material possessions even when he is rich, it surely cannot define one’s life if he is middle-class or poor. By using the rich fool as an example of what not to do, He covers the entire spectrum of society.

### b. *The parable—vv. 16-21*

He begins the parable by saying, “The land of a certain rich man was very productive.” The abundant produce of the land was a sign of God’s blessing, as the Law clearly showed (Deut. 28: 4, 11); and lack of productivity was a sign of His curse (Deut. 28: 18; Hag. 1: 6; Jer. 24: 10). The rich man must, therefore, be supremely blessed of God, right? Well, in one sense, yes. A man can acquire wealth only through God’s goodness to him; but if this goodness does not receive the proper response of praise, thanksgiving, and generosity, then blessing is turned into a curse. It would be later in His ministry that Jesus would issue another warning about the rich man, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19: 23), to which the disciples responded in amazement, “Then who can be saved?” (19: 25). They figured if those who were blessed by God with material wealth could scarcely be saved, it was

hopeless for everyone else who were clearly under the curse of poverty. For now, His teaching is clearly a warning to all those in ancient culture who lived under the influence of retribution theology—the theology of Job’s three friends—which taught that God *always* blessed good behavior with material prosperity while *always* cursing bad behavior with material want. The common belief was: “Bad things never happen to good people.”

Retribution theology is still the popular theology of modern cultures lulling rich people into a spiritual sleep disturbed only as they awake in hell. Poverty is *not necessarily* evidence of God’s disfavor, and riches are *not necessarily* evidence of God’s favor—the parable of the rich man and Lazarus proves otherwise (Lk. 16: 19-31).

The rich man in the parable does the math on his profits and gleefully concludes that early retirement is in order. He has enough for many years to come. He can, therefore, “kick back”, prop his feet up, watch his money grow in the New York Stock Exchange (or Crane Bank, Kampala), and hang out with the other rich boys at the country club. He has it all figured out (vv. 17-19). Except one thing—one day he will die and will have to give an accounting to God about the use of his money, and death may come sooner than he thinks (v. 20). The reader should notice the emphasis on the word, “soul” (vv. 19, 20). The rich man believed not only that his money belonged to him, and to him alone, but also that his soul belonged to him, alone. But he was wrong, dead wrong. Both his money *and* his soul belonged to God who has absolute right and power over both, to take the man’s riches and give them to someone else he may not even know (cf. Ecc. 2: 18-19), and to send his soul to hell (v. 20). *This* rich man is a rich *fool* because he does not obey the principle taught in the Sermon on the Mount to lay up treasures in heaven (Matt. 6: 20). He is rich, but “not rich *toward God*”.

Riches alone are not condemned in this parable but one’s improper attitude toward them, the improper use of them, one’s misplaced security in them, and their enthronement in God’s place. But let not the professing Christian gloss over the warning in this parable as if it does not apply to him. Let him examine daily his use of wealth. Is he rich in paper (bank accounts and mutual funds) and real estate, but poor toward God because he is stingy and covetous? Does his security really rest in his relationship to God and the promise of eternal life or in his retirement fund? Does his checkbook (the way he spends his money) prove that his security is not in money and possessions—by giving to the needy, to the church, to missions both at home and abroad?

There are very tangible ways we can gauge our attitudes toward money and material possessions. If there weren’t, Paul would never have made one’s attitude toward money a test of leadership potential in the church: “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, *free from the love of money*” (1 Tim. 3: 2-3). How would Timothy (to whom Paul is writing) identify a man who was free from the love of money? Would he simply *ask* him, “Are you free from the love of money?” to which the potential overseer would respond, “Oh, of course”? “Good, you qualify!” Timothy would say. “Ridiculous!” we would say. Timothy would obviously look for concrete, tangible evidence that a man’s mind was set on Christ and the things above and not on the earth (Col. 3: 1-2). He would look for a man whose “life is hidden with Christ and God” (v. 3) and not covered up with “stuff” which people collect to make them happy or to impress their friends. He would look for a man who was “dead to immorality,

impurity, passion, evil desire, and **greed, which amounts to idolatry**" (v. 5). Finally, he would look for a man who was not laying up treasures on earth (excessive cars, houses, clothes, rare collections, etc.).

So, who's fooling whom? Are we fooling ourselves into thinking we are Christ-centered and generous, that we are seeking first the kingdom of God, when we are really selfish, covetous, and riveted to the earth? Are we rich toward God?

**c. The implications of the parable—vv. 22-34**

The implications of the parable for righteous living are found in vv. 22-34. Jesus introduces these implications with the words, "For this reason I say to you..." followed essentially by the same instructions given in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 6: 25-34). In the sermon, the "reason" for not being anxious follows Matt. 6: 19-24, His instructions about laying up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, and, more specifically, the evil eye (perspective or attitude) which serves mammon (money) rather than God. For this reason, they were not to be anxious about the material concerns of life—even the basic necessities like food and clothing. Anxiety and worry over such things betrays a lack of concern for the kingdom of God (6: 32-33).

The message in *Luke* is similar, but the context is the folly of trusting in riches ("For this reason"; namely, the reason of the rich fool). As the story of the rich fool proved, life is obviously more than food and clothing (v. 23) and storing up wealth in barns (v. 24). And why should we be anxious about money if such anxiety will not add one moment to our lives? Great wealth could not extend the life of the rich fool (v. 25). In the ultimate sense our wealth or the lack of it is under God's control, as well as the length of our lives. Jesus does not allow the multitudes to get off the hook. He is not addressing only **rich** fools, but **poor** ones, too—and everyone in between. Anyone can allow the pursuit of money, or even basic necessities, to become his master. Seeking the kingdom of God is everyone's obligation and the only legitimate goal in life, rich or poor. The man who desired Jesus to judge between him and his brother had short-sighted goals.

Luke adds two statements (vv. 32-33) not found in *Matthew*. Anxiety over material possessions results from short-sightedness and limited perspective (cf. Matt. 6: 22-23). Our eschatology (doctrine of future things) is supremely important if we would avoid this error. Who are we and where are we going? If we can get the answers to this question correctly, many of our problems—both practical and theoretical—will be fundamentally solved. Who are we? We are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Where are we going? Jesus has come to redeem us from our bondage to sin and to make us fit for eternal life in the new heaven and earth which awaits the consummation of the kingdom of God in the return of Christ (Rom. 8: 18-25; 1 Thes. 4: 13-18; *passim*—here and there in other parts of the Bible). Not only will we enjoy this new heaven and earth spiritually, but we will enjoy it bodily (1 Cor. 15: 35-49). And just as man and woman before the fall fellowshiped with God in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3: 8), we will fellowship with Jesus Christ, the God-man (1 Thes. 4: 17b). This life is not the end; it is not all there is. It is but the twinkling of an eye, the shadow of our lives which soon passes and gives way to the reality: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while **we look not at the things which are seen, but at the**



***things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal***” (2 Cor. 4: 17-18).

A proper eschatological perspective drives out fear: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom” (v. 32). We should be “seeking” (v. 31) the kingdom which God the Father plans to “give” us. All the more reason to seek it diligently! In consideration of this fact, we, the inheritors of a vast kingdom, can afford to be generous—not avaricious (greedy) like the rich fool (thus, v. 33, which serves as a commentary on Matt. 6: 20). Jim Eliot, a young missionary murdered at age 27 taking the gospel to the Woadani Indians of Ecuador, once said, “He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep [earthly life and possessions], to keep what he cannot lose [eternal life and the kingdom of God].”

Another explanation of the command to sell one’s possessions is that Jesus is preparing His disciples—then and now—***to live lives which are unencumbered with material things*** (Liefeld, p. 964). In the first commissioning of the disciples (Matt. 10), Jesus tells them to take no provisions for themselves but to depend upon the charity of others in the performance of their duties as missionaries to the Jews. In so doing, they would be traveling light without being hindered in their mission by excessive baggage. In the conversation with the rich young ruler, He commands him to sell everything he has and follow Him (Matt. 19: 16-26). His money and possessions constituted a wall of separation between him and God which had to be discarded for him to move forward. Material possessions can often hinder our service to Jesus by making us reluctant to follow Him wherever He wants us to go. The normal tendency is to settle down in one place and become comfortable in a routine which we are hesitant or even unwilling to leave. (And while I firmly believe that pastors should be financially supported by their congregations, a large salary can often seal the lips of pastors who are afraid of preaching the truth with boldness for fear of losing their “jobs”.) This does not imply that a routine in location, work, or ministry is never acceptable. People can be more productive, not less, if they can work in one place at one job for an extended period of time; and this appears to be God’s calling for most Christians. Yet, if the Holy Spirit calls us to something else, comfort and routine should be easily discarded in pursuit of this call.

In the passage which follows, the faithful servant, we are instructed to remain in a state of readiness continually watching for the return of our Master. He could come at any time, and we must occupy ourselves with the worthy pursuit of His kingdom.

### ***11. The Call to Readiness—Lk. 12: 35-48***

This section has much in common with Matt. 24: 42-51 (see below), but the parables are spoken here at a different time and context, in Judea before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The parable in vv. 36-40 is parallel to the one in Matt. 25: 1-13, the ten virgins. In both parables, there is a wedding feast. In *Matthew* the bridegroom is ***going*** to the feast while in *Luke* the master is ***returning*** from the feast. The exact time of the master’s return is not known, requiring due diligence. When he does return, he should not be required to bang loudly upon the door to awaken his sleeping servants; rather, they should be at the door ready to receive him. The surprising element of this parable is the role reversal when the master returns. For those slaves

who are alert and waiting for their master, he will gird himself (tuck his outer robes into his belt) and will wait upon them at the table. This is not what a slave in the ancient East would expect of his master, yet precisely what Jesus does at the last Passover feast celebrated with His disciples (Jn. 13). At His return, Jesus will honor those who have been eagerly and diligently awaiting Him.

The waiting period in the parable is the time between Jesus' ascension to the Father's right hand and His second coming. It is implied from the parable that Jesus will not immediately return, but that His disciples must wait for Him expectantly for an undisclosed period of time. Other passages of scripture also teach an indefinite, undetermined period of time between the ascension and the second coming, including the entire section of Matt. 24—25.

In v. 39 the figure of speech changes to that of a man guarding his house. Just as the servants in the previous verses did not know when their master was returning from the wedding feast, the master of the house does not know when a thief will come to steal his goods. A thief will never notify the master ahead of time that he is coming to steal from him; the master must, therefore, *always* be ready to defend his house at any time. The point of comparison in the parable is not that Christ is attempting to steal something not belonging to him (He owns everything already), but only in the *manner* of His coming. In the same way a thief comes in the night—unexpectedly—Christ will come again at a time in which no *unbeliever* is expecting him. Constant watchfulness is necessary for those who wish to be ready when He returns (v. 40; cf. Matt. 24: 43-44). However, in another sense, Jesus' coming should not come as a surprise to *believers*. Jesus has already warned His disciples to be ready when He comes and not to let his coming take them by surprise. Only those “would-be” disciples who refuse to heed His words will be caught unprepared.

Picking up on the theme of the thief coming in the night, the Apostle Paul—who possibly learned this parable from Luke, his traveling companion (Col. 4: 14)—reiterated (repeated) this metaphor in his letter to the church in Thessalonica.

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, *you* have no need of anything to be written to *you*. For *you* yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While *they* are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon *them* suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and *they* will not escape. But *you*, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake *you* like a thief; for *you* are all sons of light and sons of day. *We* are not of night nor of darkness; so then let *us* not sleep as *others* do, but let *us* be alert and sober (1 Thes. 5: 1-6).

The distinction between *you*, *we*, and *us* (on the one hand), and *they*, *them*, and *others* (on the other hand) is striking. The Day of the Lord will overtake *them*—unbelievers—like a thief in the night, but it will not overtake *us*—believers. *We*—true believers—will be ready for the Lord's return.

Since there is certainly a negative element in the parable—for those who are *not* ready—Peter wonders whether the parable is for the benefit of everyone or specifically for the disciples (v. 41; cf. Geldenhuys, p. 363). Without answering his question directly, Jesus tells another parable which indicates that in a special sense the disciples have an *even greater responsibility* to maintain a state of readiness. Not only should they be watching for their Lord's return for their own benefit, but for *others given to them for spiritual protection and nurture*. They are, or

should be, the faithful and sensible steward (*oikonomos*—a high-ranking household manager) who is responsible for giving all Christ’s servants their “rations” (spiritual food from the Master) “at the proper time”—that is, the time between Christ’s ascension and His second coming. Once again, it is implied that there is a waiting period between the ascension and the second coming of Christ. Before Christ ascended, He assured the disciples that He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28: 18). As a consequence of this authority, they were commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Triune God and instructing them to observe everything (their rations at the proper time) He had commanded them (vv. 19-20).

While the passage has an application for every Christian—since every Christian has some responsibility for the spiritual welfare of others—it is especially applicable to the *apostles* who would constitute the foundation of the NT church (Eph. 2: 20). They must be faithful in the preaching and teaching of the gospel *lest others be unprepared* when the Lord returns in glory to judge the world. Extending this application, elders of churches have a unique responsibility to shepherd the flock given to their charge (Acts 20: 28; 1 Pet. 5: 2) as those who will be accountable before God (Heb. 13: 17). The reward for faithfully feeding the flock—or for spiritual nurture of any kind—is implied in v. 44. Jesus will bestow “all his possessions” upon the steward who is faithfully discharging his spiritual duties for the benefit of others at His second coming. By extension we can say that He will also reward anyone who has done so at any time between His first and second coming. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15: 58). (Of course, Christ will reward any OT believer as well, but the special emphasis here is the period between the ascension and the second coming.)

Yet, the blessings for obedience (the blessings of the covenant) are balanced by the dire (severe) consequences for disobedience (the curses of the covenant) (vv. 45-48). In this section, Jesus is giving the disciples a “heads-up” that He will be away for “a long time” (v. 45). It is thus ludicrous for liberal scholars to suggest that Jesus believed in His *immediate* return but was, Himself, mistaken. Jesus humanly did not know the day or the hour of His return (Matt. 24: 36), but He seemed to know that He would not return for a long time, and accordingly gave the disciples a subtle warning to this effect. There is *no* suggestion in Matt. 24 that Jesus did *not* know when the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, and He warned the disciples that many false “Christs” would appear before then whose claims not fool them (Matt. 24: 23-26). The destruction of the temple in 70 AD was roughly 40 years after the ascension; thus, any suggestion that Jesus thought or taught His second coming was imminent is ruled out.

In His warning, Jesus changes the term from “steward” (*oikonomos*; v. 42) to “slave” (*doulos*—the lowest-ranking slave in the household; v. 45) perhaps to remind the disciples that any consideration of high rank (house-hold manager) should be tempered (qualified) with a keen awareness of the unworthiness of their privilege. They were, after all, “unworthy slaves” who were doing what they were obligated to do (Lk. 17: 10). If the slave reasons that the master will be gone a long time and uses his extended absence as an opportunity to mistreat the other servants allotted to his charge, as well as an opportunity to live irresponsibly and promiscuously, the master will return at an unexpected time and will punish this slave (vv. 45-46). The punishment for being disobedient is appropriately severe for the eschatological application of the parable (v. 46). Unfaithful servants—particularly Christian leaders—who claim to know Christ,

but whose actions demonstrate a callous disregard for fellow believers (particularly those who are dependent upon them for spiritual guidance and nurture) will at the return of Christ be punished in hell with “many lashes” (note: They will be assigned to “a place with the unbelievers”).

The punishment received in hell will be commensurate with (proportionate to) the knowledge of the master’s will bestowed upon the servant. If he knew his master’s will and sinned against that will “with a high hand” (deliberately and willfully; Num. 15: 27-31), he will be beaten with many lashes. But if he did not know his master’s will and, therefore, did not sin against this will with full knowledge of it, he will be beaten with few lashes (vv. 47-48). The one who knows his master’s will is the *professing Christian*—particularly the professing Christian leader (pastor, elder, evangelist, etc.)—who sins against a greater light with full knowledge of what he is doing (cf. Heb. 10: 26). The one who does not know the master’s will is the *unbeliever* (v. 46) who makes no claims of being a Christian—and who perhaps has never even heard of Christ—who sins against less light. Unbelievers are still God’s “slaves” because He owns them whether they know it or not, but they do not know God’s will for their lives to the extent of the professing believer who has been taught the word and has benefited from the covenant community of the church (Heb. 6: 4-8). To whom much is given, much is required (v. 48). Conversely, to whom little is given, less is required.

It is not true that everyone going to hell will receive equal punishment. The extent of their punishment—many lashes or few—will partly depend upon the *measure of knowledge* they received while on earth. Another factor determining their punishment will be the *deeds* they have done on earth, deeds reflected in the description of v. 45 (Matt. 16: 27; Rom. 2: 6; 2 Cor. 5: 10; 11: 13-15; 2 Tim. 4: 14; Rev. 2: 23; Rev. 20: 12-13). This interpretation is simply in agreement with the nature of God who always judges each person’s case appropriately and justly. We would not expect a sinful human judge to give the same sentence (punishment) to a young adolescent who steals 20,000 Ush (12 \$US) as he does to a hardened, premeditated murderer. The first person commits a lesser crime with less knowledge than the second. We would rightly accuse the judge of gross injustice if he gave them the same sentence, even demanding his removal from the bench. Yet, there are many Christians who expect God to give the same sentence in hell to all sinners who are grossly different from one another in knowledge and deeds. Should we not expect the same degree of justice from God that we expect from human judges? Besides, it’s Biblical (see passages above).

## **12. Christ divides—Lk. 12: 49-53**

“Why can’t we all just get along?” These were the now famous words of Rodney King after he was arrested and beaten by Los Angeles police—and after his case became public in the American media. He sued the LA police department for a lot of money, which he promptly used to buy more illegal drugs. He was arrested several times later for drug possession or some other criminal charges. In a perfect world—the world to come—we all *could* just get along, but we don’t live in a perfect world. Divisions of all kinds exist, including religious divisions which are the most fundamental divisions of all. When the angels announced the birth of Christ, they did not pronounce “peace” upon all men but “peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Lk. 2: 14). Jesus repeats this theme here, declaring in unqualified terms that indiscriminate peace

among all men was not the reason He came. In fact, the Christian faith would divide even the most honored relationships—those between members of the same family.

The passage is very similar to that of Matt. 10: 34-37 (see commentary above). Once again, Jesus repeats Himself for effect. The new context is Jesus' imminent death on the cross, the "baptism" He must undergo (v. 50a) which is the basis of much personal dread (v. 50b), not primarily because of the physical suffering—an understandably horrific prospect (a look forward) by itself—but because of the temporary separation from the Father (Matt. 27: 46). Jesus wishes the ordeal of the cross were already behind Him. The cross would present a stumbling block to the Jews who were looking for a political Messiah, making it difficult and humanly impossible for many Jews to accept the conversion of their family members to the Christian faith.

But what is the "fire" which He has come to "cast" upon the earth? John the Baptist described the ministry of Jesus as the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3: 11-12; Lk. 3: 16-17). Fire—a symbol of judgment—would burn up the "chaff" of disobedience and unbelief (viz. [namely] unbelievers; Lk. 3: 17; cf. Matt. 13: 30; 13: 36-43; in which the wheat are believers and the tares are unbelievers). When this judgment did not come immediately in the ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist began to have serious doubts whether Jesus was the promised Messiah (Matt. 11: 1-6). But fire was also a symbol of purification which separated precious metal from dross (Prov. 25:4; Isa. 1: 25; Ezek. 22: 18), a **constructive** purpose rather than merely a **destructive** one. Thus, the fire which Jesus wanted to cast upon the earth—a fire He wished "were already kindled"—is more likely the fire of **purification** rather than the fire of judgment (in spite of the fact that the previous parable is concerned with judgment—Lk. 12: 45-48). By His own words to Nicodemus, Jesus had described the ministry of His first coming not in terms of **judgment** but **salvation** (Jn. 3: 17). Accordingly, on the Day of Pentecost the gift of the Holy Spirit was visibly manifested to the disciples as **tongues of fire** which "appeared to them" and "rested on each of them". The Holy Spirit was "sent" by the Father and the Son to regenerate the hearts of those chosen by grace, convicting them of sin and enabling them to repent and believe. However, before the Spirit could come at Pentecost with conviction and regenerating grace, turning thousands of the Jewish people to their crucified Savior, Jesus must "undergo" His baptism of suffering and death. The purifying fire of the Holy Spirit which Jesus is casting upon the earth **cannot be "kindled" before His atoning death has satisfied the wrath of God against sin**. Until this is accomplished, the Holy Spirit cannot "come" to convict the world of sin and to regenerate the hearts of men (Jn. 16: 5-9) (cf. Liefeld, p. 968). Jesus is, therefore, anxious for His atoning work to be completed in order that the soteriological work of the Spirit can begin.

### ***13. Interpreting the Times—Lk. 12: 54-59***

The passage from vv. 54 to 57 is very similar to Matt. 16: 2-3, and vv. 58-59 is similar to Matt. 5: 25-26 (see commentary above). The Jews could readily discern weather patterns, but they could not, or would not, apply their minds to the OT scriptures to analyze the present situation. Jesus had come teaching, preaching, and healing in fulfillment of the OT prophecies, and the "season" for belief was clearly present (cf. Liefeld, p. 969); but the Jews refused to believe that He was the promised Messiah in spite of overwhelming evidence. Instead, they had even accused Him of being possessed by a demon (Lk. 11: 15). Time is now of essence since His

crucifixion is scarcely six months away, and the unbelieving Jews will not have much more time to analyze and discern the prophetic fulfillment of the OT in the person and work of Jesus. If they fail to do so—and they did fail—they will suffer the inevitable judgment of the eternal Judge who will throw them into prison (hell) from which there will be no pardon (vv. 58-59).

Even in light of the terrible judgment and unspeakable horrors of the Jewish War with Rome from 66-70 AD ending in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the Jewish people as a whole did not mend their ways. Josephus, a Jewish historian, chronicles those events in the *Works of Josephus*.

#### **14. A call to repentance—Lk. 13: 1-5**

Luke gives the reader a temporal connection in v. 1. The present conversation occurs on the same occasion as the previous discourse of Lk. 12: 1-59. Jesus had dined with a Pharisee (11: 37). Having left the Pharisee's house (11: 53), he was confronted by "many thousands" of people, but His main focus is upon the disciples, whether the twelve or the more general class of followers (12: 1). Nevertheless, the crowd of 12: 1 is close enough to him for a man to ask him about dividing the inheritance between him and his brother (12: 13). On this same occasion He calls the people to repentance (13: 1-5).

For some reason, Jesus' warning of judgment (12: 58-59) provoked some people in the crowd to tell Him about Pilate's gruesome butcher of Galileans who had come to sacrifice in Jerusalem (13: 1). Their own blood—so to speak—had been mingled with the blood of their animal sacrifices. The Jews living in Judea—where Jesus is now speaking—did not particularly like the Galilean Jews whom they disdained as inferior; thus, the death of these Galileans gave them convenient support for their presumed but mistaken superiority. As it was common to believe that the rich were God's favored people, it was equally believed that severe tragedy or judgment was proof that someone was under God's special curse. The retribution theology of Job's three friends was the popular theology of the day (cf. Jn. 9: 1-3; and see my notes on *Job* in *Wisdom Literature*. Better yet, read John E. Hartley, *Job, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*).

Knowing exactly "where they were coming from" (what they were thinking), Jesus uses their report about the slaughtered Galileans to make His point. The question he poses in v. 2 is rhetorical, expecting a "yes" answer. Jesus knew these **Judeans** believed that the **Galileans** were **worse** sinners than they were. Yet, He answers His own question with a resounding "No." They were not worse sinners. Unless these Judeans also repent, they "will all likewise perish". The word, "likewise", has both spiritual and literal content. They will perish spiritually, to be sure, but their violent physical death may resemble that of the Galileans they were gloating over. Forty years from now (in 70 AD), Titus, a Roman general, would assemble his Roman legions in Judea and slaughter thousands of Jews for their rebellion against Caesar.

But Jesus does not stop here. He has another tragedy of His own to tell, one which would be very familiar to His Judean audience. Siloam was a district just outside of Jerusalem, and the tower which had fallen, killing 18 people, had fallen on Judeans, not Galileans. But these Judeans who had died were, likewise, not worse sinners than those living in Jerusalem. Unless

everyone in Jerusalem repents, they will all “likewise” perish. Commenting on this passage, Calvin observes,

This passage is highly useful, were it for no other reason than that this disease is almost natural to us, to be too rigorous and severe in judging of others, and too much disposed to flatter our own faults. The consequence is that we not only censure with excessive severity the offences of our brethren; but whenever they meet with any calamity, we condemn them as wicked and reprobate persons. On the other hand, every man that is not sorely pressed by the hand of God slumbers at ease in the midst of his sins, as if God were favourable and reconciled to him. This involves a double fault; for when God chastises any one before our eyes, he warns us of his judgments, that each of us may examine himself, and consider what he deserves. If he spares us for a time, we are so far from having a right to take such kindness and forbearance as an opportunity for slumber, that we ought to regard it as an invitation to repentance (*Harmony of the Evangelists*; Vol. 2, pp. 151-152).

It is sheer presumption and pride for us to believe that we have avoided violent death or excruciating sickness because of our personal righteousness while others, who may be more righteous than we, have experienced a miserable death. As Calvin observed in his lifetime, a person’s outward circumstances, good or bad, are not an infallible measure of God’s disposition toward that person or of what he deserves (cf. *Job*, a righteous man whom God afflicted). Sometimes Christians die horrible deaths in automobile accidents, in painful sicknesses, or even to murder, while unbelievers live easy, long lives by comparison (cf. Ps. 73). What we must understand from the passage, however, is that ***all of us without exception are worthy of eternal death***, and if we do not repent we will perish in hell regardless of how our sins compare with others.

God’s partial purpose in calamity and human suffering, as Calvin has said, is to give the human race temporal warnings of the ultimate judgment to come; they are preliminary to the final judgment. The terrible calamities which happen to many people—believers and unbelievers—should cause us to ask ourselves serious questions, including: What if I were this person? At death, where would I go: heaven or hell? At death, will there be an opportunity to cry out to God for mercy, or will He take my life from me suddenly and without warning with no such opportunity? At death will I have the opportunity to repent? Sobering questions which most people don’t like to think about. Nevertheless, there is one unalterable reality which we must all face: One day we all—without exception—will appear before God to give an account of our lives.

### ***15. The Parable of the Fig Tree—Lk. 13: 6-9***

The metaphors of vineyards and trees are common in prophet writings (Isa. 5: 1-7; Jer. 12: 10; Micah 7: 1). It was common for people to plant fruit trees of various kinds within their vineyards. Fruitfulness was always required after a three year probationary period (Geldenhuys, p. 372); otherwise, the fig tree would be cut down. Israel, God’s fig tree, had not borne fruit; but God will extend mercy and patience to Israel for a short while longer—forty years, until 70 AD. If she still has not borne fruit after this last opportunity, Israel will be destroyed. Since the parable of the unfaithful servant (12: 45-48), Jesus has been emphasizing judgment, and He continues to do so here. The chosen nation has had ample time (1500 years since the exodus) to bring forth the fruits of repentance but had remained stubborn and rebellious. God will not strive with man forever (Gen. 6: 3), but will judge Israel again even as He had done so in the past.

The difficult part of this parable is in identifying the vineyard owner and the vineyard keeper. Is God the owner while Christ is the keeper? Is Christ presenting Himself as the intercessor of Israel? Perhaps, but the owner and the keeper may be incidental to the parable. The main point is that judgment is sure to come if Israel refuses to repent. The hard lesson here is that the patience of God has limits. If God's patience were infinite, something men would like to believe, there would be no judgment and no hell. On the other hand, God's patience is amazing. Even after their rejection of Christ, the nation had forty more years to repent before their destruction by Roman legions.

### ***16. Healing on the Sabbath Day—Lk. 13: 10-17***

We are not told in what city of Judea this occurred. The last reference to a city is found in Lk. 10: 38, the village of Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha (Jn. 11: 1). Nevertheless, since Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, we may assume that Jesus is teaching in villages close to there. The pericope is similar to the healing of the man with the withered hand (Matt. 12: 9-14). Both incidents occur in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath; in both incidents Jesus is accused—either directly or indirectly—for breaking the Sabbath; and in both incidents Jesus uses the same argument to expose the hypocrisy of those who cared more for their personal property (oxen, donkeys, or sheep; cf. Matt. 12) than they did their fellow human beings. The Proverbs taught that men should be kind even to animals: “A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, But *even* the compassion of the wicked is cruel” (Prov. 12: 10). The Pharisees and applied this proverb to their own animals, but their “compassion” toward people who were not part of their “holy club” was “cruel”. The Law itself, while forbidding work, did not forbid any works of compassion even toward animals, much less toward people. Thus, Jesus was not breaking the Sabbath, but only one of the many rules added to the Law by the Pharisees. Besides, He had taught earlier that the temple was greater than the Sabbath, that He was greater than the temple; and, therefore, He was greater than the Sabbath and Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12: 1-9 and commentary above).

Although we may attempt to determine what kind of sickness this woman had, Luke tells us that she was afflicted by a “spirit” (v. 11). One can only imagine the difficulty of this woman's life having been bent over double for 18 years. Yet, her affliction had not caused her to abandon her faith, for here she was, attending to the instruction of the Law in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Providentially, she was there at the right time when the Savior was teaching (v. 10). Having the compassion absent in the synagogue ruler, Jesus heals her. This is one of the occasions in which Jesus heals someone without being asked to do so and without any evidence of faith that Jesus could heal. Jesus had the true gift of healing which ***did not depend upon the person's faith***. He could heal ***with*** their faith or ***without*** it, and it is dishonest for modern “faith healers” to claim inability to heal due to a person's lack of faith. The comment in Mk. 6: 5 that Jesus “***could do no*** miracle” in Nazareth “because of their unbelief” (an addition in Matt. 13: 58) does not imply inability, but ***refusal*** (see commentary above on these two passages). *Matthew* says, “***did not***”, not “***could not***”; and besides, it is evident in the Markan passage that He actually did heal a few sick people.

In Matt. 12: 12, Jesus asked whether it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Here, He asks whether the Sabbath is an appropriate day for healing (v. 16). The Year of Jubilee, seven Sabbaths of years plus one (7 x 7 = 49 + 1 = 50), was the year of ***release*** from bondage. In Jesus'



rejection at Nazareth (Lk. 4: 16-21; the same rejection recorded in Matt. 12 and Mk. 6), Jesus quotes from Isa. 61 and Lev. 25: 10. The release in the Jubilee was basically a release from poverty and oppression as Jewish slaves were released from their Jewish masters, and those who had sold their lands due to poverty could return to them. Jesus did not come to immediately remove the scourge of poverty—although His work will eliminate poverty in due time—but to remove the poverty of sin. This woman had been in bondage to an evil spirit for 18 years, and the Sabbath, symbolic of release from sin's bondage, was a good day for her to receive physical healing.

Jesus says that Satan had bound this woman 18 years. This brings up the question of how Satan can do such things. Can Satan afflict even believers with evil spirits (Jesus calls her a daughter of Abraham; v. 16)? It cannot be doubted that Satan afflicted Job, another believer, but only with God's permission (Job 1: 12; 2: 6). It can also be argued, furthermore, that the power employed to ruin Job was power "borrowed", so to speak, from God. We have no evidence of Satan's omnipotence in the Scriptures; his power to afflict people is derived from God. In Job 2: 3, God assumes the responsibility for ruining Job, and we hear no more of Satan throughout the rest of the book (cf. my notes on *Job*, including citations from Hartley, *Job*, NICOT). Luke also does not record that the woman was demon-possessed but only that she was afflicted by a spirit. There is also no record that Job was demon-possessed. Satan may afflict God's people, but he cannot possess God's people.

Another question which arises is the age-old question of retribution theology. Had this woman sinned in some way which caused her affliction? There is no evidence of this in the passage. When the disciples asked whether a certain man born blind had sinned or whether his blindness was caused by his parents' sin, Jesus said that neither the man nor his parents had sinned in such a way to deserve his blindness. He was born blind so that the works of God could be displayed in the man's blindness (Jn. 9: 1-3). On that occasion, Jesus displayed the works of God by healing the man. As for others who suffer various afflictions, God's works are displayed through modern medicine, the healing that comes from prayer, and the kindness of others to those in need, as well as God's wrath against sinful humanity. Therefore, God has various uses for physical afflictions, all of which serve to bring Him glory. This does not solve the many problems involved in the mystery of a good God and the presence of suffering, but we must rest content in the sovereign wisdom of God who does all things well (cf. Job 38-41 and notes on *Wisdom Literature*).

### ***17. Parables of the kingdom—Lk. 13: 18-21***

See commentary above at Matt. 13: 31-33. The twin parables are repeated on this occasion.

### ***18. The parable of the narrow door—Lk. 13: 22-30***

One of the few temporal connections in Luke's travel narrative is given in v. 22. Jesus is now traveling around from one village to another on His way to Jerusalem. This section is similar to Matt. 7: 13-23 found in the Sermon on the Mount (spoken much earlier in Jesus' ministry), but there are certain differences here in which the metaphor of the narrow door is extended into a short parable in vv. 24-27. The parable itself is provoked by the question of v. 23, "Lord, are

there just a few who are being saved?” Further, in *Matthew* there are few who *find* the way while in *Luke* there are many who attempt to enter the narrow door but will not be *able* because they are denied entrance by the door-keeper. Jesus often mixes the imagery in His parables, and it is a mistake to force any speaker as creative and spontaneous as Jesus into a rigid mode of story-telling. At any rate, the number of people being saved is not the right question. The important question is whether we are among those who are being saved (Geldenhuys, pp. 379-380).

The imagery of *a door* is prevalent in Jesus’ teaching (Matt. 16: 19; 24: 33; 25: 10; Lk. 11: 7; 12: 36; Jn. 10: 1-9), and Jesus is either the door itself (Jn. 10: 9) or the keeper of the door, as here (Lk. 13: 25). There is no entrance into the heavenly kingdom apart from Jesus Christ. He is not *one way* but *the way*, the only way (Jn. 14: 6 where the definite article “the” is present). Other differences from Matt. 7 may be noted. In Matt. 7: 22, those who are rejected argue that they have been actively engaged in ministry in the name of Jesus. Here, they only say that they were present during Jesus’ teaching (v. 26). In *Matthew*, Jesus does not know *them* while in *Luke* He does not know where they are *from* (v. 27). The difference is not significant since the essence of Jesus’ remark is that they were *strangers* to Him and had no intimate relationship to Him. Both time and identification are important in the parable. Those who delay entering the door will find the door shut (time), and because Jesus does not know them as His sheep (Jn. 10: 27), He will not open the door for them (identification). The urgency of the gospel is implied, and those who wish to be saved cannot dilly-dally around in hope that they have plenty of time and opportunity. Thus, He says at the beginning of the parable, “*Strive* to enter by the narrow door...” (v. 24). Salvation is not by works, but this does not imply the absence of human response. One must avail himself of the means of grace at every opportunity—the preaching and teaching of the word, prayer, etc. If the Holy Spirit is at work, the sinner will spare no effort in hearing everything he possibly can to understand the gospel.

As in *Matthew*’s gospel, the criterion of judgment is works (v. 27). The people whom Jesus does not know personally are those who are “evildoers” (cf. Matt. 7: 23—“you who practice lawlessness”). Not the hearers of the word, but the doers (whose faith is genuine) will be saved (Rom. 2: 13; James 2: 14-26). The Jews prided themselves in the Law and in being the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they will weep and gnash their teeth in agony and self-hatred for their own sin and stupidity as they behold their forefathers and the OT prophets (whom they persecuted and killed) entering the kingdom of God while they are being excluded (v. 27). What will be even more agonizing is that the despised Gentiles will come from all directions to partake of the Messianic feast of the consummated kingdom (v. 29; cf. Lk. 14: 15-24). The statement of v. 30, in this context, has a different meaning from Matt. 19: 30 and 20: 16. In that context, Jesus had no reference to the Jews and Gentiles, but here He is clearly reversing the Jewish expectations that the kingdom of God belongs to them. The gospel has truly been offered to the Jews *first*, and the Gentiles *last*, but now that the Jews have rejected it, the last (the Gentiles) will be first.

### ***19. Jesus’ prophecy concerning Jerusalem—Lk. 13: 31-35***

We do not know exactly where Jesus is at this time except that He is passing through village after village on His way to Jerusalem (13: 22). When Herod the Great died, his kingdom was

divided between three of his sons. Herod Antipas ruled in Galilee and Perea; Antipas' full brother Archelaus reigned in Judea, Samaria and Idumea; and Philip, half brother of Antipas and Archelaus, reigned in Iturea and Trachonitis (Lk. 3: 1; cf. Bible maps). Herod Antipas is Herod the tetrarch of Matt. 14 who has John the Baptist beheaded because he confronted Antipas for taking Philip's wife, Herodias, away from him. He is also the Herod to whom Pilate sends Jesus for questioning (Lk. 23). He ruled as tetrarch for 42 years and Philip, his half-brother over his realm for 37 years. Archelaus, on the other hand, was so oppressive in Judea that Caesar Augustus removed him in 6 AD after a reign of nine years to prevent a Jewish revolt.

Herod has already had John the Baptist beheaded, and he would later have James, son of Zebedee, beheaded (Acts 12: 2). It seems his thirst for blood was almost as insatiable as his more notorious father, Herod the Great (see notes on the "Intertestamentary Period"). Commentators lean toward the view that the Pharisees coming to Jesus (v. 31) are genuinely concerned for His safety. The strongest evidence of this is the fact that Luke makes no note of any hidden motive of getting rid of Jesus through intimidation. Yet, if their motives of protecting Jesus are pure, it is one of the few passages in all the Synoptics with a positive mention of the Pharisees. Personally, I'm inclined to believe they were simply trying to force Jesus out of their precincts through intimidation.

In the ancient East, as elsewhere, foxes were known for cunning; and Herod was a master of political diplomacy and palace intrigue to get his way. Jesus is not alarmed at the potential threat and will not allow Herod or anyone else to hinder the remainder of His ministry in this particular area. When He is done with healing and casting out demons, He will continue His journey toward Jerusalem where He will reach His "goal". The word "goal" is *teleiousthai* (perfection), and we are reminded that Jesus, a true human who "increases in wisdom and stature" (Lk. 2: 40), is perfected through suffering, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to *perfect* the author of their salvation through sufferings" (Heb. 2: 10; in which the word "perfect" comes from the same Greek root). Undoubtedly, Jesus is making a veiled reference in v. 32 to His crucifixion and resurrection, the *ultimate goal* of His first advent.

"Today and tomorrow" are not literal days but figurative, as also the "third day" which represents the day of His resurrection (so also Liefeld, p. 974). This interpretation is supported by the reference to His death in v. 33 immediately following. Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, is the place that kills the prophets and stands as the infamous symbol of Judah's rebellion against God (cf. Isa. 4: 4; Jer. 13: 27; Amos 2: 5; Mic. 1: 5; Zeph. 1: 4). Jesus is not at all concerned about dying before He arrives in Jerusalem but is in complete control of all the circumstances of His death (Acts 2: 23; 4: 27-28). No one can take His life away by force, but He lays it down voluntarily (Jn. 10: 18; cf. Matt. 26: 52-53). In the near future, Herod will get his opportunity to meet Jesus and will desire Him to do a few "tricks" for his personal entertainment, but Jesus will not offer Him one single word (Lk. 23: 7-9).

The compassionate, grief-laden words of vv. 34-35 are also repeated during the Passion Week demonstrating Jesus' sorrow over Jerusalem's inhabitants and the horrors facing them in the near future—sorrows which could have been avoided had they repented and embraced Him as their Messiah (Matt. 23: 37-39). God's justice is not vindictive, and He would much rather have seen

Jerusalem repent and turn from their wicked ways (Ezek. 18: 23; 33:11). Like a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings for protection against predators, Jesus wished to do the same with the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The antecedent of “you” in the phrase, “and you would not have it!”, is debated. Is Jesus speaking of the general inhabitants of Jerusalem, the **common people**; or is He directing His statement to the **religious leaders** of the Jewish people, the “blind guides of the blind” (Matt. 15: 14) who prevented the people from entering the kingdom of heaven (Lk. 11: 52; Matt. 23: 13)? The reference to the temple (“house”) in both passages seems to support the former interpretation since the temple did not belong specifically to the Pharisees but was the common property of all Jews. Yet, as indicated in Lk. 11: 52 and Matt. 23: 13, the scribes and Pharisees (and with less influence the corrupt priesthood; see notes above on the “Intertestamentary Period”) were uniquely responsible for the apostasy of Israel. Furthermore, Jesus’ repetition of this lament over Jerusalem (Matt. 23: 37-39) immediately follows a series of “woes” pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees with the recurring formula: “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...” (Matt. 23: 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). Seven times He addresses them as **hypocrites** supplementing the term “hypocrite” with “blind guides” (23: 16), thus, raising the number of “woes” to eight (7+1—a perfection of “woes” plus one).

In the Greek text, “**your** children” (in both Matt. and Lk.) is second person singular, indicating a reference to the whole city collectively including all its inhabitants (by metonymy—the part for the whole—even the entire nation). Truly, the whole population was apostate and resistant to the saving words of Jesus. However, “**you would not have** it” (or “**you were unwilling**”—Matt.) is a second person plural verb which could indicate a plural reference to the scribes and Pharisees.

Given the grammatical structure and the context of Matt. 23, the evidence seems to support the interpretation that Jesus is addressing **both** the common people of Jerusalem generally **and** the scribes and Pharisees particularly (so also Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 3, p. 110). The scribes and Pharisees should have embraced Jesus and led the people to Him for salvation, but they actually opposed Him every step of the way and hindered the people from coming to Him. This does not in any way excuse the apostasy of the common Jews in Jerusalem who celebrated Jesus’ triumphal entry into the city (Matt. 21: 9) but one week later demanded His crucifixion (Lk. 23: 21). They were not forced to comply with the murderous plans of the religious leaders; they did so willingly. Furthermore, Jerusalem was not the only city which demonstrated wholesale unbelief (cf. Matt. 11: 20-24—the unrepentant cities of Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum). However, we are well aware that gullible, uneducated masses can be easily manipulated and misled by avaricious (greedy), power-hungry leaders who desire at all cost to maintain control. As always, the leadership bears most of the burden in leading the common people to truth (Heb. 13: 17).

Theologically, the passage presents the problem of the **two wills** of God—the **decreed** will (what He ordains to happen), and the **preceptive** will (what He commands). On the one hand Jesus wishes to gather the people together for salvation and commands that they repent and believe; on the other hand, He praises the Father that He has hidden the truth from some and revealed it to others (Matt. 11: 25-27). No one can know the Father except him to whom the Son reveals Him, so why doesn’t Jesus reveal the Father to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, including the scribes and Pharisees? Can it be said that God has ordained what He does not desire and command for

the greater glory of His name? This must be so, since God certainly does not command murder, rape, theft and corruption, but He undoubtedly permits them in the grand scheme of things subsumed (included) under the “counsel of His will”, His “purpose” and “good pleasure” (Eph. 1: 11; Isa. 46: 10).

The last part of v. 35 is a reference to the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ. In his farewell to the disciples, Jesus uses similar language: “But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine *from now on until* that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26: 29; also Matt. 26: 64; in which *ap’arti* corresponds to the same expression in Matt. 23: 39; cf. Carson, p. 487). If Jesus is referring to His second coming in which He will inevitably judge this present generation of unbelieving Jews, why, then, does He quote the positive reference of Ps. 118: 26? The grammatical context of this quotation in *Matthew* and *Luke* is overwhelmingly negative, namely, the unbelief of the Jews and Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple—“your house is left to you desolate”. How, then, shall this present generation say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”?

A possible solution is found in the fact that Jesus is not applying the quotation of Ps. 118: 26 to the *present* generation of unbelieving Jews, but to *future* generations of believing Jews at the parousia, the second coming. At the second coming, the unbelieving Jews of the Jesus’ generation will not be able to greet the Lord with “Blessed” (or “Be praised” from *eulogeo*; literally, to speak well of, from which we get the English word, eulogy, a statement of praise for a deceased person). Rather, they will recoil in horror at the prospect of judgment and eternal death (Matt. 24: 30). Nevertheless, many of the Jews in future generations will turn in repentance and faith to their Messiah and will greet Him at His return with joy and thanksgiving (Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, p. 213; cf. Rom. 11, cited by Chamblin). The problem with this interpretation is that it applies the second person plural pronouns and verbs of v. 35 to different people, something we don’t ordinarily do in hermeneutics. In other words, it seems unnatural to apply the phrase “and I say to *you, you* shall not see Me...” to one group of Jews while “*you* say, ‘Blessed is He...’” applies to different group of Jews at a different time. Jesus is not at this moment speaking in parables, and we would assume (?) He wishes to be clear in his communication. (Perhaps this is the wrong assumption, given their resistance to previous teaching.) If I had been a Jew listening to Him on this occasion, I would have naturally assumed that He was speaking only of the Jews standing there at the moment, not to another generation at the second coming.

Hendriksen (p. 841) takes the position that even unbelievers—so overcome at Jesus’ majesty in the second coming—will speak words of praise for Christ at the second advent (cf. Phil. 2: 10-11). The problem with this solution is that it is one thing for unbelievers to “bow the knee” in submission and to “confess” the Lordship of Christ as an unwelcome and necessary fact involuntarily, but another to speak His praise. The word, *eulogeo* is not used of a mere confession of fact in the NT, but as a true blessing. I reluctantly accept Chamblin’s interpretation. At the end of Jesus’ ministry among recalcitrant (disobedient) Jews, we might expect Him to be purposely veiled (unclear) in many of His instructions.

## **20. Jesus teaches in the house of a Pharisee—Lk. 14: 1-24**

Does it matter to you where you eat lunch? Does it matter to you *with whom* you eat lunch? I'm sure there are many people in Kampala, or your home town, that you would not want to be seen with, especially eating with. It never mattered to Jesus. He would eat lunch anywhere and with anyone. In this chapter we find Him accepting an invitation to eat at the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees. He did this even though He knew that the Pharisees had opposed him from the very beginning of His ministry; and even here they were attempting to trick him into healing a man on the Sabbath Day to find fault with Him.

In Luke 15: 1-2, we find Jesus eating with the tax-collectors and sinners who were despised by these same Pharisees. And we know who the tax-collectors were; they were the corrupted government workers who collected tax revenues for the Roman government and who often charged the people more than was really due in order to pad their own pocket books. Does this sound familiar? There is nothing new under the sun, is there? It was just as common in those days for government workers to skim off the top as it is today.

We also know who the sinners were. Luke uses the word often for people who lived an openly immoral lifestyle. In Luke 7 a woman who was known to be a prostitute wiped Jesus' feet with her hair which was dripping wet with expensive perfume and tears of repentance. The prodigal son of Luke 15 was a sinner who wasted his father's inheritance on prostitutes and loose living, but who later repented. The tax-collectors were also sinners, and Jesus told a parable of a tax-collector's prayer and the prayer of a Pharisee. When praying, the Pharisee lifted up his head and congratulated himself before God that he was not like the sinful tax-collector, while the tax-collector begged, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Luke also tells us of the story of Zaccheus, the tax-collector, another sinner, who repents of his sinful corruption and extortion and receives Christ as his savior.

After reading the whole gospel of *Luke*, we get a good picture of what is going on here in Luke 14. Jesus dined with sinners and got close to sinners who *knew* they were sinners, and these were the very people who were coming to faith in Christ. But He also associated with the religious leaders who considered themselves as "good and respectable" Jews. These are the people who generally hated Him and did not believe in Him. Nevertheless, Jesus accepted all invitations, no matter who they were from so that He could get close to people and challenge them to enter the kingdom of heaven.

#### *a. Healing a sick man on the Sabbath—vv. 3-6*

He was not naïve. He knew that the Pharisees had purposely arranged for the sick man to be in the house when He got there, and He knew that they had purposely invited Him to eat with them on the Sabbath to see if He would heal the man (vv. 1-2). Jesus took full advantage of the situation. He not only healed the man, but also exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Any of the Pharisees would pull their own ox or donkey out of a well on the Sabbath day (v. 5). (Some ancient manuscripts use the word "son" instead of "donkey".) The meaning of the text is not altered by the different readings. The point Jesus is making is that the Pharisees would not hesitate to protect their own selfish interests on the Sabbath day, whether to protect their own child or even their own animals; and the Law permitted it. They claimed to be strict followers of the Law of Moses, and Jesus clearly refers to that law which made many allowances even for the protection of animals (See Ex. 21: 33-34; 23: 4; Dt. 22: 1, 4; 25: 4). Arguing from the lesser to

the greater, if God is concerned for the protection of animals, He is certainly concerned for protecting people.

We can make all kinds of rigid rules and regulations about what we can do and what we cannot do on Sunday, which many believe is the NT equivalent of the Jewish Sabbath. What is often missed is that Jesus has come and redeemed His people, and that He is greater than the Sabbath Day. He is the Lord of the Sabbath who said, “Man is not made for [the benefit of] the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for [the benefit of] man” (Mk. 2: 27). Here was a sick man who needed help, and the most appropriate thing Jesus could do was to relieve this man of his misery on the Sabbath day—a day which symbolized release from bondage and suffering, a day of salvation (see commentary above on Lk. 13: 10-17).

The Sabbath was not made to be a day of gloom and doom, a day of rigid rule-keeping regulated by the Pharisees, but a day of celebration. The letter to the *Hebrews* (3: 12—4: 1-11) tells us that it is a day which reminds us to rest from all our labors to save ourselves. We should not attempt to save ourselves materially by working ourselves to death and getting no physical rest. And we should not attempt to save ourselves spiritually by keeping all the rules or even the Law of God because man cannot save himself by keeping the Law of God. He is a sinner in thought and deed, and he will always fail to measure up to God’s perfection. We must rest and trust in the only One who can save us both physically and spiritually, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath and the fulfillment of the Sabbath.

This is precisely what the Pharisees had failed to understand about the Sabbath. They saw it as a means of earning their own salvation rather than as a means of resting in God’s salvation by faith in His promises. Now, in their very presence is Jesus who is the fulfillment of all the promises of God made to the Jewish people throughout the OT, including the promise of a Sabbath rest. Rather than looking to Him in faith and repentance, they are depending on their good works, including Sabbath-keeping, to be accepted by God.

Like good Pharisees, many professing Christians are depending on church attendance to get them to heaven. They may be attending church week after week thinking that somehow they are earning credit with God by attending. While helpful as a means of grace, church attendance cannot save anyone any more than keeping rules on the Sabbath could save the Pharisees. Your faith must not be in what you do to save yourselves, but in what Christ has done already to save you—by dying on the cross and paying the penalty of your sins. To you Jesus says, “Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and My load is light” (Matt. 11: 28-30).

#### ***b. The parable of the wedding feast—vv. 7-11***

After hearing Jesus’ argument, the Pharisees responded in the usual way they responded to all His arguments—they are speechless and make no response at all (v. 6). But Jesus is not through with the Pharisees yet and sees another opportunity to correct their thinking. He was a keen observer of human behavior, and He noticed that the invited guests were picking out the best places to sit at the table, places of honor. This scene should be readily understandable to

Africans, most of whom have been to parties and celebrations where there is a certain recognized protocol (proper procedure) in the seating arrangements. The seats at the front tables are for the honored guests while the other seats going all the way back to the back can be taken by anyone. Sometimes those who sit in the back are later asked by the host to come to the front and sit. So it is here in Lk. 14.

Jesus noticed that the invited guests were arranging themselves not necessarily according to what the *host* thought of them, but according to what they thought of *themselves*. He uses a parable to correct their thinking. We need to be careful in our interpretation. Jesus was not concerned here with a little bit of social manners or protocol (See Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 389). Considering the broad sweep of eternity and the multitudes of men's souls hanging between heaven and hell, He could not have cared less where people sit at a wedding party. If ever there was a man indifferent to social status, this man was Jesus. Furthermore, He was not encouraging anyone to be falsely humble. Some people may have the habit of purposely sitting toward the back so that the host can make more of a show of bringing them to the front while everyone else is looking. This is not humility but pride, and Jesus would not have been blind to such false humility. Humility is like a slippery fish; the very second you think you have it, you have lost it.

The key to understanding what Jesus meant is found in v. 11, "For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." His focus is eschatological. The honor given to us in the final judgment when God evaluates our work will not depend on what we think of ourselves, but what God thinks of us. The host of the wedding party in this parable is God, and every member of the human race is invited to the party. The people who like to push themselves to the front by being the big men and big women of this world will be told by God to return to the back seat, but those who honestly see themselves as little people on the grand scale of things, and those who see themselves as unimportant players in God's purpose, will be asked by God to come up to the front. It does not matter what you think of yourself or what others think of you. What really matters is what God thinks of you. All this pushing and shoving to the front for the purpose of being noticed and praised by others will do you no good in the end. When Jesus comes back to judge the world of men, He will simply tell you to give your seat to someone else.

We must be clear about another thing. In this parable the best seats in the house—the places of honor—are the *only* seats, heaven itself; but the worst seats are *not* a lesser place in heaven. The worst seats in the house are in hell, a place where those who exalted themselves before men in this life are humbled forever. This becomes clear to us when we examine the parallel phrase in Lk. 18: 14. In that passage, the proud, self-righteous Pharisee bragged about his achievements and did not go down to his house justified or forgiven. People who are characteristically proud do not go to heaven. The question is not whether we are ever proud, for we all are far too much. But do we walk continually in pride? That is the question we must ask ourselves. It may be a question we should ask others about ourselves, for other people can often see pride in us which we cannot see in ourselves.

Heaven, on the other hand, is occupied only by humble people like the tax-collector who cried, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Some Christians are surely more humble than other Christians when they enter heaven, but all true believers are humble in one degree or another



*before* they enter heaven. Their proud hearts have been shattered by the grace of God, and they realize that they have nothing to boast of except the cross of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6: 14).

*c. Showing kindness to those in need—vv. 12-14*

In *verse 12*, Jesus turns to the host who had invited Him to dinner. He is now ready to teach another lesson about the kingdom of God, this time using straightforward teaching rather than a parable. He tells the host that when he invites people to dinner, he should not invite those who can pay him back—his friends and relatives or his rich neighbors. Rather, he should invite those who cannot repay him—the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind—people who because of their inability to make a good living would most likely belong to the lowest and most undesirable level of that society.

At this point in the conversation, Jesus begins to dig more deeply and painfully into the rotting corpse of human pride. Setting aside the surgical scalpel, He wields the butcher's knife to expose the cancer of pride which eats away at all of us. When you go to your next party, look around carefully. Who will you see? For the most part, you will see people just like yourself—clean, shaven, and neatly dressed. Some will be expensively dressed. All the ladies will have their best “hairdos”, and the men will be sporting their best ties. If a person has an automobile, he will be sure to show up at the party with it, freshly washed and waxed. These are the kinds of people we want at our parties—the only kind of people we actually invite to our parties. They are people who measure up to some unofficial standard of respectability who will boost our status in society, people we can count on in the future who will serve as social assets or insurance, people who will invite us to their parties, loan us money, or help us in time of need. These are the kind of people we invite as *our* guests.

But where are the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind? Where are the people who cannot repay us for the invitation? They aren't there, are they? They were never invited. I've been to a fair number of parties in Uganda and the United States. I never see any poor people or anyone much lower than the status of the person hosting the party. I never see people who are dirty or dressed shabbily. After all, what can such people give us back in return, and how useful can they be to our future success? Not much.

Of course, Jesus has much more in mind here than making out a guests list. He is talking primarily about the kingdom of God, and that will become clear soon enough. Also, Jesus is not forbidding us invite our friends, relatives, or any rich neighbors to our dinners. After all, His very presence at this dinner indicates that He did not shun the invitations of the rich and powerful. He loved them, too, and so should we. However, take special note of the fact that this parable has a present, earthly application which cannot be ignored; and we should not lose Jesus' words as a mere illustration of what will happen at the end of time when He returns. Make no mistake; if we only spend time with “our kind” of people or people who are *useful* to us in one way or another, people who elevate our social status or self-esteem, then we're hypocrites. Certainly we will spend the majority of our time with friends and people with whom we have more in common, and this is understandable and acceptable. Nevertheless, do we *ever* reach out to the poor and lowly? Do we *ever* invite them to dinner, not just to feed them outside on our door-step but at our table with our children? Do we show them kindness with a personal face

rather than simply putting a check in the mail for some unknown, nameless orphan pictured on a solicitation letter? Jesus did, and He tells us in no uncertain terms to do the same.

Now what does this accomplish? It forms a relationship with this person. It earns the right to speak to this person about the gospel of Christ. Some of these people may have never heard about Jesus Christ, and this is our opportunity to tell them. Furthermore, by showing real interest in this person, we may be able to learn more about the circumstances which contribute to his poverty or sinful condition. The reason he is poor may be perfectly innocent. He may be unable to work. Notice Jesus' words, "crippled, lame, or blind." In such cases, he has a legitimate reason why he is not working. On the other hand, he may be poor because he is lazy and sinful, in which case he needs much more than a handout or a meal, but the gospel. By forming relationships with people, even members of our own family, rather than throwing them a few shillings, we can truly help them. By inviting them to dinner, we can invite them into the kingdom of God; and if we do this, Jesus promises us a reward, "...for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (v. 14b). If we do not require repayment in *this* life, we will instead be repaid in the *resurrection*. God never forgets what you do for His sake (1 Cor. 15: 58).

***d. The parable of the big dinner—vv. 15-24***

Now when Jesus mentioned the resurrection of the righteous, one invited guest at the dinner exclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (v. 15) The prevailing Jewish belief at the time was that there would be a long continuous feast when the Messianic kingdom was established on earth after the resurrection. Guess who would be coming to this great feast? The Jews, of course, and particularly the *good* Jews, the Pharisees who were sitting at the table with Jesus. Certainly no law-abiding Pharisee would be excluded from the guest list (Geldenhuis, pp. 392-393).

Responding to the Pharisee's remark, which He recognized as a boast, Jesus tells the parable of the big dinner (v. 16). The meaning of the parable is very simple. God is the one giving the big dinner. For fifteen hundred years since the exodus He had been inviting the Jews to come to Him in repentance and faith, and for that same period of time they had rejected His gracious offer. The Jews are the invited guests in the parable giving one excuse after another for not coming to the dinner—"I've bought a piece of land"; "I've bought some oxen"; "I've gotten married" (v. 18). None of the excuses are believable. No one buys a piece of land without having already looked at it. No one buys oxen without trying them out first, and a recent marriage is not itself an excuse to refuse such an important invitation. Generally, the Jews were only concerned with the ordinary affairs of life, not the kingdom of God which should govern life (Matt. 6: 33).

Finally, God sends the invitation again through His Son who is represented in the parable as a common slave, the lowest form (*doulos*; v. 17). God condescended to save His people by stooping very low and becoming a human being who served rather than being served. The slave is sent to submit the invitation once again. For almost three years Christ had been entreating the Jewish people to repent of their sins and to believe in Him—even producing miracles among them to prove that He is the long-awaited Messiah—but like the Pharisees eating dinner with

Him, the nation as a whole is persistent and stubborn in its indifference and unbelief. Finally, the master giving the dinner is disgusted with excuses and sends his slave into the streets of the city to offer the invitation to *anyone* who will come, including “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame”, people viewed by the general society as worthless beggars (v. 21).

Unlike those who had first been invited to the feast and who had scorned the invitation, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame people do not feel *worthy* of such an invitation, and many of them must be *compelled* to come to the feast—that is, they must be convinced that the feast is for anyone who is *willing* to come and not just for those who *deserve* it or have *something to offer* (v. 23).

We can see where Jesus is going with this parable. The Pharisees scorned the message of Jesus and took advantage of every occasion to find fault with Him, just as they were attempting to do at this dinner. They believed that they had something to offer *Him*, but He had nothing to offer *them*. On the other hand, the tax-collectors and “*real* sinners” were coming to Jesus by the hundreds in repentance and faith—like the prostitute who washed His feet, and Zaccheus who gave back what he had taken by extortion. These people didn’t consider themselves worthy of such an invitation, for they were sinners who had nothing to offer Jesus. But He had something to offer *them*. After Pentecost, the gospel would be fully offered to the Gentile people who would come to Jesus by the millions and who now constitute virtually the entire NT church throughout the world. The big dinner will not be wasted because self-righteous Jews refused to come, and God is filling His “house” with Gentiles (v. 23).

Meanwhile, what will happen to the Jews who rejected the invitation to come to Jesus for salvation? Jesus tells us in v. 24, “For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.” For the most part, the kingdom has been taken away from the Jewish people and has been given to those who were despised—the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, *and* to Gentiles. The Jews were proud of their heritage as the chosen people of God, and they would never have believed God would now favor the Gentiles instead of them.

We should note the connection between this parable and Jesus’ previous instructions earlier in the chapter (vv. 12-14). There He tells us to invite into our homes the “poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,” people who *cannot repay* us, people who do not *deserve* our kindness. In the parable of the big dinner, God does just this. He invites into the kingdom of God *people who do not deserve to be there*, people who have *nothing to offer Him*. The ones *left out* of the kingdom are those who *believed they deserved to be there*, those who believed they had earned the right to be there—the so-called “good” people, the Pharisees.

The parable of the big dinner is also a continuation of what Jesus was teaching earlier when He said, “For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted”(vv. 8-11). The Jews were convinced they would be the ones enjoying the feast when the kingdom of God came on earth. What they failed to realize was that the kingdom of God had *already* come and was right under their noses in the person of Jesus Christ. They also failed to realize that only those who were *humble enough to recognize their need for a savior* would ever taste of God’s salvation. These are the people who have to be compelled to come in because they are like the penitent tax-collector in Lk. 18 who says, “God be merciful to me, the sinner”—not one sinner among many sinners, but *the* sinner.

Now the question I have for you, the reader, is this: Which of the people in the parable represent you? Are you the self-satisfied Pharisee who believes that you deserve to get into the kingdom of God? What excuses are you now making for not accepting the gracious invitation of eternal life through Jesus Christ? Perhaps you think you are too young to be a Christian. Youth is for fun; middle-age is for work; and old age is for religion, you reason. There is no hurry, you may think, and you don't want to spoil your fun by becoming a Christian. Or maybe you think you are too rich to become a Christian. Christ will make too many demands upon your money or how you spend it. Whatever your reasons, if you keep making excuses, you will never taste of the feast of salvation, and others will take your place.

On the other hand, do you see yourself as the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind—a person who is helpless and undeserving, a person who must be compelled to come to Christ because you do not believe that anyone as sinful as you could ever be invited into the kingdom of God? If you do, there is good news for you. Jesus bids you come to His feast and taste of the goodness of the Lord. He is no respecter of persons. If you are poor He says, "Come and eat with the rich." If you are rich, He says, "Come and eat with the poor." There is no difference. To all of us He says, "You don't have anything to offer Me, but I have everything to offer you."

### ***21. The cost of discipleship—Lk. 14: 25-35***

There is no chronological connection between this passage and the previous one. Jesus is now addressing "great multitudes", not a group of Pharisees in a house. The priorities of discipleship over filial relationships is accentuated in *Luke* compared with *Matthew* (cf. Matt. 10: 37; where "loves more" is used rather than "hate"). In comparison to one's relationship and commitment to Christ and His kingdom, filial relationships should be "hated". Jesus is using "exaggerated contrast" (Robertson's Word Pictures, *Bible Works*) to make His point but not speaking in a literal sense (cf. Matt. 15: 4, where Jesus quotes the fifth commandment about honoring one's parents). One who follows Christ must hate his own life as well in comparison to the all-consuming allegiance he owes to Christ. Considering the possibility—even the probability—in the Jewish context that anyone converting to the Christian faith would be shunned or disowned by their families, one must count the cost (cf. commentary on Matt. 10: 37).

Unlike many modern presentations of the gospel which make discipleship sound effortless, Jesus does not "sugar-coat" his message to attract would-be "disciples" who would inevitably fall away at the first signs of resistance (cf. Matt. 8: 19-22). If anyone was not willing to suffer estrangement from family and even death, he could not be a disciple of Jesus Christ (v. 26). Every other loyalty on earth was subordinate to one's loyalty to Him (Geldenhuys, p. 398). How strange this sounds to Western ears! Imagine following Christ under such circumstances. But these were the terms—the only terms—and there are no amendments to these terms recorded throughout the book of *Acts* or in all the epistles. Many Africans who have been martyred for their faith in Sudan and other Muslim-led countries recognize the cross as more than a metaphor. They have actually suffered and died rather than renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. They are modern-day heroes of the church.

Following Christ meant taking up the cross (v. 27), a voluntary surrender to suffering. “Cross-bearing” does not include all the ordinary ways that human beings suffer—sickness, poverty, injustice—*unless* such suffering is for the sake of Christ and the gospel. All human beings suffer, some much more than others, but only Christ’s true disciples are willing to suffer *for His sake*. Going the way of the cross indicates the abandonment of one’s self-interests to the interests of the kingdom of God (Geldenhuis, p. 398), and the willingness to deny oneself lawful liberties for the greater privilege of serving God (1 Cor. 9: 19, 23; 10: 23—11: 1).

The remainder of the passage builds upon the initial context of counting the costs. The folly of starting something presumptuously without being able to finish it is well-known, and Jesus uses two parables to demonstrate the importance of knowing the costs before promising a commitment we are not willing to complete. People often “bite off more than they can chew” when it comes to building projects they cannot finish (vv. 28-30). I just visited one today. A huge, multi-building hotel complex was begun on a very high hill outside Kampala, Uganda overlooking beautiful Lake Victoria. Out of a dozen or so multi-storied buildings, only one was actually completed, and the landscape is now cluttered with half-empty wheel barrows and ghost buildings only partially completed. The rotting remains of long-abandoned scaffolding hang precariously to the sides (Scaffolding in Uganda is made completely from wood). As the story goes, the owner is now attempting to sell off other properties in Uganda to fight off bank foreclosure. It would have been wiser to complete a couple of buildings rather than start a dozen he couldn’t complete. It pays to count the cost first. (The swimming pool is great, though, at least the part with water in it.)

The same goes for kings (or presidents) going to war. The strength of the army—and the budget—is often over-estimated, and the king would have been better off negotiating a peace deal (vv. 31-32). In Africa, however, the costs are not even considered since African leaders can always get handouts from Western powers for the procurement (acquiring) of arms and military machinery—to kill and maim fellow Africans. Paul Collier, former director of development research at the World Bank (Is “development *research* at the World Bank” an oxymoron considering the billions of dollars wasted by the World Bank on failing governments?), says that a typical civil war in Africa costs the country and its neighboring countries \$64 billion (*The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, p. 32). It’s difficult to determine whether his figures are inflated, but if it’s only half that much, it’s still a chunk of change—cash that Africa cannot afford. George B. N. Ayittey, an African scholar, uses different figures but agrees that *civil war is one of the leading causes of poverty in Africa*. Ayittey estimates that the total expenditures on weapons and militaries on the African continent is \$15 billion *annually*, roughly the same amount spent on food imports (*Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa’s Future*, pp. 325-326). Commenting on Robert Mugabe’s wreckage in Zimbabwe, Ayittey says,

The crisis in Zimbabwe, for example, has cost Africa dearly. Foreign investors have fled the region and the South African *rand* has lost 25 percent of its value since 2000. Recall that more than 2 million Zimbabwean refugees have fled to settle in South Africa, and the South African government is preparing a military base at Messina to house as many as 70, 000 refugees. Since 2000 almost 60,000 physicians and other professionals have left Zimbabwe (*The Washington Post*, March 3, 2002; p. A20). According to *The Observer* [London] (Sept. 30, 2001), Zimbabwe’s economic collapse had caused \$37 billion worth of damage to South Africa and other neighboring countries. South Africa has been worst affected, while Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia have also suffered severely.

As we have seen, neglect of peasant agriculture, the uprooting of farmers by civil wars, devastated infrastructure, and misguided agricultural policies have made it difficult for Africa to feed itself. Therefore, Africa must resort to food imports, spending \$15 billion in 1998 (World Bank 2000a; p. 107). By 2000, food imports had reached \$18.7 billion, slightly more than donor assistance of \$18.6 to Africa in 2000 (*Africa Recovery*, Jan. 2004; p. 16) (*Africa Unchained*, p. 326).

The displaced Acholi people of Northern Uganda languish in squalid refugee camps without sufficient food, water, and medical care from the effects of a 21-year terrorist campaign led by Joseph Kony. It is now alleged that the Acholi people, including women and children, are now being neglected for the past atrocities of the Acholi army under Obote II (Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo, *Girl Soldier, A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children*, pp. 69-74). Meanwhile, Ugandan military generals have used international aid from various sources (55% of Uganda's total budget is fueled by international aid) to wage illegal military campaigns in the Democratic Republic of Congo (also an oxymoron) to oust Kabila and plunder Congo's gold and diamonds (Ayittey, pp. 207-210).

I hope the reader will excuse this long excursus into African politics, but I couldn't resist an African example of Jesus' metaphor. Wars cost lives and money, but no one—African leaders and the Western donor nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund which fund them—seems to be counting the costs. To offer one application closer to the text, part of counting the costs of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is being willing to lay down one's life for the gospel (v. 26); and since the gospel has implications for the well-being of any nation, it seems necessary that African Christians should be willing to get involved in African politics, even at the cost of their lives. (Ayittey cites several examples of honest men throughout the continent who attempted to fight corruption and have lost their lives in the process [*Africa Unchained*, "Dedications", pp. xi.-xv.]).

Christians do not have the luxury of sticking their heads in the sand (like the ostrich) pretending to ignore the human devastation going on all around them while preaching a pietistic gospel which offers only the hope of escape in the next life. It offers just that, but far more. It offers the hope of sanctification for the individual and the hope of temporal justice *in the here and now*. (Just read the OT prophets who were always "meddling" in politics.) Political injustice and corruption is not just politics as usual; it is sin which reaches epidemic proportions when it convinces the common African citizen that corruption and injustice must necessarily be a way of life in order to survive. This thinking must change if Africans truly survive as a people; otherwise, they may simply be absorbed into other cultures in which the *rule of law* has become the predominant order rather than the *rule of men*.

John the Baptist refused to beat around the bush with Herod Antipas concerning his adulterous marriage to Herodias, and he had his head chopped off as a result. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran theologian, was hanged in Hitler Germany for speaking out against the holocaust. ***I am not suggesting armed resistance. Armed resistance and civil war have not worked, anyway.*** Civil war in Africa appears to lead only to the succession of one unjust, inept leader after another—e.g. the rise of Kabila after Mobutu—or the succession of someone who ascends to power with good intentions but succumbs to the temptations of power and money. ***What I am suggesting is educated, informed, Christian infiltration and influence into the cobwebs of civil government to effect the changes that Africa needs to climb out of the man-made pits of***

***injustice and poverty.*** Such non-violent activism may result in one's violent death, but it was said long ago, "The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

Jesus concludes His teaching on discipleship by saying that one must not only be willing to give up his life, but also his possessions. Otherwise, one cannot be His disciple (v. 33). Again, how strange to Western ears—and, I am discovering—to African ears, as well. How much of our wealth and possessions belongs to God? The standard answer is one-tenth; with the rest we can do as we please. But Jesus makes it clear that, as disciples, we are only stewards or care-takers of our wealth. God could ask us at any time to give all of it up in order to follow Him wherever He wants to take us or to do whatever He wants us to do. This is what He demanded of the rich young ruler (see below), and we are often too disposed toward a theoretical interpretation of that passage, as well as the present one. The young ruler was unwilling to give it up, but Jesus did not reduce the requirement to secure his following; for the true disciple it is all or nothing. The question is not whether Jesus will actually require all our possessions, as if He needed our money or anything else we have. The question is: Are we sufficiently committed to the kingdom of God to be **willing** to give up "all" our possessions if required to do so—including money, personal ambitions or goals, abilities, family, and friends? And are we willing to submit everything we have to the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth rather than use it for the advancement of our own personal kingdoms? "Jesus is Lord **of all**, or He is not Lord **at all**." While usually allowing us to maintain possession of such things, Jesus commands us to place everything at His disposal unreservedly, holding back nothing which would be of service to Him. Being thus freed from worldly possessions, we are now liberated to serve (cf. Geldenhuys, p. 399). "It's hard to imagine the freedom we find in the things we leave behind" (Michael Card).

Without such commitment, we may be able to play the game of discipleship, but in truth, our salt has become tasteless (v. 34; see Matt. 5: 13 and commentary above in which Jesus is speaking to citizens of the kingdom). Nominal (name only) "Christians" attempting to hang on to their former lives of independence, self-indulgence, and self-centeredness while claiming the promises of eternal life, are useless. Having never really counted the costs of knowing Jesus, they have never really experienced the transformation in world-view and life-application which renders us effective as change agents living in a dark world of sin and unbelief. They so nearly imitate the world that their influence—if you can call it that—is unnecessary. They are, in fact, one and the same with the people who make no claim to Christ. Salt is only useful to the extent that it possesses the quality of salt; otherwise it is useless. So also with the disciple of Christ. He is only useful if he possesses the quality of a true disciple (Geldenhuys, p. 399).

## ***22. Parables in response to the scribes and Pharisees who grumbled because Jesus received sinners and ate with them—Lk. 15: 1-32***

All three of these parables share the same context and the same message. As to the context, a large group of tax-collectors and "sinners" (openly immoral people) were coming to Jesus to be taught by Him, thus **provoking** the Pharisees and scribes to complain that Jesus approved of such people. Table fellowship in the ancient East was reserved for those of the same social rank and credibility, and to eat with such implied approval of them. While it was true that Jesus accepted such people, as people, made in the image of God; it was not true that He approved of their behavior. The grumbling of the scribes and Pharisees, in turn, **provoked** Jesus' response, three

parables with *one central message*: the joy in heaven when one sinner repents (vv. 7, 10, and 32).

**a. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin—vv. 3-10**

The parable of the lost sheep (Matt. 18: 12-14) has been interpreted above (see commentary). However, the context in *Matthew* is different, and Jesus employs the same parable here to accomplish a different purpose. Again, we don't have to worry ourselves over whether Jesus told the parable in the Matthean context or in the Lukan context. He told it in *both* and perhaps on many other occasions which are not recorded in the gospels.

*Luke* adds some details which are not found in *Matthew*. (1) The man who finds his lost sheep puts it on his shoulders, and (2) then calls all his friends together to rejoice with him. Putting the sheep on his shoulders adds a tender touch to the parable which is also found in the parable of the lost son (v. 20). Furthermore, the addition of communal, corporate rejoicing over the recovered sheep (v. 6) is parallel to the corporate rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents (v. 7). This important element is also repeated in the next parable when the woman finds her lost coin and calls her friends and neighbors together to rejoice with her. "In the same way", the angels in heaven rejoice together over one sinner who repents (v. 10). Jesus accentuates this corporate rejoicing with the words, "I tell you...", both in v. 7 and v. 10, as if to say, "Are you scribes and Pharisees listening to me? *I am telling you* that heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents!"

Another Lukan addition to the parable which fits the context and the purpose for which it is told is the last part of v. 7, the words, (3) "than over ninety-nine righteous persons *who need no repentance*." But *who* doesn't need repentance? Do such people exist? No, but the scribes and Pharisees identified themselves as such people in the same way that the elder brother identified himself as the son who had never done anything wrong!

Lastly, (4) the shepherd does not stop looking for his sheep until he finds it (v. 4). This same perseverance is evident in the next parable in which the woman sweeps the whole house until she finds the coin. However, in *Matthew*, to suit the purpose of *provoking the church* to care for His little ones, there is an element of doubt about finding the lost sheep, for Jesus says, "And *if* it turns out that he finds it..." (v. 13a). Thus, if the church is careless of the lost sheep—the little one—he will remain lost. The perseverance in these two parables contributes to message that God longs to find the one who is lost.

**b. The parable of the lost son and the elder brother—vv. 11-32**

This parable is about two primary characters, not just one. Jesus draws our attention to this fact in the first sentence of the parable, "A certain man had *two* sons." The younger son demanded his share of the estate, showing a callous disregard for his father, who was still living. He could not wait around for his father to die before he got his hands on the money. Thus, his desperately sinful and selfish character is evident from the first of the story. Furthermore, the younger son's impatience is highlighted by his leaving his father's house "not many days later". Finally out from under his father's supervision, he squanders his money on godless living (v. 13). After the



money is spent, a famine hits, making it difficult to find a decent job or food, so he accepts the most degrading job a Jew could find—feeding swine. Jesus presents the “lost son” in the worst possible light for the purpose of emphasizing the father’s love and forgiveness later in the story. The Pharisees and scribes to whom he is speaking could never imagine stooping so low to become swine farmers; death would have been preferable.

The turning point in the story occurs in v. 17, “But when he came to his senses....” (literally, “he came to himself”). Although his desperate hunger was the initial stimulus (something which arouses one to action) to his recovery (vv. 16-17), his willingness to humble himself before his father was not primarily based upon his desperation. He had experienced genuine repentance which was directed toward God, first, and his father, second; and his sense of unworthiness is confessed (vv. 18-19a). Not only this, but he is willing to accept the consequences of his foolishness by working as a hired hand rather than being treated as a son (v. 19b). He had no high hopes of being vested once again in his father’s property. After preparing his speech, he returns to his father who is obviously longing for him and anxiously looking for his return. The compassion, forgiveness, and rejoicing of the father clearly demonstrate the rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, the subject which ties this parable to the previous two parables (cf. vv. 7, 10). There is no continuing condemnation and no “I told you so!” speeches for the truly repentant sinner. He has suffered for his actions through poverty and hunger, but ***his status as a true son has not been irretrievably lost***. He is the lost son who is found, the sinner who seeks for and receives forgiveness.

However, we should note that there are ***continuing temporal consequences for his sin***, even though genuinely forgiven. The wealth he has squandered cannot be recovered, and now all the remaining wealth of his father belongs to the elder brother (v. 31—“***all*** that is mine is yours”). He is forgiven, but also broke. ***Eternal*** forgiveness does not imply that there will be no repercussions ***in this life*** for the sins we have committed. The father in this parable would not be just in dividing the inheritance once again between him and his brother to make up for what he has carelessly lost. The elder son in the parable is not angry (v. 28) because he will now have to divide his portion with his irresponsible brother, but because the father forgives him and treats him as a son. It could be argued that this is such an insignificant element in the parable that it cannot bear close examination. However, the temporal (earthly) consequence of sin is taught in other portions of scripture, and should not be ignored here. King David was genuinely forgiven for his sin of adultery and murder, but he suffered immense temporal judgment for these sins in the devastation of his family—the death of his first son by Bathsheba, the rape of Tamar by Amnon, the murder of Amnon by Absalom, the estrangement and rebellion of Absalom, and his ultimate murder by Joab. The believer’s faith in Christ does not remove the painful, temporal consequences of his sins. If his promiscuous life-style has resulted in AIDS, he will continue to have AIDS when converted to Christ and will most likely die. He is eternally forgiven, and that forgiveness will enable him to endure a slow and painful death knowing that God loves Him and will not hold him ***eternally*** accountable.

The temporal consequences of sin—subtly inferred by Jesus in the parable—is in direct contrast to the ***all too common African concept of forgiveness*** which attempts to obliterate (do away with) the temporal demands of justice. Consider, for example, the ***in***-justice of the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” hearings in South Africa post-apartheid and the village courts of

Rwanda post-genocide which have attempted to bring peace and reconciliation for past atrocities by forgiving murderers without punishment. While hailed by African, and by some Western, intellectuals as an astounding success, it can be argued that the continuing violence in South Africa and the seething, pent-up hatred lying under the surface in Rwanda proves that no sense of reconciliation can be achieved without Biblical justice. Innocent blood pollutes the land (Num. 35: 30-34).

Without restoring the son's wealth, what the father *does* do is assure him of his *status as a true son* (v. 22). By putting "the best" robe on his back (cf. Gen. 37: 3), a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet, he distinguishes his son from a common slave who had no such adornments (Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message, A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible*, p. 21). The penitent son had lost his way, but he could never lose the privilege of being a son *unless* he was unwilling to repent. Theologically, this implies that once a true son, always a true son, and that *genuine sonship is confirmed by genuine repentance* (to be distinguished from simply seeking forgiveness from the temporal consequences of sin). Furthermore, as noted above, the son was willing to accept the consequences of being considered as nothing more than a hired man. Getting back to South Africa and Rwanda, it is difficult to believe the genuineness of a murderer's repentance without his willingness to face the just punishment for his crime. The Apostle Paul, a truly righteous man, did not refuse to be executed *if he had done "anything worthy of death"* (Acts 25: 11).

The return of the younger brother and the forgiving gestures of the father all occur in the absence of the elder brother (vv. 25-27). His reaction betrays the kind of person he is—legalistic, exacting, and unforgiving (v. 28). His brother had probably been gone for quite some time, and for all appearances was "dead" to his father (v. 24a). It is clear from his anger that the elder brother now wished that his younger sibling *was* dead rather than safely returned to his father. Thus, he not only shows a calloused disregard for the life of his brother, but for his father who had been devastated by the loss. Even if he hated his brother, which he did, he should have loved his father sufficiently to desire his brother's return, but he was so angry that he refused even to greet his brother and remained aloof from the festivities (v. 28).

We should notice that the father did not return the elder son's anger with his own anger. Rather, he sought him out and "began entreating him" (v. 28b). Jesus doesn't wish to cut off all communication with the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees but to invite them to repentance and faith. Even the end of the parable demonstrates hope for *their* return to the heavenly father (see below). We are not told what the father initially says to the elder son, but the son responds as a typical "Pharisee" claiming devoted service and unquestioning obedience—doubtlessly overstated ("I have *never* neglected a command of yours..." v. 29). "This son of yours" distances him from the prodigal, for he does not say, "my brother", but "this son of yours." He wanted absolutely nothing to do with this sinner; likewise, the Pharisees and scribes wanted nothing to do with the sinners and tax-collectors with whom Jesus scandalously associated (vv. 1-2)—even if they were *repentant* sinners. The elder son—and the scribes and Pharisees—were like many modern church members who loathe the idea of rubbing shoulders with people who have wallowed in the mire with pigs (prostitutes, drug addicts, and other "sinners") but through repentance and faith now wish to commune with saints in the church. Pharisees don't want people like this in *their* church. What will their friends and neighbors think? What kind of pastors would they prove to be with dozens of "sinners" in their congregations? Mercy toward

sinners is repulsive to Pharisees since Pharisees don't *need* any mercy; they simply have a right to get what they *deserve*. Likewise, mercy was repulsive to the elder brother. The father was obligated to give him what he deserved and to give the younger brother what *he* deserved—nothing.

In spite of his unforgiving attitude, the father appeals to the son with terms of endearment, “Child”, assuring him that his entire estate belongs to him (v. 31; see comments above). However, we should not conclude from this, theologically, that the kingdom of heaven belongs to impenitent, self-righteous Pharisees. Nevertheless, in the father's appeal lies Jesus' invitation to the scribes and Pharisees to see the error of their ways and to rejoice with Him that tax-collectors and sinners were coming to Him for forgiveness and life. The father's final comments to his elder son reveal much about the nature of God (v. 32). Just as the earthly father “had to be merry and rejoice” in the restoration and return of the prodigal son, the heavenly Father is *compelled* by His very nature to rejoice in even one sinner who repents. Failure to do so would be a denial of this nature.

The end of the parable remains indefinite, not telling us whether the elder brother repents or remains hostile. Likewise, Luke does not inform us how these scribes and Pharisees responded to the parable, and by way of application, the invitation to forgive and to be forgiven is now extended to all readers throughout the church age.

### **23. The parable of the unrighteous servant—Lk. 16: 1-13**

This parable has posed a problem for interpreters since it appears that Jesus is condoning (approving) the deceptive activities of the unjust steward (v. 8). The problem arises, however, only for those who insist on pressing all the details of the story rather than finding the main point that Jesus is teaching (cf. Geldenhuys, p. 417; footnote quoting T.W. Manson, *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 583). Parables should not be made “to walk on all-fours” in an attempt to identify every point in the parable or to find the spiritual analogy in every detail (cf. my notes on interpreting parables in “Hermeneutics”; see especially Milton S. Terry, *Hermeneutics—A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, pp. 276-282). Besides, does not Jesus expressly identify the servant as “the unrighteous steward”? (v. 8) Thus, whatever Jesus is praising about this man, He is not praising his act of deception per se (by itself), but a legitimate activity.

The *thematic connection* between this parable and the previous one (the lost son) is one's use of money and possessions. The lost son had, in a manner of speaking, stolen his father's inheritance, and now the unjust servant steals his master's money. However, the spiritual lesson in the parable is not the same as that of the lost son; thus, there is very little similarity in these two parables. From chapters 15 through 16, Luke appears to be reporting a series of parables which employ the subject of *money and possessions* in one way or another (cf. Liefeld, p. 986).

We are not told how the steward was “squandering” (*diaskorpizo*; same word found in 15: 13) his master's money (v. 1), but the offense was serious enough to warrant dismissal (v. 2). In order for the next steward to step into his position, the business accounts had to be put in order, and the steward had to clear the outstanding balances of current loans (v. 2). We may ask why

he was allowed to transact even more business and not immediately dismissed, an act which would have avoided his further treachery; but this is not important to the development of the parable. (Besides, it would ruin the story!) It is fairly clear that the master did not suspect the steward of outright embezzlement (stealing funds by dishonest bookkeeping) but only irresponsible mismanagement (Geldenhuijs, p. 415).

Although irresponsible and dishonest, the steward is not stupid, and he understands his limitations. Having worked at a cushy (comfortable) job for some time, he was not strong enough to take up farming for a living, and he was too proud to beg (v. 3). He, therefore, devises a plan to provide long-term assistance for himself through advantageous relationships with the two debtors (vv. 4-7). Apparently, he still possessed all records of past transactions, and once the old records were destroyed and new ones written (vv. 6-7), the master would have no legal proof that he had stolen from him (Geldenhuijs, p. 415). Meanwhile, the debtors who had been forgiven large sums of money would be more than happy to help him.

Liefeld's interpretation (following Fitzmyer, *Semitic Background*) that the steward is only waving (forgiving) the **interest fees** from the loans—fees which belonged to **him** as the manager, his “cut”—is unsatisfactory (pp. 987-988). Even if the usurious interest (excessive interest—100% to the first man) is forgiven, it is unlikely that the forgiven debtor would now be agreeable to boarding and feeding this greedy man in his own home who previously took advantage of him with exorbitant interest rates. Further, by his own accounting, Liefeld values the amount forgiven to both men as 80 \$US each or 16 month's wages for a day laborer in ancient Palestine, quite a sum of money even for this steward. The steward could not be guaranteed that these debtors would provide him an equal amount of favor if the interest was forgiven, and it would be safer just to abscond (escape illegally) with the interest money rather than hope for any uncertain mercy on their part. Besides, it is not likely, as Liefeld holds, that the master was not charging any interest in these business transactions, but only the steward. Charging interest to **poor** Israelites was forbidden in the Law (Ex. 22: 25; Deut. 23: 20), but interest per se (in itself) was not illegal in all cases as is clear from Jesus' parables in Matt. 25: 14-30 and Lk. 19: 12-27 in which God, Himself, requires interest (cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 473-481)! Thus, the interest, if any was being charged, would have belonged **to the master and not the steward**. As we will see below, the lesson of the parable is consistent only if the steward is making room for himself in the homes of these two debtors **by using his master's money**, not his own. The money he is forgiving belongs to the master.

When the master learns of the steward's cunning device, he praises the steward, not for his dishonesty but for his **shrewdness** (cleverness) (v. 8). It is important that we ask the question: **How** did the steward demonstrate shrewdness in dealing with the two debtors? If we can answer this question correctly, we can determine the proper meaning and application of the parable. The steward demonstrated shrewdness by his **foresight**, by looking ahead into the future and planning for the future rather than thinking of only short-term solutions. He also demonstrated shrewdness by **using someone else's money to bring future blessing to himself**. The main point of the parable is one's earthly use of money and possessions—“unrighteous mammon” (vv. 9-11). **Do we use money wisely or unwisely; do we use it only for short-term benefit or for long-term blessing?** We go astray if we begin to press all the details of the parable. The shrewdness of the steward was not a godly wisdom, and it is clear from Jesus' own words that He considered

the man an “unrighteous steward”. However, the steward’s actions showed foresight and planning; and in this one sense it is an example for believers to follow. Jesus is not encouraging His disciples to learn how to swindle people out of their money. He is teaching them to look further than their own noses—to take the long view of life and money rather than the short view.

In the parable, the “*sons* of this age” (v. 8) are unbelievers who are living *only* for this age (this world) and not the age to come. However, they are often very wise (in a worldly sense of the word) in relation to their “own kind”—other unbelievers. In other words, unbelievers often demonstrate much more common sense (what I call “walking-around-sense”) than believers. They know how to form advantageous relationships with other people which can prove to be of great benefit while they are living in this world. This is precisely the way people rise to power both financially and politically. They have the wisdom to know that they cannot prosper alone without the help or influence of others; thus, they “court” this influence by doing people favors which they will later “cash” by calling in such favors. And if their “friends” wish to expect other favors in the future, they will be willing to cooperate in the present by returning these benefits. Africans know very well that survival in this world often depends on the relationships we are able to develop with others who may be able to help us out in the future. In this worldly sense, Jesus says, “the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light”, that is, believers.

Once again, we must be careful in our interpretation. Jesus is not encouraging Christians to form “mercenary friendships” only for the purpose of receiving some material return in the present life. This is all too common among unbelievers who form disingenuous (not genuine) friendships only for some “worldly” benefit like money or political influence. Such friendships are not based on love, and Jesus has previously advised us to invite people to dine with us who cannot repay us in kind (Lk. 14: 12-14). On the other hand, there is a spiritual analogy (or a spiritual counterpart), to forming worldly friendships for material benefit. Just as unbelievers are shrewd *in relation to their own kind*, believers should be wise *in relation to their own kind*, namely, other believers. As unbelievers are doing good to their own kind for selfish reasons and for a very limited time on earth, believers with purer motives should be actively seeking to benefit other believers with whom they will spend an eternity in heaven (v. 9b; “they may receive you into the eternal dwellings”. Of course, this does not exclude doing good to *all* men, but we should do good *especially* to believers—Gal. 6: 10.)

Jesus calls money the “mammon of unrighteousness” not because money is evil in and of itself (cf. 1 Tim. 6: 10 where the “*love* of money is the root of all sorts of evil”). Rather, Jesus calls money “the mammon of unrighteousness because injustice is so often involved in the accumulation and use of earthly possessions” (Geldenhuys, p. 416). Quoting Calvin,

By giving this name to riches, he intends to render them an object of our suspicion, because for the most part they involve their possessors in *unrighteousness*. Though in themselves they are not evil, yet as it rarely happens that they are obtained without deceit, or violence, or some other unlawful expedient [an overstatement on Calvin’s part], or that the enjoyment of them is unaccompanied by pride, or luxury, or some other wicked disposition [not an overstatement], Christ justly represents them as worthy of our suspicion; just as on another occasion he called them *thorns*, (Matth. Xiii. 7, 22). It would appear that a contrast, though not expressed, is intended to be supplied, to this effect; that riches, which otherwise, in consequence of wicked abuse, polluted their possessors, and are almost in every case allurements of sin, ought to be directed to a contrary object, to the means of procuring favour for us (*A Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 2, p. 179; words in brackets mine).

“When it fails” is a reference to the temporariness of unrighteous mammon (v. 9). Temporal, earthly possessions—as well as the favors and kindness they purchase—will not endure beyond “this age”, but the good things we accomplish for God’s glory with money and possessions *will endure* in “the eternal dwellings”. This truth is taught elsewhere in the gospels when Jesus commands us not to lay up treasures *on earth* but to lay up treasures *in heaven* which will not be stolen by thieves or exposed to earthly decay (Matt. 6: 19-20; Lk. 12: 33). In the parable of the rich fool, Jesus warns of the danger of laying up treasure *for ourselves* without being rich *toward God* (Lk. 12: 16-21). It is taught again in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25: 31-46) in which believers (the sheep) receive eternal rewards on the basis of their kindness to others. When such kind-hearted believers enter into their dwelling places in heaven—for heaven is, indeed, a physical place (Jn. 14: 2-3)—they will also be welcomed into the dwellings of other believers who received the benefit of their charity while on earth. By using money and possessions *unselfishly* (rather than selfishly like the unjust steward) believers make friendships which will last, not a lifetime, but an eternity. Not only this, but the friendships being made also include the *most important friendship of all*, the friendship of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Whenever we do anything to relieve the suffering of others, we have done it for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is incarnate in human flesh and identifies Himself intimately with His people (Matt. 25: 40). It is primarily *His* eternal dwelling into which we are received (v. 9b). If this sounds too much like salvation by works, the reader is referred to countless other passages in the gospels (including Matt. 7: 18-23; Matt. 25: 31-46—not to speak of the epistles of James, Paul, Peter, and John) which teach a clear connection between genuine faith and good works. There will be no reception into the eternal dwellings for those who lived selfishly on earth.

If we are faithful in our use of temporal, earthly possessions for the benefit of others (v. 10)—“a very little thing”—this faithfulness is evidence that we are also faithful in “much” (namely, other spiritual responsibilities, some of which may carry more weight in light of eternity, things like sharing the gospel or helping others through spiritual crises). Furthermore, by implication from vv. 11-12, the faithful believer who has been entrusted with “little things” on earth (things which are temporary, things which he *cannot* keep) will be granted in eternity “true riches” (v. 11) which he *can* keep. Material possessions granted to us on earth are only temporary and must be managed as stewardships. They do not essentially belong to us but belong to “another” (v. 12a), even God, who gives them to us to use for His kingdom and glory on earth. (Thus, it is important exegetically to see the connection between the *unjust steward* who is using the material wealth of “another”—his earthly master—to be received into earthly homes, and the *believer* who is managing the material wealth of “another”—the Heavenly Master—to be received into eternal dwellings. Both the unjust steward and the believer make use of that which is “another’s”.)

If we are faithful in the use of earthly possessions, “the mammon of unrighteousness” God will grant to us “that which is [our] own” (v. 12b); namely, true riches which are eternal. This statement compares with the master’s statement in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25: 14-30) in which the master commends the labor of the first and second slaves saying, “Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with *a few things*, I will put you in charge of *many things...*” (vv. 21, 23). The “few things” correspond to one’s responsibilities on earth while the “many things” correspond to one’s future responsibilities in heaven. The difference is that our

responsibilities on earth are only temporary while those in heaven are eternal; and since life on earth is only a tiny blip on a radar screen (a very short time) compared to eternity, we will have many more things to do in heaven than we ever did on earth.

On the other hand, if we have been unrighteous in the “little thing” of using money, this is evidence that we are unrighteous in many things. And if we have been unfaithful in the use of unrighteous mammon which does not belong to us and which cannot endure (v. 9, “when it fails”), why should God entrust us with eternal things which we can keep for eternity (vv. 10-12)? The parallelism of vv. 11-12 is evident in the passage where “unrighteous mammon” in v. 11 is parallel to “that which is another’s” in v. 12 and “true riches” in v. 11 is parallel to “that which is your own” in v. 12.

As stated earlier, the parable teaches believers to be future-oriented in their use of money and material possessions. In this transient, fleeting life we now have the opportunity as stewards to use **God’s money**—“that which is another’s”—to bring blessing to others and honor to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, we often look upon it as **our money** to selfishly “feather our own nest” and to hedge against every uncertainty of life. Such fear (Lk. 12: 22, 32) and lack of foresight causes us to take the **short view** of life and money rather than the **long view**. The unjust steward took the long view and made room for himself when he lost his job. If we would be as wise in regard to our own kind (believers) as he was with his own kind (worldlings), then we would generously look for opportunities to relieve fellow believers of destitution, physical and spiritual, rather than limitless ways to make our earthly lives more comfortable. Earthly comfort and security are fleeting, uncertain things, (they will “fail”) but spiritual riches are eternal. “This present life will soon be past; only that which is done for Christ will last.” In the final analysis, we can only serve one or the other, God or mammon, but not both (v. 13; cf. Matt. 6: 24 and commentary above).

#### ***24. Jesus’ response to the scoffing of the scribes and Pharisees—Lk. 16: 14-18***

The temporal connection between this passage and the parable of the unjust steward is given in v. 14. The Pharisees were listening to Jesus’ previous parable about the unjust steward and were “scoffing at Him”. They were obviously in the category of those who served mammon (v. 13) rather than God. In a very scathing denunciation of the Pharisees, Jesus lays bare their strenuous efforts to make themselves look good in the eyes of men through external rule-keeping; but before God, they didn’t look so good (v. 15). They could fool men (“justify yourselves...”), but they couldn’t fool God who knew their motives (“but God knows your hearts”—Prov. 16: 2). The Pharisees were “highly esteemed” (honored) among the common people who were spiritually unable to see through their hypocrisy, but God despised their insincerity for all the harm they were doing among the people: “for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” His denunciations would reach a new height in the eight woes He would pronounce upon them during the Passion Week (Matt. 23).

As always, God is never impressed by external appearances, but looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16: 7). As finite human beings, we **cannot** look upon the heart, yet Jesus’ statement warns us not to be gullible (to believe anything) about a person’s spiritual stature. While “believing all things”, that is, while wishing to believe the best about people (1 Cor. 13: 7), we must hold our

estimation of someone in reserve until we know him more thoroughly. This may sound judgmental, but it is essentially the same advice given by the Apostle Paul to Timothy that he and others would employ in the selection of elders. Elders must not be chosen *too hastily*, lest they become poor examples to the flock and lead many others into sin with them (1 Tim. 5: 22). The church has a history of not taking Jesus' words too seriously, for God's people often esteem what is esteemed by the world around them—money, possessions, and power. Elders in churches are often chosen, not on the basis of spiritual wisdom, but on the basis of material success and social position. (I've never known too many plumbers and carpenters being chosen as elders, but many lawyers, doctors, and professional businessmen). This does not imply that material and social success disqualifies someone (God does not "detest" material success per se) but that it is not listed as one of the qualifications for elders in the NT (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). But Jesus' words still stand; God is not impressed with what impresses men. His disdain for what men esteem will surface again in the story of the widow's two coins (Lk. 20: 45—21: 4).

There appears to be very little connection between the next three verses or with the verses that precede them, but closer examination will reveal otherwise. *Verse 16* is a parallel to Matt. 11: 12-13, but the wording is substantially different. In the Matthean passage, the kingdom of heaven "suffers violence" by men who attempt to seize it unlawfully ("take it by force"—*arpazo*) by hindering others from entering it, while in *Luke* the kingdom of God "is preached". Furthermore, in *Luke* "violent men" are not the subject but "everyone", and a different verb is used, *biazomai*, "forcing". Note the differences below.

Matthew 11:12 "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John.

Luke 16:16 "The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

Since the two passages are parallel to one another, it is possible—some would say advisable—to interpret them the same way. Yet, given some of the distinctive differences, it is also possible that Matthew and Luke are emphasizing two different things. In *Matthew* Jesus is emphasizing the fact that the kingdom of God is being *opposed* by the violent resistance of the scribes and Pharisees. Nevertheless, in spite of their fierce opposition, the kingdom of God is being preached and "everyone" (all kinds of people, including the tax collectors and sinners) are energetically *entering* it through repentance and faith. No amount of opposition from the religious leaders can prevent the kingdom of God from moving forward and progressing. Previously in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has presented the kingdom of heaven as a narrow gate which only few enter (Matt. 7: 13), and it is highly probable that He has used this same metaphor on many different occasions to highlight the urgency of entering the kingdom of God. Thus, the few who have become convinced that He *is* the narrow gate are now pressing earnestly against that gate to gain entrance. They are, so to speak, "forcing [their] way into it" (Geldenhuys, p. 421). Meanwhile, the Pharisees remain aloof and indifferent to the kingdom of God and hostile to Jesus, the only means of entering this kingdom.



In v. 17, as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 17-18), Jesus draws their attention to the continuity between the Old and the New Covenants. He had not come to do away with the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them and bring them to completion. The Law and the Prophets had predicted His coming, and nothing they had predicted would fail to be accomplished. Although the Pharisees had rejected Jesus and were at this moment scoffing at His teaching (v. 14), Jesus would bring to perfection all that was written in the Law. He was the new law-giver whose authority exceeded that of Moses; and as an example of His completion or perfection of the Law, Jesus makes an addition to the Law in his regulation of divorce (v. 18; cf. Matt. 19: 3-12 and commentary below). Luke gives us only an abbreviated account of Jesus' fuller teaching in Matt. 19. David Instone-Brewer argues that the fuller teaching on the subject of divorce would have been understood by Luke's readers (*Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 161).

### **25. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus—Lk. 16: 19-31**

This is one of the most familiar parables of Jesus found only in *Luke*. Jesus has upbraided (rebuked) the Pharisees (vv. 14-18) who were scoffing at His teaching about money and possessions in the parable of the unrighteous steward (vv. 1-13). In His rebuke, He also criticizes the Pharisees for their unbelief (v. 16). "Everyone" is forcing his way into the kingdom of God—that is, everyone *except* the scribes and Pharisees, who remain obstinately resistant. He now presents a parable which combines the two elements—the love of money, which renders a person apathetic to the needs of others, and persistent unbelief.

Two extreme conditions of wealth and poverty are presented in vv. 19-21. The rich man, who is not named, lives in luxurious splendor (v. 19) while the poor man, Lazarus, lies outside the rich man's gate longing even for the crumbs from the rich man's table (v. 21). It is implied that Lazarus "was laid at his [the rich man's] gate" daily by others who perhaps hoped for some measure of charity from the rich man, but no such charity was offered. To compound his misery, the wild dogs on the streets would come and lick his sores, furthering his pain and the infection of his skin. Commentators normally interpret the dogs licking his wounds as a positive relief, but there is little reason to believe that the experience was pleasant to Lazarus. (So also Alfred Edersheim, who says that dogs are usually given a negative presentation in the scriptures—*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 4, p. 279). Eventually, both Lazarus and the rich man died. The contrast in the description of their deaths should be noted. Lazarus died, but he was "carried away by angels to Abraham's bosom." The bosom signified protection and loving care (Jn. 1: 18; 13: 23), and since Abraham was in heaven—something no Jew would dispute—his bosom was none other than heaven itself. The death of the rich man is described in terse (concise) and abrupt words, "the rich man also died and was buried", followed by an immediate reference to "Hades" or hell.

Suffering the torment of hell, the rich man, nevertheless, is given a view of Abraham in the distance with Lazarus being comforted in his bosom (v. 23). The rich man's address, "Father Abraham" indicates Jewish descent (v. 24), an unmistakable warning to the Pharisees that Jewish-ness alone does not qualify anyone for the kingdom of heaven (Lk. 3: 8). Crying out for mercy, the rich man requests that Abraham send Lazarus to provide him with some small relief from his suffering, even a drop of water on the tip of his finger to cool his tongue. He is in agony from the intense heat and flames of fire in Hades. Abraham reminds him that God was

very good to him during his life, but Lazarus had endured much suffering. No comment is made about whether the rich man or Lazarus had deserved the kind of treatment given them in their earthly lives, but the implied reason appears to be simply the sovereign good pleasure of God who allots to each one the material benefits or destitution which serves His inscrutable (not capable of examination) purpose. Some are rich and some are poor, not necessarily because of human merit or failure, but because God has a purpose for both. The tables were now switched so that Lazarus is being comforted and the rich man is being punished, quite a contrast to the description of both in the beginning of the parable (vv. 19-21). As it turns out, then, Lazarus' poverty was not a punishment for his sins, and the rich man's wealth was not a blessing for his righteousness—according to the popular, retributive theology of the day.

Having implied that the rich man's theology had been mistaken, Abraham also replies that there was too much distance between them and the rich man to make such an act of mercy possible. A great chasm or divide (a vast split in the earth; figuratively, a vast expanse) is fixed in place between those who are in heaven and those who are in hell, one which cannot be crossed. Previously, Lazarus had been the one lying in agony *outside the gate*, and there had been a great *wall of separation* between the rich man who lived in splendor and the poor man who lived in squalor. Furthermore, while this wall of separation was imposed or "fixed" by the rich man who had no consideration of Lazarus, the separation between him and Lazarus continues in eternity by the imposition of God's wrath who "fixes" a great chasm between the two, one which cannot be crossed. In his earthly life Lazarus could not reach the rich man to receive any of his kindness; so now, the rich man cannot reach Lazarus to receive any of *his* kindness. Retributive justice—the law of sowing and reaping—is, indeed, in operation, but not in the same way the rich man had expected! Lazarus was now enjoying the fruit of his belief while the rich man was being tormented for his unbelief and for the mercilessness which his unbelief produced.

The rich man has one last request. He is confident that if Lazarus, raised from the dead, appears to his brothers and warns them of their unbelief and the torments of hell which follow, they will repent (vv. 28, 29). Abraham's answer is simple: Let them listen to the predictions of the Messiah given for hundreds of years through Moses and the prophets, predictions which were inscribed in the OT scriptures. But this response is unsatisfactory to the rich man who had ignored the OT witness of the Messiah. It would be much better, he insists, if signs and wonders were given to his brothers, such as the *resurrection* of someone from the dead. Then, and only then, would his brothers repent. But Abraham replies that if his brothers would not listen to the witness of the OT scriptures, neither would they be convinced if Lazarus is raised from the dead.

The meaning is obvious. For three years Jesus had been performing signs and wonders—even raising the dead to life on three separate occasions (the widow's son in Nain, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha)—but all of this had left the Pharisees unconvinced that He was the Messiah promised by Moses and all the prophets. One more miracle would not be sufficient to alter their entrenched unbelief; rather, they are instructed to examine the scriptures once again to see if Jesus was who He claimed to be. If they then failed to believe what the scriptures obviously taught—that Jesus was the Messiah—they would not be persuaded by someone rising from the dead. Sure enough, when Jesus was crucified and actually rose from the dead, the religious rulers and teachers of Israel refused to believe the obvious. Even though the body had disappeared from the tomb, and there was no logical explanation for its

disappearance, they still would not believe. Thus, through this parable Jesus is predicting the obstinate, persistent unbelief of the Pharisees who refused to believe in Him despite overwhelming evidence.

In addition to the comments above, the parable teaches us the following:

**a. Christ Knows Our Name**—While the poor man receives the name, Lazarus, the rich man receives no name, possibly to emphasize the distinction God makes between the righteous and the unrighteous. Christ *knows* His sheep, and they follow him, and He gives unto them eternal life (Jn. 10: 27-28). On the other hand many will say to him on the judgment day, “Lord, Lord”, but He will say to them, “I never *knew* you...” (Matt. 7: 23).

**b. The Fallacy of Retributive Theology**—The “conventional wisdom” of the day taught that material blessings indicated God’s approval and the worthiness of the recipient (cf. Matt. 19: 25 and commentary below). Tragedy and poverty, on the other hand, proved personal sin and God’s curse (Jn. 9:2). But if this rigid doctrine of retributive justice operated *without exception* (cf. my notes on *Job*), Lazarus would have ended up in hell and the rich man in heaven. Poverty is *sometimes* the result of personal sin and laziness, but it is obvious that this is not the case with Lazarus who now enjoys the comforts of heaven. Riches are *sometimes* the blessing for righteousness (*Proverbs*), but not always, as is evident in the rich man’s judgment (cf. Lk. 12: 16-21, the rich fool). Through this parable, Jesus challenges the retributive justice of the Pharisees which had become “fossilized” (hardened) into a rigid doctrine allowing of no exceptions—the same mistake as Job’s three friends.

**c. The Nature of Heaven and Hell**—We should be careful not to emphasize every detail of this parable in an attempt to formulate the precise doctrines of heaven and hell. I don’t think Jesus intends to teach us that there can be communication between those in heaven with those in hell. However, we can make some general observations which are supported from other passages: (1) Heaven is a place of bliss and happiness in which God’s forgiven people enjoy the fellowship of God and all the saints, including the OT saints (Abraham). It is also a place where believers who have suffered extreme poverty, destitution, sickness, and persecution in this present life will be relieved of such suffering and will enjoy the comfort they have never known. (2) Hell is a place of agony separated from God and from the fellowship of God’s people (v. 26; “a great chasm is fixed”). Whether the flames (v. 24) mentioned in this passage are literal flames of fire in which unbelievers are continually burned but not consumed is a debatable point, but the description given by Jesus leaves us in no doubt about the terrible torment awaiting those who go there. The precise nature of this physical punishment may be debated. Hell is a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8: 12; 13: 42, 50; Lk. 13: 28; etc.). That we have so little description of it in the NT suggests its *unspeakable* horror.

As there is a resurrection of the body for believers, there is also a resurrection of the body for unbelievers (Jn. 5: 29). There is, therefore, physical blessing for believers and physical punishment for unbelievers, but the bodily resurrection of believers and unbelievers will not take place until the final judgment (1 Thes. 4). Thus, Jesus was not attempting a detailed description of the eschatological judgment since He pictures the rich man suffering physically in hell while his brothers are still alive (Liefeld, p. 991).

**d. *There is no mercy extended to those who are in hell***—The rich man cried for mercy (v. 24), even for a small drop of water to be placed on his tongue, but no mercy was given. He also “begged” Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to his father’s house to warn his five brothers to repent, thus saving them from the same torment he now faced. This request was also denied. In this present life, God grants the wicked considerable mercy, the sun and the rain to grow their food (Matt. 5: 45), the love of family and friends, etc, and in the rich man’s case, vast wealth. Such kindness is designed to lead the wicked to repentance (Rom. 2: 4), but the wicked ignore God’s common grace and seal their own doom.

**e. *Signs and wonders do not convince unbelievers of the truth of the gospel***—Just as the Jews refused to believe in Jesus as their promised Messiah in spite of His miraculous works, even so no one will believe the gospel apart from the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. The miracles Jesus performed on earth were helpful in drawing attention to His message, but they were never substitutes for the message itself. If sinners refuse to believe the entire testimony of Holy Scripture, neither will they believe in Christ on the basis of miraculous works.

**f. *Riches cannot purchase eternal life***—While the rich man could live splendidly on earth, his comforts and entertainments were only temporary; and at death he found himself face to face with an angry God who judged him for his selfish use of material wealth (cf. Lk. 16: 1-13). Had he repented of his self-indulgence and sought to please the Lord with his worldly goods, he would have found himself side by side with Lazarus enjoying the fellowship of Abraham; but he was like the rich fool who laid up for himself treasures on earth and was not rich toward God (Lk. 12). Jesus had warned on an earlier occasion that anyone who wished to save his life would lose it and whoever lost it for His sake would find it. Even if a man gained the whole world and lost his soul, he had profited nothing (Lk. 9: 24-25).

**g. *The parable offers an illustration of what Jesus meant in Lk. 16: 15, “for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Geldenhuys, p. 424)***—As in all cultures and in every age, the rich among us are the most highly esteemed of all men. To be sure, many of them have worked hard, treated men fairly, and conducted their business with honesty and integrity. However, this is certainly not true of all rich men, and even many who have earned their wealth honestly have not met the requirements of generosity established by Christ and the apostles. More often than not, wealth breeds arrogance and contempt for those who have not been “successful” in life, and this same arrogance generates a self-justifying, self-indulgent, opulent life-style cluttered with superfluous (excessive) possessions. But Jesus is not impressed with rich men, for it is clear from the parable that whatever the rich man had was ultimately due to the sovereign purpose of God. As the rich man showed his contempt for Lazarus, Jesus shows His contempt for self-indulgent, heartless rich people, regardless of their reputation among men. In the end they will be nothing more than poor beggars asking for the smallest mercy but receiving none.

## **26. *Further instructions to His disciples; the parable of the unworthy slave—Lk. 17: 1-10***

The temporal connection with the previous parable is not clear. Previously Jesus had been speaking to the Pharisees, but now to His disciples (v. 1). The content of this section is an

abbreviated account of Jesus' instructions to the disciples in Matt. 18 (particularly vv. 6-7, 15, and 22; see commentary above) with the exception of the parable of the unworthy slave (vv. 7-10) which occurs only in *Luke*. When Christ instructed His disciples about forgiveness in Matt. 18: 15, Peter responded with a question followed by a possible answer, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (18: 21) Jesus responded to this question and answer with the command to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven, followed by the parable of the unforgiving slave (vv. 23-35).

In the Lukan passage, the requirement of repentance as the condition of forgiveness comes out more clearly than in *Matthew* in which repentance is only implied. In Lk. 17: 3, we read, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and **if he repents**, forgive him." In Matt. 18: 15 we find, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; **if he listens to you**, you have won your brother." Peter's response in v. 21 indicates the necessity of forgiveness in v. 15. However, in *Matthew* Jesus responds to Peter's question with the command to forgive seventy times seven, followed by a different parable from the one in *Luke*, while in *Luke* He is not responding to a question when He commands the apostles to forgive the brother seven times a day. The response in v. 5 from the apostles—not just Peter—**follows** this command rather than coming **before** it and is not a question but a request, "Increase our faith!" Apparently, the disciples noted the extreme difficulty of Jesus' command to forgive someone seven times a day! As noted in the commentary on Matt. 18, Jesus was not dealing with the nature of genuine repentance. Here as well, He is not dealing with this question but only with the necessity of forgiveness **if** a brother **truly** repents.

Since there are no clear temporal indicators in the Lukan passage to connect it with the same discourse in Matt. 18, I am inclined to believe that Jesus is simply repeating the same teaching on another occasion rather than Luke pulling from another source and inserting this material in haphazard fashion. In fact, the logical and temporal connection of the passage with the previous one could be the resistance of the Pharisees. The Pharisees, in this context, could be the "stumbling blocks" of 17: 1, but we must note that Jesus was speaking to the **disciples**, in which case He may have been warning **them** not to become stumbling blocks.

**Verse 6** is a difficult one. On another occasion, when the disciples had asked Jesus why they were not able to exorcise a demon, He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you" (Matt. 17: 20). Moving mountains was a common proverb for overcoming seemingly insurmountable difficulties (Carson, p. 391; cf. Isa. 40: 4; 49: 11; Matt. 21: 21-22; 1 Cor. 13: 2; cited in Carson); thus, we should understand the expression in *Matthew* as an intended **figure of speech rather than a literal promise**. The same is true here. Uprooting mulberry trees and planting them in the sea would not be very useful activities for the disciples. What Christ is teaching them is that they don't need **more** faith, but only the **right kind** of faith (Geldenhuis, p. 432). A mustard seed is a living organism which has all the potential of the full-grown tree, and if it is allowed to germinate and grow, it will produce fruit. Likewise, the disciples needed to allow the **little faith** they possessed to grow to **maturity**, and when this happened, nothing would be impossible for them. As the *Acts of the Apostles* and the history of the church has demonstrated, their faith **did**

grow, and many mighty acts of God through them and others have yielded a church which has spread to almost every people group on the face of the earth.

Knowing beforehand the mighty deeds His apostles and their spiritual descendents would perform, Jesus gives a subtle warning against pride in the *parable of the unworthy slave*. Every good work and every good deed believers accomplish in the name of Christ is the direct result of the Spirit's gracious work in them. ***There is never any ground for self-satisfaction or pride in one's achievements*** (Geldenhuys, pp. 432-433). In v. 7, the slave has been laboring all day in the fields, and he comes in from work tired, thirsty, and hungry. Yet, the master does not invite the slave to sit down in his presence and rest from his toil, but tells him to first prepare something for him to eat, change clothes, and serve him before the slave can enjoy his own supper. Not only this, but the master does not thank the slave for working all day, nor does he thank the slave for preparing him something to eat and drink (vv. 8-9). The argument in the parable is from the lesser to the greater. Common slaves did not expect special honor and entitlement from their masters for doing what they were *supposed* to do. In the same way, Christians should not expect special honor for serving Christ in the kingdom of God on earth. Serving Christ is simply our duty, and Christ is not indebted to us for doing "only that which we *ought* to have done" (v. 10). Once again, we must be careful in the interpretation lest we make mistakes in the application. Jesus is focusing on one point, the need for humility in service which guards against a sense of pride and entitlement ("you owe me"; cf. Matt. 20: 1-16 and commentary, which teaches the same principle). Quite obviously, Jesus is *not* an insensitive master who is indifferent to the needs of His servants. His life and crucifixion prove that He, of all people, was the Servant of servants who laid down His life for others. (In Lk. 12: 35-38, Jesus is depicted as a master who humbly serves his slaves; Liefeld, p. 994). This is precisely the *attitude* we must have in *our* service. Nothing God requires of us is over and beyond the call of duty; nothing He commands us to do is *more* than we ought to do. Even casual examination of our lives and work will quickly reveal that we have fallen far short of what we ought to have done. We should have done far more! (Jesus is being lenient with us in the parable.) Therefore, at the end of our lives, no matter what sacrifices we have made, we will not be able to claim that we have gone above and beyond the call of duty as Christians for which God is obligated to thank us. We must, rather, confess, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done" (and, most likely, *far less* than we ought to have done).

Another caution in the interpretation is against the conclusion that God will not reward us for our service. God will never forget anything we do in His name and for His glory (Heb. 6: 10). The Biblical teaching of rewards is found in other passages (1 Cor. 3: 8, 4; 9: 17; Matt. 25: 14-30; passim [in other places]), but this was not Jesus' focus in this parable. Yet, it is equally clear that even our rewards for service are founded upon pure grace.

### ***27. The Cleansing of Ten Lepers—Lk. 17: 11-19***

Once again we notice the characteristic formula of Luke's travel narrative, "And it came about *while He was on the way to Jerusalem...*" (v. 11). We are given no chronological connection with the previous passage.

Entering a certain village (we are not told which one) Jesus is met by ten leprous men. They cry for mercy, and Jesus requires an act of faith—presenting themselves to the priest as required by the Law (Lev. 14). As they were going to the priest, they were healed (v. 14b). One of them, a **Samaritan** (v. 16), noticed en route (on the way) that he had already been healed and began glorifying God loudly (v. 15). He was the only one of the ten, nine of whom were **Jews**, who bothered to come back and thank Jesus for the gift of healing. Luke has already recorded the parable of the Good Samaritan in which only a despised Samaritan takes the time to help the beaten traveler (Lk. 10: 30-37). In this actual event, Luke highlights the difference between the nine Jewish lepers and this one Samaritan who is grateful for what Jesus does. The passage does not expressly say that **only** the Samaritan had genuine saving faith, but it is possible that only he was made completely “well” or received salvation (the word “well”, *sesoken* is a “more comprehensive word” than “cleansed”; Liefeld, p. 995; cf. Geldenhuys, who believes that only the Samaritan was saved on this occasion, p. ).

### 28. *The second coming of Christ—Lk. 17: 20-37*

Again, there is no temporal connection with the previous story. Luke moves quickly from one story to the next with few, if any, transitional statements.

The Pharisees were continually asking for signs (Matt. 12: 38). Jesus had given many such signs in healing the sick, casting out demons, and even raising the dead, but they were never satisfactory to the Pharisees who wanted a sign “from heaven” (Matt. 16: 1). Reading their thoughts on this present occasion, Jesus anticipated their lust for signs by saying that the kingdom of God was “not coming with signs to be observed”, and if they were looking for them as definitive indicators of the kingdom, they would miss the kingdom altogether. This was, indeed, the case. The truth was that the kingdom of God **had already come** in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the Pharisees had completely missed **Him** as the inaugurator of the kingdom.

But how could Jesus insist that the kingdom was not coming with **observable signs** when, in fact, His whole ministry had been characterized by such signs? The answer may be found by determining exactly what **stage** of the kingdom of God Jesus is referring to. Is Jesus speaking of His first coming or His second coming? As mentioned above, there was an **already** and a **not yet** to the kingdom of God. In one sense the kingdom had **already** come and had manifested itself in the decline of Satan’s power (Lk. 11: 20), but it had **not yet** come in the power and might expected by the Jewish nation as a whole. Only a small minority like Simeon and Anna had expected the “suffering servant” who would save not only the Jews but the Gentiles (Lk. 2: 30-32) and who would be opposed by His own people (Lk. 2: 34-35). The kind of Messianic kingdom the Jews were looking for was characterized by a climactic revolution in which the Jews would be forever delivered from the external rule of foreign powers and a David-like king would sit once again on the throne in Jerusalem governing conquered nations. Such an expectation was not altogether mistaken, for this is just the kind of kingdom described in some of the prophets, most notably *Isaiah* (9 and 11) in which the universal reign of the Christ is described in dramatic detail. What the Jews had ignored was the suffering servant passage of Isa. 53 (among others) which showed that the omnipotent Messiah must suffer before He enters into His glory.

If we are inclined to excuse the Jewish expectation on the basis of a preponderance (greater amount) of prophetic passages describing the glorious consummation of the Messianic kingdom, then we must answer Jesus' provocative question to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in *all* that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to *suffer* these things and to enter into His glory?" (Lk. 24: 25-26) The problem with the Jewish interpretation of the OT was their selectivity—they chose only those texts which told them what they wanted to hear while ignoring others. Jesus' rebuke in Lk. 24 was that the disciples were slow to believe in *all* that the prophets had spoken, not just *some* of it.

The dramatic signs of Jesus' first coming clearly indicated the inauguration of the kingdom of God, and these signs had been performed not all at once, but progressively for the past three years of His ministry. But the *consummation of the kingdom*—to which Jesus refers in v. 20 and v. 24—would not come *gradually and progressively* in the form of signs which would give the observer clues about when the Son of Man was coming. There would be no clues for those who refuse to listen to His message; He would just *come*—unexpectedly and suddenly. Therefore, if someone says, "Here is the kingdom!" or "There it is", no one should believe them or run after them (v. 23) for two reasons: (1) because the second coming, the consummation of the kingdom, will be so sudden that no one will be able to predict it by progressively interpreting the signs, and (2) it will be so dramatic (like lightning flashing) that no one will be able to miss it when it actually occurs. It will, therefore, need no interpretation at all because it will be evident to all (cf. Geldenhuys, pp. 440-441).

This explanation is supported by the remainder of the chapter (vv. 22-37) in which Jesus likens the second coming—the final and climactic coming of the kingdom—to the flood in Noah's day and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 26-30; notice the phrases, "just as it happened", "the same as happened", and "it will be just the same"). Neither of these two events was *expected by those who were destroyed*, and neither of them could have been *missed* by those who were alive when they happened. The people involved in both events were simply going about their business when destruction came suddenly and unexpectedly upon them. They were eating and drinking, marrying, buying and selling, planting and building (vv. 27-28). Neither the flood nor the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah *could have been predicted by miraculous signs which warned them beforehand* because there were none—only the verbal warnings of Noah (1 Pet. 3: 20) and Lot (Gen. 19: 14)—and neither will the precise timing of the Son of Man be a predictable event preceded by "*signs to be observed*" (v. 20). Nevertheless, when He "is revealed" (v. 30; *apokalupto*), no one will be able to miss it any more than one can miss lightning (v. 24) or a dead body with vultures gathered around it (v. 37).

When the kingdom of God is consummated in the "revealing" of the Son of Man, it will be a day of judgment in which the greatest sense of urgency is required. Those who are on their housetops should not even take the time to retrieve their belongings on the first floor, and those working in the fields should not "turn back" to their homes. Singleness of heart is also a must. "Remember Lot's wife" who although escaping Sodom with her body, had left her heart and affections there. In vv. 32-36, Jesus uses language which He will later use (in Matt.) in describing two events: the climactic destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies in 70 AD and His second coming (Matt. 24: 17-18 compared with Lk. 17: 31; Matt. 24: 41 compared with Lk.



17: 35; Matt. 24: 27-28 with Lk. 17: 24, 37). The first description in *Matthew* is applied to the destruction of Jerusalem and the last two are applied to the second coming while in *Luke*, all of them are applied to the second coming. The horror experienced in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is very similar to what will be experienced by unbelievers at the second coming of Christ.

### **29. The parable of the persistent widow—Lk. 18: 1-8**

On the evening of His betrayal by Judas, Jesus would tell the disciples that they would become outcasts in the synagogues and whoever killed them would think he was doing God a favor (Jn. 16: 2). Because of such discouraging predictions, and because Jesus said He was going away to the Father, the disciples were overcome with sorrow. He then encourages them by promising the Holy Spirit whose help would be more advantageous to them than His own bodily presence (Jn. 16: 5-7). Something similar is happening here in Lk. 18. Still speaking to His disciples, Jesus tells the parable of the persistent widow. The context of this parable is the instruction concerning the coming of the Son of Man from vv. 22-37 which has been likened to the terrifying events of the flood and the destruction of Sodom. Understandably, the disciples would be alarmed by such a description, but in addition to this, He has said that “He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” of Jews (17: 25). Jesus also hinted that the time would soon come when He would be taken away from them, and they would long to see Him but would not be able (Lk. 17: 22).

In the present passage Jesus is now encouraging them with a parable which has the expressed purpose of teaching them “that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart” (v. 1). Thus, the purpose of the parable is to teach them to be persistent in prayer *particularly in times of discouragement and persecution after His departure*.

The negative characterization of the judge in v. 2 is particularly important to the parable. The judge did not fear God and had no regard for people (repeated in v. 4b). A widow—one of the more helpless and socially insignificant members of ancient culture—implores the judge to grant her justice in an obvious case of social oppression. At first the judge was indifferent to her pleas, but because of her persistence in pleading for her rights, he eventually granted her request. The verb phrase, “wear me out” literally means “strike me under the eye” or “give me a black eye” with the connotation of giving someone a bad reputation. Thus, the judge was afraid that her continual pleas would become public and put him to open shame in the community (Liefeld, p. 1000).

The argument Jesus employs is an argument from the lesser to the greater. The *contrast* is two-fold. The unrighteous judge is contrasted with a just and righteous God, and the helpless widow who has no social status or influence in society is contrasted with the elect who are loved as God’s children and to whom He listens sympathetically at all times in prayer. If an unrighteous judge who does not fear God will grant a request to an insignificant widow on the basis of persistence and fear of public shame, *how much more* will God bring about justice for His chosen people who also pray continually for His help? By way of *comparison* with the unjust judge (Liefeld, p. 1000), Jesus is asking, “Will God allow His name to be blasphemed among the heathen because He refuses to vindicate His elect people for the many injustices they suffer in

this world?" No, indeed! He will not delay *a moment longer than necessary* in answering their prayers, but will come *at the proper time* and grant them justice quickly and decisively (vv. 7-8) (Leifeld, p. 446).

This assurance of "speedy justice", of course, begs the question of how the Lord counts time, for it surely does not appear to us that He is in any great hurry to right the wrongs of this world. Evil men by all accounts seem to prevail against the righteous, and the Lord appears slow in returning. But this apparent delay—which by Jesus' own account is not a "long" delay (v. 7)—should be nothing new to God's people. God waited 4000 years (at least) between Adam and Christ to reconcile the apparent contradiction between His *justice* and *mercy* toward rebellious sinners in the sacrifice of Christ. He is now both "*just* and *the justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3: 26; cf. Liefeld, *Luke*, p. 999; John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 171-190). It has now been 2000 more years since Christ's ascension, and God is *still waiting* (for 2000 more years?) to "clear" His own name of any accusations by those who argue that a truly *good* God, who is also all-powerful, cannot allow evil in this world (see also *Job*). Nevertheless, "let God be found true, though every man *be found* a liar" (Rom. 3: 4). The real question is whether, upon His return, God's people will be persevering in faith and prayer, confident of His coming and confident of His ability to establish justice on earth when He comes (v. 8b).

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "*How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. *Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"* (Rev. 6: 9-17)

### 30. *The parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer—Lk. 18: 9-14*

It is not certain whether this parable was spoken on the same occasion as the previous one. Jesus had been addressing only His disciples, but now he is addressing this parable "to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt" (v. 9). This could only mean the Pharisees who could have been the same Pharisees He addressed in 17: 20.

We should keep in mind just how offensive this parable would have been to a group of self-righteous Pharisees who despised even the ground upon which tax-gatherers walked. Such "sinners" symbolized anti-nationalism because their work required them to cooperate with the Roman government and participate with it in the oppression of the Jewish people. Likewise, the Jewish rabbis considered the tax-gatherers beyond the hope of repentance and salvation, precisely why Jesus' choice of Matthew was especially symbolic of His mission to seek and to

save the lost (p. 37 of notes; Edersheim, pp. 516-517). Previously, some of them had criticized Jesus for receiving tax-gatherers and sinners and eating with them (Lk. 15: 1-2). The ones Jesus is addressing now in Lk. 18 are not the same ones (cf. Lk. 17: 1, which indicates that Jesus had changed locations) but they are of the same “stripe” and attitude as implied in the parable. The wording of v. 11 is instructive. The self-righteous Pharisee, who thought he was praying to God, was really only praying “to himself” (v. 11). God doesn’t hear prayers which denounce others as sinners while excusing one’s own sins. God judges not only external sins, but the sins of the heart, and the Pharisee was getting nowhere with God by comparing himself with others, something all of us should keep in mind. The tax-gatherer, on the other hand, remaining humble and contrite not only in heart but in posture (v. 13; “unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven” and “beating his breast”) cried out to God for undeserved mercy. Note well that the tax-gatherer does not call himself “*a* sinner” but “*the* sinner” (The definite article “the” is included in the Greek text.) He does not consider himself *one* sinner among *many* sinners who cry, “No one is perfect!”; but he is *the* sinner, allowing no excuses, standing in desperate need of God’s mercy and forgiveness.

It is possible that Jesus is presenting the tax-gatherer as a *greater* sinner than the Pharisee in terms of the sheer quantity and seriousness of sins committed. On a previous occasion in the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus had forgiven the sins of a woman (a “sinner”) who had anointed His feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair (Lk. 7: 36-50). In the parable which followed her unceremonious (lack of formality and ritual) display of repentance and faith, Jesus acknowledged the fact that her sins, compared to Simon’s, were “many” and for that reason her love for Him was great. This woman was forgiven (7: 48), but there is no evidence in the story that Simon even sought forgiveness. So, also in the present parable. The Pharisee knows nothing against himself which needs forgiveness; consequently, no forgiveness is sought and none is given. He goes down to his house without being justified while the tax-gatherer goes to his house “justified” (*dikaioo*; the same word used in Rom. 3: 24).

Jesus concludes the parable with the same warning given in the house of another Pharisee, “for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (v. 14b; cf. Lk. 14: 11; see commentary above).

The point of the parable, as the one in Lk. 7, is not *how many* sins we have committed or *how dreadful* our sins have been. (In comparison with others, the Pharisee looked pretty good on the outside.) It is just as easy (or just as difficult in light of the cross) for God to forgive “big” sinners as it is “little” sinners or many sins as comparatively few. The point is that we all—without exception—must acknowledge that we are *dreadful sinners in desperate need of forgiveness*. There are no little sinners (see commentary on Lk. 7), but we have a *big Savior* who is willing and able to forgive us for anything we have done. The big requirement is genuine repentance—seeing ourselves as God sees us without comparing ourselves with others—and faith which believes that He will forgive.

### ***B. Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce—Matt. 19: 3-12; Mk. 10: 1-12***

The question posed by the Pharisees in v. 3 reflects the ongoing controversy on divorce between two schools of thought—Hillel and Shammai—a controversy which revolved around the

interpretation of Deut. 24: 1 and the meaning of the word, “indecent” (*erwat dabar*). The conservative school of Shammai interpreted the word to mean some gross indecency though not necessarily adultery while the Hillel school allowed a meaning which included all kinds of frivolous (silly) or insignificant offenses such as poor cooking (Carson, p. 411). It is difficult to determine the exact meaning of the word in the original context of Deut. 24, but it could not mean adultery for the reason that adultery by a married woman was punishable by death (Lev. 20: 10). Thus, we are left with the option of some other kind of shameful deed which is not clearly defined in *Deuteronomy* or elsewhere, an uncertainty which led to the rabbinical debates in Jesus’ day. The root idea of the word is nakedness, and the verbal form is used in the context of sexual relationships, e.g. Lev. 18: 6 and 20: 18-19. The word occurs only once more in the OT (Deut. 23: 9-14) referring to excrement (human wastes) which must be covered up so that God is not offended by anything in the vicinity of the camp of Israel (James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 98-99).

The question which naturally occurs to the modern reader is: What about a husband divorced by his wife? The answer is that wives were not allowed to divorce their husbands in the ancient Eastern context, even in Jewish culture. If the husband, or an unmarried man, was guilty of sexual relations with a **married** woman, both of them would be executed, thus eliminating the need for divorce from an adulterous husband (Deut. 22: 22). On the other hand, if the husband had sexual relations with an **unmarried** woman, this was not considered adultery since polygamous relationships (more technically polygyny—having more than one wife) were permitted. For instance, if Bathsheba had not been married, King David would not have been confronted by Nathan the prophet for adultery, but he would have been expected to pay her father a dowry and take her as his wife. Bathsheba’s father, on the other hand, would not have been obligated to give her to David (Ex. 22: 17), although an unlikely scenario.

In Jewish law, David’s offense was not against his many wives—at least six at the time of his adultery—but against Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband. In the case of an unmarried woman, the offense is against the woman’s father, with whom no formal contract of marriage has been arranged (David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 98). The man who seduces a virgin must pay the dowry to the woman’s father whether he takes the woman as his wife or not (Ex. 22: 16) since the father would no longer be able to get the same amount of bride price for a woman who was no longer a virgin (Hurley, p. 39).

Upon further examination, the purpose of Deut. 24: 1-4 is not to establish in detail the grounds for divorce, but to restrict the practice of divorce by spelling out the consequences for the husband pursuing divorce. If the divorced woman marries another man, she cannot be reunited to her former husband even if she is divorced by the second husband or if the second husband dies. Such being the stipulations (rules of divorce), the legislation is a warning to the husband to think twice about divorcing his wife for anything but the most serious infractions (violations) of decency. As mentioned above, this cannot include adultery since adultery was punishable by death, but whatever the violation was, the husband should seriously consider whether it was worth a permanent, irrevocable (irreversible) separation from his wife. Once he divorced her and she was remarried, she was gone forever and could not return to him under any circumstances. As we shall see later, Jesus makes it clear that Moses never “commanded” the husband to put

away his wife for “indecent” but because of the hardness of their hearts, he “permitted” them to put their wives away for something other than adultery.

Quite the contrary of making divorce easy for husbands, the Mosaic legislation was actually ***designed to protect the rights of women***. Instone-Brewer has documented the differences between divorce legislation in Israel and that of other ancient Eastern cultures. In Assyrian culture, the divorced woman could be reclaimed by her husband within five years. This meant that if the divorced woman remarried before the five years were completed and had children by her second husband, not only would she be forced by law to return to her first husband, but all her children by her second husband would belong to the first husband. In Babylonian and Assyrian cultures there was no legal certificate of divorce required from the divorcing husband to be given to the divorced wife as proof that she was legally divorced and had the ***right of remarriage***. Such a certificate was awarded to the Israelite woman (Deut. 24: 1-4) who would need proof that she was no longer obligated by marriage covenant to her former husband. Men would need no such document since polygamy was allowed. Without this document the woman would be like all other divorced women in ancient Eastern cultures who could be reclaimed by their former husbands who abandoned them earlier (Instone-Brewer, pp. 28-32).

Thus, the Pharisees’ question to Jesus completely missed the point, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for ***any reason at all?***” Their sole concern was to identify the ***grounds*** for divorce according to the long-debated meaning of the word, “indecent”, but the emphasis of Deut. 24: 1-4 was to ***restrict easy divorce*** by warning of the impossibility of remarriage to the divorced woman, once joined to another man, and to give the divorced woman the ***liberty of remarriage*** without fear of being reclaimed by her former husband in the future, along with her children.

On the other hand, Jesus does not lend himself to the ongoing debate by pointing out the original meaning of the text. Rather, ***he goes beyond the text of Deuteronomy by stressing the importance of marriage as a creational ordinance***, “And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate’ ” (vv. 4-6). The structure of marriage—the “one flesh” principle—did not begin with Moses but with Adam and Eve at the beginning of creation. It is, therefore, unnatural to divide what God has joined together; and it is only because of men’s sinful hearts that this unnatural division has come about (Carson, p. 413). The emphasis of the whole debate about the grounds for marriage was misplaced, an emphasis which Jesus now condemns by properly pointing to God’s original design for marriage. Although all divorce is not unlawful, all divorce is based on sin.

Challenging Jesus, the Pharisees again go back to Deut. 24: 1-4, quoting Moses’ command to give the wife a certificate of divorce and send her away. Jesus corrects their interpretation, pointing out that Moses never ***commanded*** the husband to send his wife away, but ***permitted*** him to do so because of the hardness of men’s hearts. The hardness of their hearts is partly a reference to their indifference to the sanctity of marriage as a creation ordinance and their moral obligations in the marriage. Their self-serving interests in possessing the “perfect” wife to

gratify their own selfish desires had clouded their judgment about the marriage covenant which required them to be loving companions to their wives and to treat them as they would their own bodies. Although this requirement for marriage is made more explicit by the Apostle Paul in Eph. 5: 28, Paul uses the creational ordinance expressed in Gen. 2: 24 to make this point—the husband and wife are one flesh, thus any mistreatment of one’s wife is mistreatment of himself (Eph. 5: 31).

Jesus then goes beyond the Mosaic legislation of Deut. 24 by forbidding divorce for any reason other than sexual immorality (*porneia*), thus eliminating the normal practice of divorce for any “indecent” other than sexual immorality. He also goes beyond the Jewish understanding of adultery as an offense only against another *husband*. “Another woman” of Matt. 19: 9 is a single woman, yet Christ says that if the man divorces his wife and marries her, he has committed adultery “against” his former wife (cf. Mk. 10: 11). As Hurley notes, “This step is radical in its historical context, placing husband and wife on the same level...” (p. 97; see also Lane, p. 357). This would not imply, however, that Jesus was proclaiming the immorality of polygamy as such (as Instone Brewer argues); otherwise His forbidding of such a practice would have been registered in Paul’s instructions later in 1 Tim. 3: 2, the qualifications for elders. At this time, polygamy among Jews was becoming less common. Nevertheless, a man may not divorce his wife for reasons other than *porneia* (including adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.) and marry another woman without incurring the guilt of adultery. This teaching was radically new in Israel and overturned both the Hillel and the Shammai schools of thought as well as the Mosaic legislation allowing divorce for *some other indecent* (Hurley, pp. 102-103; cf. Lane, p. 357).

The additional statement found in Mk. 10: 12, “and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery”, also intensifies Jesus’ *radical departure from Jewish law*. The right of divorce was reserved to the husband even though the wife could sue for divorce for certain reasons—denial of conjugal rights or lack of material maintenance (Ex. 21: 9-11; cf. Instone-Brewer, pp. 99-102). Nevertheless, the act of divorce had to be carried out by the husband (Lane, p. 358, including note 19).

The new element in this teaching, which was totally unrecognized in the rabbinic courts, was the concept of a husband committing adultery against his former wife. According to rabbinic law a man could commit adultery against another married man by seducing his wife (Deut. 22: 13-29) and a wife could commit adultery against her husband by infidelity, but a husband could not be said to commit adultery against his wife. The unconditional form of Jesus’ statement served to reinforce the abrogation of the Mosaic permission in Deut. 24: 1. This sharp intensifying of the concept of adultery had the effect of elevating the status of the wife to the same dignity as her husband and placed the husband under an obligation of fidelity (Lane, p. 357).

Mark was writing for Gentiles who would be more oriented toward Roman law which permitted wives to divorce their husbands. The pronouncement is also a bold condemnation of Herod Antipas and Herodias, former wife of Philip, who divorced him to marry Herod Antipas, a union which John the Baptist declared unlawful (Matt. 14: 1-4). (Lane also points out that some manuscript evidence does not use the word “divorce”, *apoluo*, but “desertion”, p. 358).

The urgent question at this juncture is: Why did Mark leave out the exceptional clause—“except for immorality”—which Matthew includes? It is possible that Mark, writing to Gentile readers,

did not consider it necessary to mention this exception since they would have *assumed* the exception. For Matthew's Jewish readers, however, divorce upon the grounds of adultery *effectively abolished the death penalty for adultery established in the Mosaic Law* (Carson, p. 418).

The disciples were shocked at Jesus' words, further evidence that Jesus' new regulations were radical to the Jewish mind, even going beyond the strict interpretations of the Shammai school. If marriage was this *permanent*, then it would be better never to marry (Matt. 19: 10). Jesus' response in vv. 11-12 has received various interpretations. One interpretation has Jesus immediately moving to the discussion of celibacy, a subject which His disciples had just introduced in v. 10 (Carson, p. 419). Not all men can accept "this statement", namely, the statement of the disciples, "...it is better not to marry." But God has granted the gift of celibacy ("to whom it has been given") to some men who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. (The other eunuchs mentioned were those born impotent or those castrated by men to care for a king's harem—Esther 2: 3; Acts 8: 27.) Jesus made Himself a eunuch (not literally, but figuratively) for the kingdom of God, never marrying but devoting Himself exclusively to His ministry. There would be others, like the Apostle Paul, who would forego marriage as a special means of devoting himself to the gospel ministry (1 Cor. 7: 32-35). How could the Apostle Paul have devoted sufficient time to the responsibilities of marriage in light of his rigorous life as a traveling missionary? His wife would have led a very lonely life—a virtual widow.

Another interpretation takes Jesus' response in v. 11 to apply to His teaching about divorce in the previous passage. *Not all men would be able to accept His new, more restricted teaching about divorce.* Certainly the hard-hearted men who were looking for any reason to dismiss their wives would not "accept" His new teaching, but only those whose hearts are changed and made willing to hear the truth (Hurley, p. 105; Matt. 13: 9, 11, 43; cited by Hurley).

There is an element of truth in both interpretations (Hendriksen, pp. 717-718). The gift of God's grace is required to accept Jesus' teaching about marriage as a creational ordinance and to fulfill the obligations of marriage, namely, to love another person as he loves himself. Otherwise, he will always be preoccupied with what he can *get* out of the marriage relationship and not what he can *give*. In the latter case, marriage is too threatening for this self-centered person who may not be able to lawfully escape the marriage. (This would also apply to the wife.) But it is also the gift of God for a person to voluntarily deny himself the joys of marriage in order to devote himself more unreservedly to the Lord's work. Not many people—men or women—have this gift of self-denial; but it is a valid decision in light of the overwhelming claims of the kingdom of God. *The real question is: How can my life most effectively be used for God?* Some people—most people—cannot function well without the companionship of marriage, a reality based on God's general design for the human race (Gen. 2: 18). Others to whom the gift of singleness has been given find that they are not burdened with the distractions of marriage and can devote far more of their time to the Lord's work (1 Cor. 7: 32-34), even if their occupation is not strictly ministerial. Both singleness and married life are acceptable options if the motivation for either is proper—service rather than selfishness.

***C. Jesus Blesses the Little Children—Matt. 19: 13-15; Mk. 10: 13-16; Lk. 18: 15-17***

It is here that Luke's narrative rejoins that of Matthew and Mark (cf. Carson, Geldenhuys, Liefeld). Thus, from Lk. 9: 51 to 18: 14, Luke departs from the narratives of Matthew and Mark to chart his own course in the gospel story, including elements unique only to Luke's gospel (cf. Guthrie, "An Outline of the Life of Christ", pp. 558-559, *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).

These three texts are some of the most vigorously debated from scholars on both sides of the issue of infant baptism. Others argue that they prove nothing about infant baptism one way or another. Jesus is simply holding in public view the child-like qualities of children who receive the kingdom of God as those who cannot work for it or deserve it but who are helplessly dependent (*paidea* in Matthew and Mark, a term which may include older children as well as infants; *brephe* in Luke, a term decidedly referring to infant children or very young children). In the same way as a little child, the sinner must acknowledge his total dependence upon God's grace to enter the kingdom of God (cf. discussion of Matt. 18 above). It is noteworthy that Luke places this pericope (short story) in the context of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Lk. 18: 9-14) in which the self-righteous Pharisee goes away from the temple unforgiven while the penitent publican, recognizing his sinfulness, goes away justified (v. 14). Immediately following is the story of the little children who reflect the child-like faith of the publican.

Thus, we must recognize that the teaching focus of the story is not infant baptism per se, but the necessary qualifications to enter the kingdom of God—total dependence, humility, and the acknowledgement that we have nothing to offer God in exchange for our salvation.

Although baptism is not mentioned, we should not simply dismiss these texts as having *nothing* to do with the *question* of infant baptism. Taking the standard anti-paedobaptist (anti-infant baptism) position, Carson notes,

Jesus does not want the little children prevented from coming to him (v. 14), *not because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them*, but because the kingdom of heaven belongs to those *like* them (so also Mark and Luke, stressing childlike faith): Jesus receives them because they are an *excellent object lesson* in the kind of humility and faith he finds acceptable (p. 420, emphasis mine).

But does the kingdom of heaven definitely *not* belong to children but only to those who are *like* them? It is true that all three Synoptists use the words, "to such as these" (*toiouton*) emphasizing not the children themselves but those with the child-like qualities necessary for entering the kingdom. However, are we to assume that Jesus is *excluding* the children—even infant children (*brephe*)—altogether? R. A. Webb argues strongly against this suggestion.

But if this is all that is meant [that only people of child-like quality are eligible for the kingdom] then the Master's indignation [Mk. 10: 14] must be thought of as having been aroused by his disciples' proposition to send away, not *members*, but only *types*, of the kingdom of God. Was this all? Was the Redeemer's displeasure excited only by the prospect of there being taken away from him a happy object lesson? If so, then he but leveled his criticism at their gross stupidity and blockheadedness, in not having the perception to recognized a living text in the children, from which to preach a good sermon on Christian humility. That does seem to my mind to be a sufficient reason for his deep displeasure and stinging rebuke. Nor does this view sufficiently explain the fact that our Lord *laid his hands on the heads of these children and blessed them*. Why? According to this view, he did it not because they were *members* of the kingdom of God, but because they were apt *illustrations* of the members of his kingdom—mere *emblems* of what the members of his



kingdom should be (R. A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, p. 34, emphasis his, words in brackets mine).

Total exclusion of infants from Jesus' purview (range of thought) is quite literally to throw out the baby with the bath water. Jesus **blessed** the children brought to him, not as "object lessons" in humility, but as children, the objects of His love and compassion and as true recipients (receivers) of the kingdom of heaven. Had He viewed them as anything less than human beings in need of grace and salvation, His lesson on this occasion would have been misleading, to say the least, to the mothers who were longing for His blessing upon their children. Having given Jesus a convenient illustration, they would have gone away with nothing but a blessing and prayer emptied of any genuine intent on Jesus' part—an unthinkable assumption unworthy of the Savior.

The passage should not be taken as an argument for baptismal regeneration, as if to imply that all infants receiving infant baptism are presumed regenerate (saved). Nor should it be taken to prove that all infants, regardless of their relationship to believing parents, should be baptized. Quite obviously, the passage says nothing **directly** about baptism. However, the text does strongly imply that infants are **not excluded from the saving blessing of Christ** merely because they cannot make a cognitive (thoughtful) and conscious profession of faith, something these infant children (*Luke*) could not do. Furthermore, the reason they are eligible for the kingdom has really nothing to do with the rite of infant baptism, but the prerogative of Christ alone who wishes to include them. None of the passages mentioned prove conclusively the genuine faith of the parents who brought their children (although their faith is a reasonable assumption); thus, this is not a passage which implies infant salvation **only** for covenant children. It may be argued that only those children who are either "brought" to Jesus or who "come" to Jesus for blessing are in view, but this would prove too much. It would prove that the ground or reason for their inclusion into the kingdom of heaven is the faith of their parents and not the will and blessing of Christ. Those who are not "brought" by their parents are, therefore, damned. According to this view, the salvation of infants is grounded upon the activity, or inactivity, of their parents (Webb, pp. 39-40).

It should be noticed from the Matthean account that the children were brought to Jesus so that He would lay hands upon them (an ancient symbol of blessing; Carson, p. 420) and pray for them. We are warranted to believe that Jesus does both, thus begging the question: What did Jesus pray for on behalf of these children? Without stretching one's credulity (ability to believe), we may assume that He prayed for the very thing He declared, that these very children would be received into the kingdom of His heavenly Father, a prayer most certainly answered (Webb, p. 38, citing Calvin). While the passage does not indisputably prove the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, it certainly lends support to the theory (cf. Webb's entire argument, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*).

Arguing from the greater to the lesser, we may say that just as infant children may not be refused the blessing of the kingdom of God, they may also not be refused baptism, the covenantal sign. The infant children of believers may not be refused baptism on the grounds that they cannot consciously believe the gospel. If Jesus did not refuse to bless these children, who are we to refuse the baptism of believer's children? In the same way the texts lend support to the doctrine of infant salvation, they likewise lend support to the doctrine of infant baptism.

***D. The Rich Young Ruler—Matt. 19: 16-26; Mk. 10: 17-27; Lk. 18: 18-27***

This pericope is rightly called the story of the **rich young ruler**. Matthew tells us that he was young, and Luke that he was rich and a ruler (archon). The young man was sincerely searching for answers to the urgent question of how he could become eligible for eternal life. “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” Both Mark and Luke insert, “**Good teacher**”, and Jesus’ response to the man is accordingly different: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.” Much ink has been spilled over the Christology of this statement as if Jesus is denying his own perfection or is confessing sin. For a thorough discussion of this impossibility, see Carson, p. 422. Jesus’ response is only designed to question the young man’s own “inadequate understanding of goodness” (Carson, p. 422).

It is important to understand why Matthew and Mark place this story together with Jesus’ blessing the little children. Quite in contrast with helpless children who must depend totally on the good graces of others, the young man believed that he was quite competent to earn eternal life by going beyond the teachings of the Law (Carson, p. 422, 423).

The Jewish people had looked to the Law for hundreds of years to secure their acceptance with God while failing to see the grace of God in the animal sacrifices. Thus, his question does not surprise us. What **may** surprise us is Jesus’ response (in Matt.) to his question, “...if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19: 17; Mk. 10: 19; Lk. 18: 20). What are we to make of this response? From all appearances Jesus seems to be agreeing with the young man’s orientation toward a legalistic way of salvation based on law-keeping. Why didn’t Jesus simply say, “Believe in me as your Savior, and by that faith you will have eternal life”? To answer this question, it is necessary to consult the testimony of the Law itself, and what the Law of Moses taught about the conditions of eternal life?

The Israelites were commanded to keep God’s Law and live: “So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, **by which a man may live if he does them**; I am the LORD” (Lev. 18: 5). They were also instructed that their continuance in the land of promise was conditional upon obedience to the Law: “You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, **so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out**” (Lev. 20: 22; cf. Deut. 5: 33). During the covenant renewal ceremony on Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal (Deut. 27-30), Moses affirms the demands of the Law as the condition to life in the land of Canaan.

“See, I have set before you today **life and prosperity, and death and adversity**; in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that **I have set before you life and death**, the blessing and the curse. **So choose life in order that you may live**, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deut. 30: 15-20).

It is evident from the sad history of Israel that they failed to keep the commandments, and God removed them from the land, sending them into exile. The curses of the covenant had become a horrible reality.

*Choosing life rather than death* is precisely the decision Jesus is setting before the rich ruler on this occasion. In approaching the man this way, Jesus is not teaching a legalistic way of salvation, but simply approaching him on the same terms as the OT legislation. He had asked Jesus what *he* must do to inherit eternal life—not what *God* could do for him—and Jesus had quoted the demands of the Law, terms which the young man fully understood. This was not the only occasion in which Christ refers his questioners to the righteousness of the Law (Lk. 10: 25-28). A lawyer once asked Him the exact question as the young ruler (“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”), and Jesus responded in like manner, “What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?” On that occasion the lawyer repeated the standard summary of the Law (v. 27) to which Jesus responded with a quotation of Lev. 18: 5, “You have answered correctly; *do this and you will live*” (v. 28). Commenting on Lk. 10: 25-28, Calvin observes,

Now it is certain that in the Law there is prescribed to men a rule by which they ought to regulate their life, so as to obtain salvation in the sight of God....though no man is justified by the Law, yet the Law itself contains the highest righteousness, because it *does not falsely hold out salvation to its followers*, if any one fully observed all that it commands” (*Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Vol. 3*, pp. 56-57; emphasis mine).

Returning to the present passage, the rich, young ruler did not think there was anything lacking in his obedience to the Law (v. 20—Matt. and Mk.; v. 21—Lk), but considered the possibility that there was something beyond the Law he could do to ensure his future salvation.

Accordingly, Jesus will command him to do something even the Law did not require; namely, to sell all he has and to distribute it to the poor. However, Jesus will also demonstrate that even his obedience to the Law is only skin-deep; it is only external and does not penetrate the deeper issues of the heart. Characteristically, Jesus moves beyond the external, legal requirements of the Mosaic Law to lead him into a deeper understanding of his sin. It is a method He had used earlier in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, “For I say unto you, that unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5: 20). Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had explicated the Law in ways that went beyond the superficial legalism of the scribes and Pharisees. He had shown that the Law actually requires *a total transformation of the heart*, not simply outward obedience.

Clearly, the young ruler had never understood just how radical the demands of the Law really were, and Jesus had prepared him to understand his deficiency when He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only *One* who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments” (v. 17). The man actually thought that he *had been good* his whole life (v. 20). When asked *which* commandments he needed to keep, Jesus names several from the Decalogue itself, as well as the prohibition of fraud (Mk., cf. Lane, p. 366), but the last commandment—not directly from the Decalogue—deserves special attention: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Apparently the rich ruler thought he had kept this commandment, as well, by fulfilling the external demands of the Law mentioned in vv. 18-19b. But had he truly loved his neighbor as himself? Jesus will now test this theory. He tells him to sell his possessions (Mark and Luke indicate that he must sell “all” his possessions), give the proceeds to

the poor, and follow Him. (All three Synoptists include the words, “and you will have treasure in heaven”—cf. Matt. 6: 19-20).

Obvious infractions (violations) of the Law are apparent in his response to Jesus’ command. He does *not* love his neighbor as himself; for his money, not his love for people, rules his life and precludes (prevents) his generosity. Second, his money is lord of his life and not God. He is willing to forego the kingdom of God in order to hold on to his money, to pile up treasures on earth in service to mammon rather than God (cf. Matt. 6: 24; Lk. 12: 16-21). Thus, the young man reveals that he has broken the Law both in regard to his neighbor and in regard to God—essentially the whole Law. His desire to go beyond the Law to ensure his salvation is based on pure ignorance of the fact that he is a desperately sinful, covetous man.

This is so often the case with people who are holding on to their self-righteousness. In order to justify themselves, the internal demands of the law of God must be diluted or lessened in order to fit their claims to righteousness. With a proper explication of the Law, their hopes of being justified by law must be dashed to pieces. After understanding the Law’s demands for the first time, the Apostle Paul said,

...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, " YOU SHALL NOT COVET." But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead. I was once alive apart from the Law; but *when the commandment came*, sin became alive and I died; and this commandment, *which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me*; for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me” (Rom. 7: 7b-11).

The commandment against coveting “*came*” to Paul’s realization when he finally understood its internal requirements. He then understood the radical, *internal and spiritual* demands of all the other commandments, knowing that he had not kept them and could not keep them. The Law which says, “Do this and live”, could only result in his death. Having finally understood the Law and his total inability to keep it, Paul turned to the only solution, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8: 1). Summarizing one of the uses of the law, Paul says, “Therefore the Law has become our tutor [disciplinarian] to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith” (Gal. 3: 24). In the same way, *Jesus uses the law as it is designed to be used*. He clearly demonstrates the inadequacy of the ruler’s self-righteousness in hopes that he might be led to the grace of the gospel in the person of Jesus Christ.

We have no right, therefore, to deny that the keeping of the law is righteousness, by which any man who kept the law perfectly—if there were such a man—would obtain life for himself. But as we are *all destitute of the glory of God* (Rom. 3: 23) nothing but cursing will be found in the law; and nothing remains for us but to betake ourselves to the undeserved gift of righteousness. And therefore Paul lays down a twofold righteousness, *the righteousness of the law* (Rom. 10: 5) and the righteousness of faith (Rom. 10: 6). He makes the first to consist in works, and the second, in the free grace of Christ.

Hence we may infer, that this reply of Christ is legal, because it was proper that the *young man* who inquired about the righteousness of works should first be taught that no man is accounted righteous before God unless he has fulfilled the law (which is impossible), that convinced of his weakness, he might betake himself to the assistance of faith. I acknowledge, therefore, that as God has promised the reward of *eternal life* to those who keep his law, we ought to hold by this way, if the weakness of our flesh did not prevent; but Scripture teaches us, that it is through our own fault that it becomes necessary for us to receive as a gift of what we cannot obtain by works (Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 2, pp. 394-395).

It should be noted that Jesus does not negotiate His terms to offer the ruler less rigid entrance requirements into the kingdom of God. He only says that “it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Why is this so? Because the rich are more likely to trust in their own resources rather than relying on God’s resources. Again, the rich young ruler is observed in stark contrast to the little children whom Jesus presents as a model of those who will inherit the kingdom (Matt. 19: 13-15). It is as impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven as for a camel (the largest animal in Palestine) to go through the eye of a needle (the smallest opening in Palestine) (Lane, p. 369). (The most damnable competitor to the gospel is not Islam or any other world religion, but the worship of money.) The disciples were amazed at the impossibility of the rich entering the kingdom of God. The conventional (accepted) wisdom of the day—as in our day—was that the rich were those especially favored by God. (“If you have money, God must be blessing you!”) Thus, if the rich could not enter the kingdom of heaven, salvation must be hopeless for everyone else, as well. Apart from the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (“with God all things are possible”, v. 26), salvation is impossible for everyone, both rich and poor. God has made that which is *impossible, possible* through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But although salvation is a free gift of God, this does not imply that there are no conditions to the gospel. Jesus’ prerogative (right) to demand more of the young ruler than the Law demanded (Carson, p. 424) further demonstrates His superiority to Moses. He did not come to abolish the Law or the prophets, but to fulfill them and bring them to completion (Matt. 5: 17-19). Since He is the new law-giver greater than Moses, He has now revealed a new level of obedience and commitment which is consistent with the new age of fulfillment. The law of God can no longer be interpreted in the static (unchanging) terms of the Old Covenant, but must be reinterpreted in terms of the *Messiah who is Lord* (cf. discussion on the Sermon on the Mount; including Eph. 5: 25; etc.). He will not necessarily demand the same thing from every disciple (Zaccheus only gave *half* his possessions to the poor—Lk. 19: 8), but if we wish to be His disciples, He has the divine right to command of us whatever He will: “Come, follow Me”, a call to radical self-denial (Lk. 9: 23-25).

Keeping the individual commandments is no substitute for the readiness for self-surrender to the absolute claim of God imposed through the call of the gospel. Jesus’ summons in this context means that true obedience to the Law is rendered ultimately in discipleship. This man will achieve the perfect observance of the Law when he surrenders himself and follows Jesus. Self-surrender implies a renunciation of his own achievement and the reception of messianic forgiveness through which a man is released to stand under the Law and to offer the obedience of love (Lane, p. 367).

### ***E. Rewards for Discipleship—Matt. 19: 27-30; Mk. 10: 28-31; Lk. 18: 28-30***

This passage is a continuation of the previous one. Peter’s question (v. 27) is provoked by the incident with the rich young ruler who was not willing to leave his wealth behind and follow the Lord. The disciples, on the other hand, had done just that. Peter, Andrew, James and John had left their fishing businesses and Matthew had left a lucrative customs tax business. Would there be any reward for their self-denial? There is no hint in the passage that Jesus is annoyed by the question. In fact, he answers it affirmatively with “Truly I say to you...”

The “regeneration” (literally, “making again”) refers to the renewal of the heavens and the earth at the second coming of Christ “when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne” (cf. Rom. 8: 18-25). Very likely Jesus is speaking *literally* of the spiritual renewal (the regeneration) of ethnic Israel which, in time, will be made jealous by the ingathering of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God (Chamblin, p. 162; Rom. 11). When the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled, God will ignite a spark within His chosen nation which will burn brightly unto salvation, “and thus all Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11: 26a). (For a detailed exegesis of this position see John Murray, *Romans*).

In v. 29, Jesus assures them that He will be no man’s debtor, but all who have given up *anything* or *anyone* will receive much more in return. The sacrifices of relationships (brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, wives, children; cf. Mk. and Lk.) and material things (houses and farms) will be rewarded in like kind. In addition to all these things, one will receive eternal life.

The difference in *Mark* and *Luke* from *Matthew* is the *timing* of the rewards. While Matthew projects the material rewards into the future age, Mark and Luke promise them in the present with eternal life in “the age to come.” Notice the wording of both Mark and Luke: “...but that he will receive a hundred times as much *now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions*; and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mk. 10: 30). “...who will not receive *many times as much at this time* and in the age to come, eternal life” (Lk. 18: 30). The future reward of eternal life is easily apprehended, but how are we to interpret the promise of present rewards of relationships and houses?

The promise of “many times as much” in Luke should be interpreted as spiritual blessings and not material ones. That is, although the disciples must sacrifice many material blessings and blood relationships in the present life, they will be more than compensated—also in this life—by the reward of fellowship with Jesus and being reconciled with God. Furthermore, the brothers, sisters, mothers, and children of the Markan passage refer to the *spiritual affiliations* the disciples gain *presently* through fellowship with other believers. The spiritual relationships with fellow Christians—including mature Christians who act as fathers and mothers—are often much more intimate and meaningful than our interaction with blood relationships (cf. Mk. 3: 31-35, spoken at a time when Jesus’ brothers were not believing in him—cf. Jn. 7: 5).

However, the “hundred times as much” of Mark must also be referenced to “houses” and “farms” which will be granted “in the present age” which is delineated (marked off) from “the age to come” (separated from the present age by *kai*, “and”). While we can understand the spiritual fulfillment of brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers, etc, it is difficult to understand the spiritual fulfillment of houses and farms unless they are granted only in “the age to come”. It is an undeniable fact that believers often die penniless and homeless. One possible explanation is that the believer, however poor, is granted the grace to enjoy the material blessings bestowed upon him, however meager they are in comparison to others. “Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife” (Prov. 17: 1). Nothing on earth, not even great wealth, truly satisfies the human soul when that soul has no peace with God. In addition to this, the humble believer is often invited to enjoy the material blessings of other believers who are more endowed with material goods than he. Genuine Christians understand that all wealth comes from God, even the wealth they worked so hard to accumulate (Prov. 10: 22); therefore,

they are not reluctant to part with their wealth or share their farms and houses to help their fellow brothers and sisters.

Along with the rewards for service, Jesus also promises persecution (mentioned only in Mk.). If the disciples are honored upon the twelve thrones of Israel, they must ascend these thrones in the same manner as Christ who emptied Himself even to the point of dying upon a cross. They must “drink the same cup He drinks” (Matt. 20: 22) since “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14: 22). The warning about the certainty of persecution leads naturally to another warning, “But many who are first will be last and the last first” (v. 30). The meaning of this statement is illustrated in the parable of the vineyard in chapter 20.

#### ***F. Laborers in the Vineyard—Matt. 20: 1-16***

The purpose of the parable (found only in Matthew) is to explain the statement of Matt. 19: 30, not to establish an economic paradigm (model) for the payment of day laborers. Employers who would use the parable for this purpose would soon find themselves out of business! Every parable contains earthly elements which have spiritual meaning. There is also an analogy between the earthly and the spiritual which requires interpretation. The land owner in this parable is Jesus, corresponding to Peter’s question: “Behold, we have left everything and followed **You**; what then will there be for us?” We will determine shortly the identity of the day laborers.

The vineyard owner strikes a deal with the first laborers to work all day in the vineyard for a denarius, the normal day’s wage for common labor. In the third hour of the day (9 AM), he notices that there are other laborers standing around with nothing to do, so he hires them as well (vv. 3-4). He does the same thing at 12 noon (the sixth hour) and 3 PM (the ninth hour). At 5 PM (the eleventh hour) the last hour of the work day, he hires this last group of workers. It is important that the last workers are paid first; otherwise, the first group hired would not have been around to see the last group get paid for a full day’s wage. Naturally, they think that since the last workers were paid a denarius, they will receive much more, perhaps four times as much. In their complaint to the land owner, they let him know that they have “borne the burden and scorching heat of the day” (v. 12). This could be a reference to Peter’s statement in 19: 27, “Behold, we have left everything and followed you...” In other words, the disciples had “borne the burden and heat of the day” by following Christ throughout His ministry, some of which included serious physical discomfort and all of which included a grueling (demanding) schedule of ministering to people. The disciples expected rewards for their efforts and sacrifices, and their **attitude of entitlement**—“You owe us”—is reflected in the **attitude of the first workers** in the vineyard. Those who work longer should be paid more than those who worked less.

But the vineyard owner does not accept such reasoning, and for good reason. When the agreement was made, the first workers had no complaints about working for a denarius, the normal day’s wage. The only legitimate complaint they could level against the owner now is that he is **generous** with others (v. 15). They are looking at the situation with the “evil eye” (the “envious” eye) which is blinded to the realities of the kingdom of heaven and the **manner in which God relates to His subjects** (cf. Matt. 6: 23 in which the “bad” eye which is full of darkness does not see things clearly. The same word, **poneros**, “evil” is used in 20: 15).

Primarily, the evil eye of the vineyard workers, and analogously that of the disciples, is the *attitude of entitlement*. Through their sacrifice and labor, they were now *entitled*—they thought—to the rewards which Jesus was willing to give them both in the present and in the age to come (19: 28-29). Jesus makes it plain, however, that there is *no such entitlement*. It does not matter what a person does for the sake of the kingdom of God or how long he has served. When the rewards for service are bestowed, the laborer in the kingdom will never be able to claim that he actually *earned* his rewards through personal effort. Rather, they are bestowed by *grace and grace alone* simply because God is generous (so also, Carson, p. 428). The first will be last and the last will be first simply because, in the reckoning of God, and in the light of the manner in which He relates to His kingdom subjects, there is *no distinction* between the first and the last.

Based on this interpretation, a good companion parable with this one is the parable of the slave in Lk. 17: 7-10. When the slave comes in exhausted from plowing the field or tending the sheep, he is not invited to sit down and eat, but is told to change his clothes and serve the meal to his master. He does not expect to be thanked, but does what he is supposed to do as a slave. The parable is not a model for how a master is supposed to treat his slaves, which in this case is rather abrupt and insensitive. The meaning is found in v. 10, “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded of you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’” Once again, Jesus is using a parable to transform attitudes. The attitude of the faithful servant of God is not one of begrudging servitude and entitlement but the high honor of serving his Lord. With this attitude, we are consciously aware of the *deficiencies* of our service, rather than the surplus, to One who has bought us with His precious blood.

***G. Jesus’ Third Prediction of His Death and Resurrection—Matt. 20: 17-19; Mk. 10: 32-34; Lk. 18: 31-34***

Following Matt. 16: 21 and 17: 22-23 (cf. Mk. 8: 31, 9: 31; Lk. 9: 22, 44), this is Jesus’ third prediction of His death and resurrection, the difference being in the descriptiveness of the event. Jesus describes his ordeal in more detail here than He had previously, perhaps to more indelibly imprint it upon the minds of his disciples who were slow to understand (Lk. 18: 34). Thus far He had said nothing about being scourged and spit upon by the Gentiles, or crucifixion, but only suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and more generally at the hands of men (Matt. 17). The inclusion of the Gentiles and the reference to crucifixion could mean only one thing, suffering at the hands of the Roman government. In addition, He makes reference to the fulfillment of the prophets (only in Lk., cf. Lk. 24: 44; Ps. 22, a detailed description of crucifixion roughly 1000 years before the method was used). At this point in all three Synoptics, Jesus has predicted the events of His death and resurrection *three* times; thus, the reader is now alerted to its imminent (happening without delay) realization. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem is reported less than a chapter away in Matt. 21; Mk. 11; and Lk. 19: 28.

Two additional comments are made which are not found in Matthew, one in Luke and the other in Mark. Luke informs us that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about (v. 34). They were “hidden”, not because Jesus wished to hide these things from them (per Liefeld), but because of their obtuseness (slowness of understanding). After all, this is the third time Jesus has referred to His death and resurrection, and it is inconceivable that He keeps mentioning this



event just to hide it from them supernaturally. In Mark we are told that the disciples “were amazed, and those who followed were fearful” (v. 32). Their amazement and fear could have been due to their going in the direction of Jerusalem, but we are left without an explanation.

### ***H. The Ambition of James and John—Matt. 20: 20-28; Mk. 10: 35-45***

In Matthew, the mother of James and John (sons of Zebedee) makes the request, while in Mark, the two disciples themselves make the request of special positions at the right and left of Jesus in the kingdom. Notice that in Matthew, the mother comes *with* her two sons which is essentially the same as the two sons making the request themselves. Furthermore, they could have petitioned Jesus directly on the same occasion. Their specific request is doubtless occasioned by Jesus’ promise that the disciples will sit on the twelve thrones judging or ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel (19: 28; redeemed ethnic Israel; cf. Rom. 11 and previous discussion). This high honor is reported to their mother who is also aware of their special status among the inner circle of the disciples. It is possible that James and John put their mother up to the task, thinking Jesus would be more inclined to grant the request if it comes from her. Why is this? If we compare the list of women in Matt. 27: 56 with Mk. 15: 40 and Jn. 19: 25, we arrive at the probability that the mother of James and John was named Salome and was the sister of Jesus’ mother Mary who also had four other sons named James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Matt. 13: 55) (cf. Chamblin, p. 168; Carson, p. 583). Thus, Jesus’ Aunt Salome is petitioned by James and John to put in a good word for them.

The importance of the story thematically is that it comes immediately after Jesus’ prediction of His death both in Matthew and Mark. While only Luke *reports* that the disciples did not understand this statement, Matthew and Mark *illustrate* their ignorance with this pericope. Quite obviously, the two places of prominence desired by James and John were not at the right and left hand of Jesus crucified on a cross. Jesus points out their ignorance by saying, “You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” Matthew and Mark (cf. Matt. 16: 22 and Mk. 8: 32-33) are repetitive in their emphasis upon the disciples’ misunderstanding of Jesus’ mission and purpose. But not only are the *twelve*, as a whole, in the dark about this, but the *inner circle* of the disciples, the three closest to Jesus. First Peter, and now James and John, demonstrate emphatically their focus on an earthly kingdom and an earthly throne.

The cup which Jesus is about to drink is likely interpreted by James and John as the golden goblet of a king, not the cup of suffering in spite of His three predictions of His imminent death. They considered themselves capable of the *leadership* positions they were requesting, but were they able to drink the cup of suffering? Without divine intervention, they were not able, proven the night Jesus was betrayed when all the disciples fled in fear (Matt. 26: 56). Yet, Jesus sees them not as they *were*, but as they would *become* by grace and the influence of the Holy Spirit: “My cup you *shall* drink...” Historical tradition indicates a martyr’s death for all he disciples except John, who nevertheless suffered the cup of suffering exiled on the Island of Patmos (Rev. 1: 9). James his brother, put to death by Herod, became the first martyred disciple (Acts 12: 2).

Nevertheless, the honor they seek for is not Jesus’ to give, but only the Father’s. Throughout His ministry, Jesus had subjected Himself to the Father’s will, and the placement of one on His left

and right hand is likewise subjected to the Father. He neither denies nor affirms this great honor, but He gives no further information about it, indicating that the emphasis of the passage lies elsewhere—the inauguration of the kingdom of God through suffering and sacrifice. Jesus will enter into His exalted position at the right hand of God through suffering and death, and His disciples will ascend their thrones of honor in the same manner. All of them will take up the cross one way or the other (Rom. 8: 17-18).

Overhearing the conversation, the other ten become indignant (angry) with the two brothers, thus manifesting the same pride which produced their request. Due to a misunderstanding of the nature of Jesus' kingdom, the disciples regressed many times into arguments about which one of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18: 1; Lk. 22: 24—other arguments may not have been recorded). The *self-serving model of earthly kings* is now exposed as one not to be emulated (imitated) by Christ's disciples. The kingdom of heaven is the *great reversal* of many earthly institutions. Earthly kingdoms exist on the basis of pride, power, money, intrigue, and the manipulation and oppression of others; and those who rule are served by others. Jesus is presenting an entirely *new model* of leadership. Real leaders are those who *serve* others, not those who *are served* by others. Those who would be great in the kingdom of heaven are servants (*diakonos*), and those who are given first place in the kingdom are those who become the willing slaves (*doulos*—the lowest slave) of others. Always a servant to His disciples, Jesus would very soon give them an object lesson in slavery at the Passover meal when He washes their feet—a task fit only for the lowest of slaves, the *doulos* or bondsman.

He had not come to be served, but to serve by giving His life as a purchase price (ransom) for many. The ransom was the price paid for the *release of a slave*; thus, once the ransom was paid, the slave was set free or retained by the one paying the ransom (1 Cor. 6: 20; 7: 23; 1 Pet. 1: 18-19). This is a reference to the substitutionary death of Christ who atoned for the sins of *many*, but *not all*. He does not say, "for all". Jesus dies not for all individuals without exclusion, but only for those who are given Him by the Father (Jn. 6: 37) and those for whom He intercedes at the very hour of his death (Jn. 17: 9). It is inconceivable that those for whom the purchase price has been paid would remain slaves to sin rather than becoming the bondsmen of Christ. If Christ died for the *many*, then the *many* are the recipients of the *benefit* of His death (Hendriksen, p. 749). This is the doctrine of "limited atonement", better known as "particular atonement". It could also be called "effectual atonement". All of those for whom Christ died, without exception, will be ransomed because Christ has effectually and actually become their substitute, dying in their place. Since God is just, He will not punish both Christ *and* the sinner for the same sins. There are other passages which appear to teach *universal* atonement—that Christ dies for the sins of every individual sinner. For example, Paul says that Jesus is a ransom for "all". But if we examine the passage closely, we see that Jesus laid down His life for all kinds of men, for all who are in authority, etc. (1 Tim. 2: 1-6). Other apparent discrepancies to the doctrine can also be cleared up by a thorough study of the context of each passage (cf. Hendriksen, p. 750). However, if Christ died for all individual sinners, then there is no longer any ground or basis upon which to judge them for their sins. Christ's atoning work does not make atonement possible for *everyone*, but actual and certain for *many*.

### ***I. The Healing of Two Blind Men—Matt. 20: 29-34; Mk. 10: 46-52; Lk. 18: 35-43***

There are many differences in the accounts of this story. In *Matthew*, there are two blind men whereas in *Mark* and *Luke* there is only one, named Bartimaeus (Mk.). In *Matthew* and *Mark* Jesus and the disciples are leaving Jericho whereas in *Luke* they are approaching Jericho. Carson offers one explanation of the discrepancy between “leaving” and “approaching” by saying that there was both an “old” Jericho which lay mostly in ruins and a “new” Jericho which was inhabited. While leaving the old city, they were approaching the new city (Carson, p. 435; also Lane, p. 386). As far as the number of blind men, Mark and Luke focus only on one of them while Matthew focuses on two. (Similarly, Matthew reports two Gadarene demoniacs while Mark and Luke report only one.)

The incident is not a repetition of the healing of two other blind men (Matt. 9: 27-30) although there is much resemblance. In Matt. 9, Jesus commands the two healed men to remain silent in order for Him to avoid the distractions of the multitudes who would be carried away with Messianic fervor contrary to His present purpose. In the present passage there is no such command to be silent since Jesus is now nearing the end of His ministry and the ultimate purpose of crucifixion. Public knowledge that He was the Messiah “could not change the course of events (Carson, pp. 435-436; cf. Lane, p. 387). It is thus appropriate that in His final days on earth that He would be identified as the Messiah, the Son of David.

This is one of three occasions when Jesus uses the words, “your faith has made you well”. The woman with a hemorrhage (Matt. 9) and the Samaritan leper (Lk. 17) being the other two.

The significance of the story may lie partly in its *irony*. These blind men recognize who Jesus was—“Lord” and “Son of David”—even if the extent of their knowledge was deficient. Yet, one week later the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem would deliver Jesus over to be crucified, demonstrating the much greater blindness of those who kill the prophets and hinder those who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 23:37).

Another emphasis lies in Matt. 20: 34, the *compassion of Jesus*. Although setting His face toward Jerusalem for the momentous sacrifice which would change the course of history, Jesus will not allow the legitimate preoccupation of His atoning death obscure the immediate needs of those along the way. This will be His last earthly opportunity to do them good, and He will not pass them by. His attitude is quite contrary to ours. Our schedule—easy in comparison to Jesus’—often consumes us, leaving little patience for the frequent, but providential, interruptions which meet the needs of others.

### ***J. The Conversion of Zaccheus—Lk. 19: 1-10***

The temporal connection between this story and that of blind Bartimaeus is found in the reference to Jericho (v. 1). Zaccheus was no ordinary tax-collector, but a “chief tax-collector”, and a rich one at that whose customs office was in Jericho, a major customs center (Liefeld, p. 1007; see commentary above on Matt. 9:9 and the calling of Matthew. Matthew was not called a “chief tax-collector” either in his own gospel or in *Luke* but only a “tax-collector”. There is also no reference to him being rich. However, Edersheim (of Jewish origin) was of the opinion that Matthew was a customs official which is probably what Zaccheus was. There are also references to Matthew’s “tax office” in all three Synoptics. Whatever the case may be, Edersheim’s

description of the customs house official found in the commentary on Matt. 9: 9 would definitely apply to Zaccheus, making him one of the more despised tax-collectors.)

He was short (v. 3), making it difficult for him to get a glimpse of Jesus over the heads of the crowd as he passed through Jericho. After three years of public ministry, Jesus was well-known throughout Palestine, and wherever He went people would desire to see just “who Jesus was” (v. 3). Noticing carefully the direction Jesus was walking, Zaccheus went ahead of him, and throwing any self-conscious dignity to the wind, he climbed high enough in a tree to catch a view of this man who was known by now to be a *friend of sinners and tax-collectors* (v. 4). We are not told whether Jesus saw Zaccheus the same way He “saw” Nathanael, before seeing him with His physical eyes (cf. Jn. 1: 48), but when He came to the tree, He looked up and told him to come down, for He “must” stay at his house. The use of the word “must” (*dei*) signifies Jesus’ sense of urgency and is used elsewhere in *Luke*. The word is used four times in *Matthew*, five times in *Mark*, but twelve times in *Luke* (4: 43; 9: 22; 12: 12; 13: 14, 33; 17: 25; 19: 5; 21: 9; 22: 37; 24: 7, 44; cf. Liefeld for further discussion, p. 874-875, including notes).

We may wonder what was so urgent about this situation. There was no one to heal, no demons to exorcise, only a solitary tax-collector. It is striking how many of the stories in the Synoptics, particularly *Luke*, mention tax-collectors. Some form of the word “tax-collector” (*telones*) is used 21 times in the Synoptics, ten of which are in *Luke*. The word for “tax booth” or “tax office” (*telonion*) is used three times, once in *Luke*. It is clear in all three Synoptics that Jesus is searching for sinners, particularly those sinners who are despised by the rest of Jewish society. If the reader of the gospel accounts can get the impression that Jesus is a savior who embraces the unlovable and the rejected, however desperately lost and sinful he is, then he has understood a large part of their purpose for being written, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (v. 10). Geldenhuys puts the story in redemptive perspective.

Here, a few days before the crucifixion, we have a beautiful example of the triumph of the forgiving grace of God in the action of Jesus. And so we can read the Passion history that follows in the light of the Savior’s words to the redeemed “publican”...(p. 469).

When they (the Pharisees?) saw that Jesus had become a guest in a tax-collector’s house, they began to grumble (*diagogguzo*, the same word used in Lk. 15: 2). Eating in someone’s home signified acceptance of the person, and while it was acceptable to the Pharisees for Jesus to eat in *their* homes (Lk. 7: 36; 14: 1), it was scandalous for Him to eat with tax-collectors (Matt. 9: 10).

We have no record of any message given to Zaccheus on that day, but he may have already heard about the healing of blind Bartimaeus (18: 35-43) and been familiar with the gospel. At any rate the Holy Spirit was at work in his heart producing the fruits of true repentance. It is striking that the first signs of repentance had reference to his money, and the story serves a bold contrast to the unwillingness of the rich young ruler to part with his money and follow Jesus in obedience and faith (18: 18-27). Zaccheus is willing to follow Biblical case law in restoring four-fold what he had defrauded others by the collection of excessive taxes (cf. Ex. 21: 1; possibly exceeding case law which may have only required double payment plus one-fifth; cf. Lev. 5: 16; 6: 5). He was also willing to give half his possessions to the poor; and had Jesus required more, he doubtless would have been willing to give it.

The declaration of salvation in v. 9 is not based on the merit of good works in v. 8, but upon the obvious change of heart from a man who had lived for riches his whole life. In the spiritual sense of the word, Zaccheus had become—by grace—“a son of Abraham”. The story serves to show the difference the gospel makes when fully understood. It is not that Zaccheus believed he had to *do something* to be saved, for there is no mention in the text of Jesus making any demands. But once saved, the desires of his heart were transformed, provoking him to do the very things which are consistent with the gospel. The things of this world become “strangely dim in the light of Jesus’ glorious face”. The story also continues to demonstrate the extreme difference between so many tax-collectors and sinners and their Pharisaical accusers who remain resistant to the gospel to the very end of Jesus’ ministry.

### ***K. The Parable of the Minas—Lk. 19: 11-27***

The context of this parable is given in v. 11. Jesus may have still been in Zaccheus’ house, or he may have just finished speaking with him. He had already “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Lk. 9: 51), and now that He was only 17 miles from there, His disciples supposed that His earthly Messianic kingdom would be soon appear.

Notwithstanding all Jesus’ teachings, even His most intimate followers persisted (even after His resurrection, Acts 1:6) in their earth-bound Messianic expectations—they believed that the Savior would appear suddenly in *outward power and glory, would create a Jewish-Messianic kingdom on earth, and would lead the Jewish people to victory over all their enemies* (Geldenhuys, p. 474; emphasis mine).

In order to suppress (hinder) any such expectations, Jesus tells the story of a king going to a distant country for the purpose of receiving a kingdom for himself. The story had its historical counterpart in the journey of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, to Rome when he petitioned Caesar to make him king of Judea. His enthronement in Judea was, in turn, opposed by a delegation to Rome of Archelaus’ own subjects who did not want him as king (cf. v. 14). Thus, Jesus is giving his hearers a hint of where He is going with this parable. Just as Archelaus was rejected by his subjects, so Jesus will also be rejected by those who should recognize Him as king of the Jews (Liefeld, p. 1009).

The mina was worth about 100 days’ wages (*Key Word Study Bible*, Spiros Zodhiates, exec. ed.), and the nobleman gives ten slaves one mina each—two of the differences which distinguish this parable from the parable of the talents (Matt. 25: 14-30) in which a different number of talents are given to only three slaves. This is not the same parable or the same context as the parable of the talents which occurs within Jesus’ “Sixth Great Discourse” in *Matthew*. The purpose of the master’s distribution of funds is business investment (v. 13). While the nobleman is traveling to receive his appointment as king, some of his citizens—not the same people as his ten slaves—send their own separate delegation to the superior country informing the king that they do want this man to rule over them (v. 14). Their plea is unsuccessful, and the nobleman receives the kingdom anyway making for a very uncomfortable return for those citizens (v. 15, 27).

Although distributing his money to ten slaves, only three are mentioned in the rest of the parable—a detail that may lead one to believe that this is Luke’s version of the parable of the talents, but there are other important differences as well. One slave invests wisely and makes ten more minas (v. 16), a considerable 1000% increase. Another slave produces 500% increase.

The two slaves had been “faithful in a very little thing” (implied with the second slave), and their reward includes not only the nobleman’s praise but also responsibility proportionate to the performance of their duties in his absence. The slave who produced the greatest increase is given ten cities while the other is given five cities. With both slaves, the authority (*exousia*; cf. Matt. 28: 18) given them as a reward renders the responsibility invested in them at their master’s departure “a very little thing”, indeed, compared to the responsibility of governing five to ten cities.

This leaves us with the third slave who tucked the nobleman’s money away in a handkerchief until his return. His accusation is that the nobleman is a hard man who benefits illegitimately from the difficult labor of others (v. 21; cf. Matt. 25: 24). He takes what does not belong to him, and he reaps where he has not sown. Such an accusation is similar to that of many wage earners in modern times who have no understanding of business but complain about the profits investors make on their capital. Without venture capital (risk money), the common laborer has no job—period—unless, of course, he creates his own job in which case he is the one investing the capital. If it were not for the master’s money, the slave would not have had the opportunity to go out and make a profit. His complaint is, therefore, totally unjustified. It may be true that the master was an exacting man who required hard work and enterprise from his servants, but this is not a fault by itself; and why should the slave complain about that when he is given the significant opportunity to invest an amount of money (100 days’ wages) which very few in his position would ever touch? The difference between him and the other two slaves is fear (v. 21) manifested in the *lack of trust*. While the other slaves trusted their master to be fair with them, he did not. As it turned out, the faithful slaves received a reward far exceeding the merit of their labors, but from the beginning they had no idea what *material* benefits they would receive, if any, for their efforts. For all they knew, the only reward they would receive was the praise and good will of the master, but their trust in him was sufficient incentive for their efforts. The faithless slave was governed by his mistrust of his master’s fairness if the investments proved unprofitable, but he is not condemned because he is unprofitable, but because he doesn’t attempt anything. Using the slave’s own words to condemn him (v. 22), the nobleman complains that the slave should have, at the very least, deposited the money in a bank to collect interest as a less risky alternative.

His money is then taken away from him and given to the one who had earned ten more minas. This seems unfair to the bystanders who then complain that this person already has ten minas (v. 25). Perhaps a more equitable distribution could be arranged in which the mina could be given to someone else. But the money belongs to the master alone, and he has the sovereign right to give it to whom he wishes. Whoever has an abundance will more be given, and those who have nothing by way of comparison, even what they do have will be taken away from them (v. 26; cf. Matt. 24: 29). Nothing is said in the parable about punishing the unproductive slave—contrasted with the parable of the talents, in which the worthless slave is thrown into hell (Matt. 24: 30). Execution is reserved for those who did not wish the nobleman to rule over them (v. 27).

The central meaning of the parable is fairly simple while there is room for disagreement as to which details should be interpreted and which ones are mere “window dressing” (unimportant accessories to the story). *Jesus is the nobleman* who goes to a “distant country” (heaven) to receive His kingdom. He will soon ascend to heaven and will be seated at the right hand of God the Father who will grant Him the kingdom He has earned through His sinless life and His

sacrificial death on the cross (Lk. 22: 69; Eph. 1: 20; Col. 3: 1). At the end of the age Jesus will return from heaven, and ***each person will have to give an account of everything he has been entrusted during Christ's absence***. Christ, in turn will reward His servants in proportion to what they have accomplished with the possessions and abilities bestowed upon them during their earthly sojourn but will eternally punish those who despised His rule over them. ***The first two slaves are believers*** who have been faithful in the use of Christ's gifts while on earth. Some believers will be more productive with their possessions and abilities than others, and Christ will reward them ***proportionately*** for their labors. I believe this detail is significant to demonstrate that God rewards believers according to their works (2 Cor. 5: 10) which are proportionate to the measure of grace given them on earth. Notice that in the parable of the talents, each slave is given a different amount according to his own ability (v. 15) which he multiplies 100%. Thus, each of the first two slaves are equally productive (in terms of percentage increase) with what they had been given, while in the parable of the minas, the one slave proves to be more productive than the other with the same investment capital—one mina. They are equally ***praised*** but not equally ***rewarded***. Some believers are more productive than others with the ***same amount*** of gifts and abilities, and they will be rewarded according to their efforts. What this reward will be is difficult to determine, but we must pay some attention to the fact that Jesus describes it in terms of ***authority*** bestowed upon the believer in eternity. This may be insignificant detail, or it could be a very important eschatological truth which deserves careful research, more than we can give it here.

This brings us to the hermeneutical problem of the third servant who is rebuked but not executed. Geldenhuys identifies him as a

believer who, through a wrong attitude towards the Lord, proves unfruitful in His service, will at His advent be rebuked and will have no part in the privilege of reigning in the heavenly kingdom and sharing the authority of the eternal King. Although no believer can perish, the unfaithful and those who forsake their vocation will meet with disgrace (p. 475).

Although not the same parable, it is similar enough to the parable of the talents to make the reader question this interpretation. Furthermore, the word ***poneros*** (“evil” or “wicked”) is used of both unproductive slaves in Lk. 19: 22 and Matt. 25: 26; “worthless” (***achreios***) is used in Matt. 25: 30. Although not specifically mentioned for judgment in *Luke*, we are somewhat warranted to believe that the worthless (evil) slave in *Luke* would receive the same treatment as the worthless (v. 30), evil (v. 26) slave in *Matthew*. Even weak believers are not generally characterized as “evil” or “worthless” in the gospels; and it is also difficult to imagine that a ***believer*** would characterize Christ as an “exacting master who reaped what he did not sow”. This is not the general disposition of a believer toward the Savior. Furthermore, from the slave’s negative characterization of the master (v. 21), can we not imply that he is numbered with those who did not ***want*** Christ to reign over them?

The way we interpret the parable has very important implications for the professing believer. If the worthless slave of Luke’s parable is a believer, we are led to believe that a Christian can be generally characterized as evil, and “worthless” in the use of material benefits and abilities—during time of Christ’s absence which would include the person’s whole earthly life—yet be a genuine believer. There are many professing believers, indeed, who would wish this to be so. They could then enter eternal life having expended the very minimum of faith to barely get

through the narrow gate. Having thus escaped the rigors of whole-hearted commitment to Christ, they would also have escaped the condemnation of hell, having in their own warped estimation the best of both worlds. But this attitude does not seem consistent with Jesus' words elsewhere in *Luke* that unless a man is willing to deny himself and take up his cross daily, he could not be a disciple of Christ. The alternative to such strenuous discipleship is not a lesser place in heaven, but losing one's life (Lk. 9: 23-25).

Many so-called believers use their money, possessions, and abilities for self-centered pursuits; and at the end of time they will not be able to say honestly that they have invested much, if anything, of what they had for the sake of Christ and His kingdom (Remember the rich fool!—Lk. 12). Having given lip-service to Jesus as their King, their attitudes toward Him are really closer to those who did not want Christ to reign over them at all. However, because of their outward association with other believers in the church (the other two slaves) and their self-identification as Christ's slaves, they are not (in the parable) included among those who openly reject His reign (v. 14). When they are judged, whatever they had been given to use for the glory of God will be "taken away" (vv. 24, 26) and redistributed to someone else—either temporally in this world and/or eschatologically in the world to come—who will use it appropriately. Eventually all gifts, abilities, wealth, and even the whole world will be given exclusively to believers who will use it to "cultivate" the earth for the glory of God (Prov. 13: 22; Matt. 5: 5; 1 Cor. 3: 21). God alone owns the world, and even as He had the right to take the land of Canaan away from the wicked Canaanites and give it to His chosen people, He has the right to redistribute His gifts and wealth according to His own desires. Those who have proven especially faithful and productive in this present life can expect to be entrusted with significant responsibilities and blessings in the life to come.

As for those who did not wish for the nobleman to reign over them, the *Jewish people* are primarily in view who should have recognized Christ as their sovereign king and submitted to Him, but refused. They can also represent *unbelievers who have never demonstrated the slightest interest in the Christian church or the Christian faith*—the "heathen", if you will, who are satisfied with the worship of self, nature, money, or any other false god. Furthermore, Christ warned us that if He was hated by the world, His disciples would also be hated (Jn. 15: 18). The world of men "does not want this Christ to rule over them", and their hatred for Him and His servants manifests itself in various ways throughout the world—from the mutilations, rapes, and murders of Christians in the Darfur region of Sudan by Muslim militias (funded by the Muslim government of Sudan headed by Bashir), to the hatred exhibited by the academic elite in the US who deny Christians tenured positions in prestigious universities because of their belief in "Intelligent Design"—the conviction that the geophysical and biological world was the product of God, the Intelligent Designer, rather than the product of random evolution.

While men are fighting against the reign of Christ in this age, He will visit the world with temporal judgments foreshadowing the final judgment. The temporal punishment of the Jews during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD—described in horrific detail in Josephus—foreshadows the destruction of all Christ's enemies at the end of time. In 70 AD, God placed the necks of Christ's Jewish persecutors under the feet of their enemies, the Roman legions—quite the opposite of their Messianic expectations. Jesus predicts this carnage in v. 27 (Geldenhuys, p. 475). In the same way, at the end of the age all Christ's enemies will be subdued in His presence



and will become a footstool for His feet. He is now “waiting” patiently at the right hand of God the Father for this day to come (Heb. 10: 12-13; Ps. 110: 1; cf. Mk. 12: 35-37). But He is in no hurry, lest even one of His elect ones perish before believing the gospel (2 Pet. 3: 9). The end of Christ’s enemies is eternal death which Christ describes in graphic language, “bring them here and slay them in my presence” (v. 27).

***The Synoptic Gospels***  
***Volume II***

***Christ's Community Study Center***  
***Mbarara, Uganda***

***Donald F. McNeill***

## *Outline of the Synoptic Gospels*

<i>XI. The Last Week of Jesus' Ministry on Earth (The Passion Week)</i>	
—Matt. 21: 1—28: 20; Mk. 11: 1—16: 8; Lk. 19: 28—24: 49	
Jn. 12: 12—21: 25	286
A. The Triumphal Entry—Matt. 21: 1-11; Mk. 11: 1-10; Lk. 19: 28-44	
Jn. 12: 12-19	286
B. The Cleansing of the Temple and the Withered Fig Tree—Matt. 21: 12-22	
Mk. 11: 11-26; Lk. 19: 45-48	289
C. Jesus' Authority Questioned by the Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders	
—Matt. 21: 27; Mk. 11: 27-33; Lk. 20: 1-8	292
D. The Parable of the Two Sons—Matt. 21: 28-32	293
E. The Parable of the Vineyard Owner—Matt. 21: 33-46; Mk. 12: 1-12	
Lk. 20: 9-19	293
F. The Parable of the Wedding Feast—Matt. 22: 1-14	298
G. Jesus Tested by the Scribes and Chief Priests about Submission to God or Caesar—Matt. 22: 15-22; Mk. 12: 13-17; Lk. 20: 20-26	300
H. Jesus Tested by the Sadducees concerning the Resurrection	
—Matt. 22: 23-33; Mk. 12: 18-27; Lk. 20: 27-40	303
I. Jesus Tested by the Pharisees about the Greatest Commandment	
—Matt. 22: 34-40; Mk. 12: 28-34	307
J. Jesus Questions the Pharisees about David's Prophecy in Ps. 110: 1	
—Matt. 22: 41-46; Mk. 12: 35-37; Lk. 20: 41-44	309
K. The Fifth Great Discourse in Matthew (The Seven Woes against the Scribes and Pharisees)—Matt. 23: 1-39; Mk. 12: 38-40	
Lk. 20: 45-47	312
1. Introductory complaints concerning the scribes and Pharisees	312
2. Seven woes directed to the scribes and Pharisees	316
a. The first and second woes: They mislead the people and even hinder them from entering the kingdom of heaven (vv. 13, 15).	317
b. The third woe: They distort the commandments to avoid responsibility (vv. 16-22).	317
c. The fourth woe: They emphasize the minor provisions of the Law and minimize the major provisions of the Law (vv. 23-24).	318
d. The fifth and sixth woes: They practice external religion rather than internal purity (vv. 25-28).	321
e. The seventh woe: They reject the prophetic word and its messengers (vv. 29-36).	322
3. Jesus' lament for the nation of Israel (vv. 37-39)	323
L. Jesus Praises the Poor Widow—Mk. 12: 41-44; Lk. 21: 1-4	324
M. The Sixth Great Discourse in Matthew—The Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24: 1—25: 46)	326
1. Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and His second	

<i>coming—Matt. 24: 1-42; Mk. 13: 1-33; Lk. 21: 5-36</i>	326
<i>a. The disciples' question (Matt. 24: 1-3; Mk. 13: 1-4 Lk. 21: 5-7)</i>	326
<i>b. Preliminary signs (Matt. 24: 4-14; Mk. 13: 5-13 Lk. 21: 8-19)</i>	326
<i>c. The destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24: 15-25 Mk. 13: 14-23; Lk. 21: 20-24)</i>	328
<i>d. The second coming of Christ and the end of the age (Matt. 24: 26-31; Mk. 13: 24-27; Lk. 21: 25-28)</i>	335
<i>e. The parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24: 32-35 Mk. 13: 28-31; Lk. 21: 29-33)</i>	336
<i>f. The need for readiness (Matt. 24: 36-42; Mk. 13: 32-33 Lk. 21: 34-36)</i>	341
<i>2. Parables preparing the disciples for the second coming of Christ —Matt. 24: 43—25: 46</i>	342
<i>a. The parable of the thief at night—Matt. 24: 43-44</i>	342
<i>b. The parable of the sensible slave and the evil slave —Matt. 24: 45-51; Mk. 13: 34-37</i>	343
<i>c. The parable of the ten virgins—Matt. 25: 1-13</i>	344
<i>d. The parable of the talents—Matt. 25: 14-30</i>	345
<i>e. The parable of the sheep and the goats (the final judgment) —Matt. 25: 31-46</i>	348
<i>N. Jesus Teaches Daily in the Temple and Retires at Evening on the Mount of Olives—Lk. 21: 37-38</i>	352
<i>O. The Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders Plot to Kill Jesus —Mat. 26: 1-5; Mk. 14: 1-2; Lk. 22: 1-2</i>	352
<i>P. Jesus Anointed for Burial—Matt. 26: 6-13; Mk. 14: 3-9</i>	354
<i>Q. Judas Iscariot Bargains with the Chief Priests over the Betrayal of Jesus—Matt. 26: 14-16; Mk. 14: 10-12; Lk. 22: 3-6</i>	355
<i>R. Jesus' Last Passover with the Apostles and His Institution of the Lord's Supper —Matt. 26: 17-25; Mk. 14: 12-31; Lk. 22: 7-38; Jn. 13—17</i>	356
<i>1. Preparation for the Passover—Matt. 26: 17-19; Mk. 14: 12-16 Lk. 22: 7-13</i>	357
<i>2. The model of servant-leadership—Lk. 22: 24-30</i>	358
<i>3. Jesus washes the disciples' feet—Jn. 13: 1-17</i>	361
<i>4. Jesus announces His betrayal—Matt. 26: 21-25 Mk. 14: 17-21; Lk. 22: 21-23</i>	361
<i>5. The institution of the Lord's Supper —Matt. 26: 26-30 Mk. 14: 22-26; Lk. 22: 14-20</i>	366
<i>a. The elements of the Lord's Supper</i>	366
<i>b. Continuity and discontinuity with the OT covenants</i>	367
<i>(1) Exodus 24</i>	367
<i>(2) Genesis 15</i>	368
<i>(3) Exodus 24 and Genesis 15 compared and contrasted</i>	369

(4) <i>Jeremiah 31: 27-40</i>	373
c. <i>The application of the New covenant</i>	376
d. <i>The consummation of the New covenant</i>	376
6. <i>Jesus predicts the failure of the disciples and Peter's betrayal</i>	
—Matt. 26: 31-35; Mk. 14: 27-31; Lk. 22: 31-34; Jn. 13: 36-38	377
7. <i>Jesus predicts His execution along with criminals</i>	
—Lk. 22: 35-38	380
S. <i>Jesus' Severe Trial of Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane</i>	
—Matt. 26: 36-44; Mk. 14: 32-40; Lk. 22: 39-46; Jn. 18: 1	381
T. <i>Jesus Betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane</i>	
—Matt. 26: 45-56; Mk. 14: 41-52; Lk. 22: 47-54; Jn. 18: 2-11	384
U. <i>Christ on Trial before Annas</i> —Jn. 18: 12-14; 19-24	388
V. <i>Peter's Denial of Christ</i> —Matt. 26: 69-75; Mk. 14: 66-72	
Lk. 23: 55-62; Jn. 18: 15-18; 25-27	391
W. <i>Christ at the First Trial before the Sanhedrin</i> —Matt. 26: 57-68	
Mk. 14: 53-65; Lk. 22: 54, 63-65	392
X. <i>Christ at the Second Trial before the Sanhedrin</i> —Matt. 27: 1	
Mk. 15: 1a; Lk. 22: 66-71	395
Y. <i>Christ Delivered over to Pilate by the Sanhedrin</i> —Matt. 27: 1-2, 11-14; Mk. 15: 1-5; Lk. 23: 1-6; Jn. 18: 28-40	395
Excursus: <i>Were the Jews in Palestine permitted to execute criminals by stoning?</i>	397
Z. <i>Christ Delivered over to Herod by Pilate</i> —Lk. 23: 7-12	400
AA. <i>Judas' Suicide</i> —Matt. 27: 3-10	401
BB. <i>Christ Condemned To Be Crucified Rather than Barabbas</i>	
—Matt. 27: 15-26; Mk. 15: 6-15; Lk. 23: 13-25	405
CC. <i>Christ Tortured and Mocked</i> —Matt. 27: 27-31; Mk. 15: 16-20	408
1. <i>The severity of the scourging</i>	409
2. <i>Two separate scourgings, not one</i>	409
3. <i>The mockery</i>	410
DD. <i>Jesus Condemned by the People after the First Scourging and Mockery</i> —Jn. 19: 6-7	410
EE. <i>Pilate's fear</i> —Jn. 19: 8	410
FF. <i>Pilate's Admission of Guilt</i> —Jn. 19: 9-10	411
GG. <i>The Sovereign Activity of God</i> —Jn. 19: 11	411
HH. <i>Christ Addresses the Women of Jerusalem</i> —Lk. 23: 26-31	413
II. <i>The Crucifixion of Christ</i> —Matt. 27: 32-56; Mk. 15: 21-41	
Lk. 23: 32-49; Jn. 19: 17-37	414
1. <i>Simon of Cyrene</i>	415
2. <i>The place of crucifixion</i>	415
3. <i>Crucifixion used as capital punishment</i>	416
4. <i>The physical agony of crucifixion</i>	416
5. <i>The symbolism of Christ's crucifixion</i>	418
6. <i>The wine mixed with gall</i>	418
7. <i>The charge: "The King of the Jews"</i>	419
8. <i>The dividing of Christ's garments</i> —Matt. 27: 35-36; Mk. 15: 24	

<i>Lk. 23: 34b; Jn. 19: 2-24</i>	419
<i>9. The sneering of the crowd, those passing by, chief priests, scribes, elders, soldiers, and two criminals—Matt. 27: 39-44</i>	
<i>Mk. 15: 29-32; Lk. 23: 35-37</i>	420
<i>JJ. The Seven Words of Christ from the Cross—Lk. 23: 34, 43</i>	
<i>Jn. 19: 26-27; Matt. 27: 36; Mk. 15: 34; Jn. 19: 28, 30; Lk. 23: 46</i>	421
<i>1. "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"—Lk. 23: 34</i>	422
<i>2. "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise"—Lk. 23: 43</i>	423
<i>3. "Woman, behold your son!... Behold, your mother"—Jn. 19: 25a-27</i>	424
<i>4. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"—Matt. 27: 46; Mk. 15: 34</i>	425
<i>5. "I am thirsty"—Jn. 19: 28</i>	427
<i>6. "It is finished"—Jn. 19: 30</i>	427
<i>7. "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit"—Lk. 23: 46</i>	427
<i>KK. Events Immediately after Jesus' Death—Matt. 27: 52-56</i>	
<i>Mk. 15: 38-51; Lk. 23: 47-49</i>	428
<i>1. The tearing of the temple veil</i>	429
<i>2. The earthquake and the opening of the tombs</i>	430
<i>3. The centurion's confession</i>	431
<i>4. The crowd's reaction</i>	431
<i>5. The women at Jesus' crucifixion</i>	432
<i>LL. The Examination of Christ's Body before Removal from the Cross—Jn. 19: 31-42</i>	432
<i>1. Christ's legs not broken</i>	432
<i>2. The piercing of His side</i>	433
<i>MM. The Burial of Christ—Matt. 27: 57-61; Mk. 14: 42-47; Lk. 23: 50-56</i>	
<i>Jn. 19: 38-42</i>	434
<i>1. Buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea</i>	434
<i>2. The sealing of the tomb—Matt. 27: 62-66</i>	436
<i>NN. The Resurrection Appearances of Christ—Matt. 28: 1-10, 16-20</i>	
<i>Mk. 16: 1-8; Lk. 24: 1-49; Jn. 20: 1-25; 21: 1-25</i>	437
<i>1. A word of caution</i>	438
<i>2. My purpose in attempting to reconcile the resurrection accounts in the Synoptics and John</i>	439
<i>3. An attempted harmony of the resurrection accounts from the Synoptics and John</i>	444
<i>a. The women who are first to visit the empty tomb</i>	444
<i>b. The time</i>	444
<i>c. The earthquake and the guards</i>	444
<i>d. The angels</i>	445
<i>e. The women's activity at the tomb</i>	445
<i>f. The angels' message and the women's obedience</i>	446

<i>g. Peter and John visit the empty tomb</i>	448
<i>h. Mary Magdalene's encounter with the angels and Christ</i>	449
<i>i. The women's report to the disciples and Peter's second visit to the tomb</i>	451
<i>j. Christ's Appearance to Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus</i>	453
<i>k. Christ's Appearance to Ten Apostles and the Promise of the Holy Spirit</i>	455
(1) <i>The arrival of the disciples from Emmaus</i>	455
(2) <i>Christ's appearance to Peter and its significance</i>	455
(3) <i>Christ's appearance to James, His brother</i>	456
(4) <i>Jesus' glorified body of flesh and bone and its significance for the resurrected believer</i>	456
(5) <i>The importance of empirical evidence of the resurrection of Christ</i>	457
(6) <i>The internal witness of the OT concerning the resurrection of Christ</i>	458
(7) <i>Divine illumination necessary for interpreting the evidence</i>	458
(8) <i>The gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations</i>	459
(9) <i>The promise of the Holy Spirit</i>	459
(10) <i>The activity of the apostles in forgiving and retaining sins</i>	460
<i>l. Christ's appearance to Thomas—Jn. 20: 24-31</i>	460
<i>m. Christ third appearance to some of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias—Jn. 21</i>	462
<i>n. Christ's Great Commission to the Apostles—Matt. 28: 16-20</i>	462
(1) <i>The timing of the great commission</i>	462
(2) <i>Those present at the Great Commission</i>	463
(3) <i>The location of the Great Commission</i>	463
(4) <i>The basis of the Great Commission</i>	464
(5) <i>The task of the Great Commission</i>	464
(6) <i>The Triune God of the Great Commission</i>	465
(7) <i>The promise of the Great Commission</i>	465
<i>o. Christ's Ascension into Heaven—Lk. 24: 50-53</i>	465

## *The Passion Week of Christ*

### ***XI. The Last Week of Jesus' Ministry on Earth (The Passion Week)—Matt. 21: 1—28: 20 Mk. 11: 1—16: 8; Lk. 19: 28—24: 49***

It is worthy of note that roughly one-third of *Matthew*, one-third of *Mark*, and one-fourth of *Luke* are and one-half of *John* are devoted to the ***last week*** of Jesus' life on earth, .06 % or less than one-tenth of one percent of His earthly life. Thus, mathematics alone reveals the ultimate importance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, without which nothing else in the gospel story matters. Jesus was, indeed, the Great Physician and Teacher, and the marvelous works He accomplished without the slightest trace of sin are necessary for our salvation. Yet, without the crucifixion and resurrection, our faith is in vain, and we have no evidence that Christ's atoning work has been accepted as a propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins (1 Cor. 15: 13-19).

The *Gospel of John* helps us reconstruct the events leading up to and surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. For this reason we will be looking at some of the passages in *John* for the remaining of our study in the Synoptic Gospels.

#### ***A. The Triumphal Entry—Matt. 21: 1-11; Mk. 11: 1-10; Lk. 19: 28-44; Jn. 12: 12-19***

*Luke* and *John* provide the chronological context of the triumphal entry. After healing blind Bartimaeus in Jericho, Jesus visits the house of Zaccheus resulting in his salvation (Lk. 18: 35—19:10). Afterwards, Jesus tells the parable of the minas (Lk. 19: 11-27). It is 17 miles from Jericho to Jerusalem along a winding, uphill road climbing 3000 feet in elevation (Carson, p. 437). In *John* we find that Jesus spent some time in Bethany before riding into Jerusalem. It had been reported to Him that Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha (Jn. 11: 19, 21, 23), was sick to the point of death. Jesus waits two days before going to Bethany during which time Lazarus



dies (Jn. 11: 6), but the disciples warn Him not to step foot in Judea because of the threat against His life (vv. 7-8). By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany Lazarus' body had been in the tomb for *four days*, a fact which is emphasized in *John* (vv. 17, 39). Jesus had already raised two people from the dead, but never one whose body had already begun to decompose (v. 39). Performing a miraculous "sign"—perhaps the kind the Pharisees and scribes had been demanding (Matt. 12: 38)—Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (vv. 43-44), a miracle which threatened the religious authority ("place") of the scribes and Pharisees rather than moving them to repentance and faith. They agreed that if Jesus remained alive the whole Jewish nation would eventually follow Him in some kind of military insurrection against the Roman government—another indication that the Jewish nation was looking merely for a human Messiah and a political "salvation" from the Romans. This insurrection would be brutally crushed resulting not only in the destruction of the nation, but the loss of religious authority by the scribes, Pharisees, and priests (vv. 47-48).

At this juncture in the gospel story Caiaphas, the wicked high priest, amazingly prophesies that Jesus will die as a substitute for the whole Jewish nation. Rather than allow the Romans to come and destroy the whole nation, the Sanhedrin will see to it that Jesus is executed instead, thus dying for the whole nation—a prophecy which John applies as well to the Gentiles (Jn 11: 49-52). (Ironically, by rejecting Jesus as king the very thing Caiaphas hoped to avoid came to pass in 70 AD during the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman legions.) Aware that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him, Jesus now withdraws from Bethany to Ephraim, a comfortable twelve miles north of Jerusalem where He would be out of immediate danger (v. 54). John informs us that this withdrawal took place near the time of the Passover (v. 55).

This brings the reader up to Jn. 12: 1. Six days before the Passover, Jesus returns to Bethany—only two miles from Jerusalem (Jn. 11: 18)—and spends the Sabbath with Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead (Hendriksen, p. 759). During this time Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly perfume and wipes his feet with her hair (v. 3), an act of worship which Judas condemns as wasteful. Judas had already made up his mind at this point to betray Jesus, but was looking for an opportunity to make some blood money in the process (Matt. 26: 14-15). While at the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, He sends two disciples to fetch a donkey for Him to ride into Jerusalem. There is no evidence that the disciples purchased the donkey, but simply proceeded to untie it and bring it to Jesus as He had instructed them. Jesus is "the Lord" (Matt. 21: 3; Mk. 11: 2; Lk. 19: 31) and has the right to do as He pleases with the animal, a right which is recognized by the owner who evidently had already believed in Him (Hendriksen, p. 764). Matthew reports a donkey and her colt, and it is the colt which Jesus chooses to ride upon. Both Mark and Luke make note of the fact that the donkey's colt had never been ridden (v. 2; v. 30) with the implication that such an untrained, unbroken pack animal would be ordinarily uncontrollable in such a threatening environment with thousands of people standing around cheering. But there is no indication from the story that Jesus had any trouble riding the animal. "In the midst, then, of this excited crowd, an unbroken animal remains calm under the hands of the Messiah who controls nature (8: 23-27; 14: 22-32). Thus the event points to the peace of the consummated kingdom (cf. Isa. 11: 1-10)" (Carson, p. 438).

Characteristically, Matthew notes that this act was to fulfill OT prophecy (v. 4), and he quotes the prophecy of Zech. 9: 9 and Isa. 62:11. Matthew wrote his gospel for the Jewish people and

quotes profusely from the OT to prove that this Jesus whom the Jews crucified was, indeed, the Messiah promised in the scriptures (cf. Matt. 1: 22; 2: 15, 17; 2: 23; 4: 14; 5: 17; 8: 17; 12: 17; 13: 14, 35; 21: 4; 26: 54, 56; 27: 9).

The significance of Jesus riding on a donkey would not be lost on the ancient readers of the NT. When an ancient king made war on a city, he did not come riding on a donkey, but a war horse suitable for the purpose. As the true and rightful King establishing His sovereign reign, Jesus would not *walk* into the city but would appropriately *ride*, but by riding a humble donkey He would clearly demonstrate His purpose of *peace, not military confrontation*. The primary indication of this purpose is found in the prophecies of *Isaiah* and *Zechariah*. In Zech. 9, the prophet declared God's victory over the enemies of Israel and Judah (vv. 1-8) and the reuniting of the northern and southern kingdoms (v. 10a). Not only this, but His kingdom would not be limited to a reunited Israel but would extend to the "ends of the earth" (v. 10b; cf. Chamblin, pp. 173, 175). Matthew replaces the phrase in Zech. 9: 9, "**Rejoice** greatly, O daughter of Zion...", with the one in Isa. 62: 11, "**Say** to the daughter of Zion, 'Lo, your salvation comes....'" as "an *evangelistic challenge* to unconverted Israel" who had not yet submitted to her King and had no claims to the promised salvation apart from repentance and faith (Chamblin, p. 173, quoting Gundry, p. 408, emphasis mine). Like so many other OT prophecies fulfilled in Christ's life and ministry, this one would also be missed by the common people and even by the apostles who would not understand its significance until after Jesus' glorification (Jn. 12: 16). Thus, by riding into Jerusalem instead of walking and by allowing the people to praise Him, Jesus affirms His status as King over the ends of the earth according to the prophecy of *Zechariah*; but by riding a humble donkey, "he was just as surely repudiating a *certain concept* of kingship" (Chamblin, p. 174, emphasis mine).

From Luke alone we learn that some of the Pharisees in the crowd tell Jesus to silence the multitude's praise (v. 39) to which Jesus responds by saying that if they remained silent, the stones would announce His coming (v. 40). The same Jesus who once *discouraged* public proclamations of His identity as the Christ now *invites* such proclamation. Only days before His crucifixion and the completion of His mission, there is no longer any need to hide the truth that He is the Christ—a revelation which would have hindered His ministry before now. Jesus is now provoking the multitudes, including the religious leaders, into a confrontation with Himself as the Messiah. Because of the favor generated by His entrance into Jerusalem, the religious elite, more than ever, will wish to do away with Him. "Jesus forces the members of the Sanhedrin to change their time-table, so that it will harmonize with his (and the Father's) time-table. The enthusiasm of the crowds with respect to Jesus will hasten the crisis" (Hendriksen, p. 760). On many different occasions the Jews had plotted to kill Him, so now He will let them; but the assassination will be on His own terms and at the right time, the Jewish Passover.

Many of the people who witnessed the raising of Lazarus in Bethany were now accompanying Jesus and the disciples in His approach to Jerusalem; furthermore, these same people had published word of this miracle throughout Jerusalem (Jn. 12: 17-18). The praises bestowed upon Christ are taken from Ps. 118: 25-26, a psalm used to celebrate deliverance from Egyptian bondage and sung during the Passover festivities (Chamblin, pp. 175-176; Hendriksen, p. 766). The NASB translates Ps. 118: 25 as, "O LORD, do save, we beseech You; O LORD, we beseech You, do send prosperity!" In *Matthew*, the Hebrew form, *hoshiana* is transliterated into the

Greek, *hosanna* (Chamblin, p. 176). However, it is evident from their desire to crucify Jesus scarcely one week later that ***the crowds had no understanding of what they were saying***. Had they truly understood the prophetic fulfillment of Ps. 118: 25 (as well as Zech. 9: 9) they, indeed, would have been pleading with Christ to save them ***from their sins***. As it was, they were still longing for an earthly, political king who would bring back “the good old days” of the Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms—“the coming kingdom of our father David” (Mk. 11: 10). The Jews had learned virtually nothing since the time of Samuel the prophet when Israel had desired a king ***like*** the kings of all the other nations who would “fight [their] battles”. As they had rejected God from being king over them ***then***, so ***now*** they reject Him once more (1 Sam. 8: 5-7, 20). But lest we condemn the Jews too harshly, we must admit our own compulsion—even as genuine believers—to plead for a “this-worldly” salvation free from financial concerns and free from emotional and physical pain. “Lord, do save!” often has little reference to the desire to be free from our sinful nature and its evil fruit (Rom. 7: 24-25).

Luke alone confirms their spiritual blindness to this momentous event (19: 41-44). As Jesus gets sight of the city, He begins to weep for their inability to discern “the things which make for peace”. The people believed that an earthly Messiah would give them peace from Roman domination, but Jesus had come to give them a much deeper, longer-lasting peace through forgiveness of their sins and a vital relationship to God. The “things which make for peace” are repentance and faith but this way of salvation had been hidden from them, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa. 6: 9-10). Ironically, had the people accepted this way of peace they also would have avoided the awful carnage (killing of people) of the Jewish war against Rome from 66 AD to 70 AD ending with the eventual blood-bath of Jerusalem’s fall (vv. 43-44). God in Christ was now “visiting” them with an offer of reconciliation. They could lay down their “weapons”—their hard hearts resisting His rule over them—and surrender to His lordship; or they could continue to resist thus provoking God’s temporal judgment in 70 AD which foreshadowed the final judgment of hell. Subsequent events in the remainder of the week proved that they did not “recognize” their opportunity.

***B. The Cleansing of the Temple and the Withered Fig Tree—Matt. 21: 12-22; Mk. 11: 11-26; Lk. 19: 45-48***

Mark provides a more detailed treatment of this pericope than Matthew. Jesus first curses the fig tree and then cleanses the temple. The following day the disciples find the fig tree withered. The relationship between the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple will be noted below.

This was now the ***third*** Passover of Jesus’ three year ministry (cf. Jn. 2: 13; 6: 4; 13: 1) and the ***second*** time Jesus had cleansed the temple—the other incident occurring at the beginning of His ministry and also at the time of Passover (Jn. 2: 13-17). Thus, Jesus ***begins*** and ***ends*** His ministry on earth demonstrating His zeal for His Father’s house. His act is the fulfillment of Mal. 3: 1-3, a prophecy connected to the denunciation of the Levitical priesthood in Mal. 1-2 (Chamblin, p. 179). The OT temple is now realized in the church, the body of Christ, and Christ now has the same zeal for the ***purity of His church*** as He had for the ***purity of the OT temple and its priesthood***. Modern scholarship generally rejects the possibility of two separate cleansings of the temple, but, as Wessel has noted, “But why Jesus could not have cleansed the

temple twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of his public ministry, is never adequately explained” (*Mark*, p. 727).

Chamblin makes note of Jesus’ sovereign prerogative on this occasion. Not being an official priest, and coming from the line of Judah rather than the line of Levi, Jesus “comes suddenly to His temple” like a “refiner’s fire” (Mal. 3: 1-2) without bothering to ask permission or consulting with Caiaphas the high priest. As He had declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath on another occasion, He implicitly declares Himself as the Lord of the temple on this occasion (p. 179).

The reason for overturning the money-changers’ tables has been variously interpreted. Jewish males were required to attend the Passover each year and to provide an animal sacrifice (Deut. 16). It was impractical for many of them traveling great distances to carry an animal with them, thus many Jews purchased their sacrificial animals—already examined for blemishes (Deut. 17: 1)—in the temple when they arrived. Furthermore, the currency used for purchasing the animal and for paying the annual temple tax would have to be changed from the Roman currency to the Tyrian shekel, the nearest thing to the Hebrew shekel (Wessel, p. 727). One theory for Jesus’ righteous anger is that those providing the services were charging exorbitant (unfairly high) exchange rates for currency and exorbitant prices for sacrificial animals—thus, Jesus’ complaint, “you are making it a *robber’s* den” (Matt. 21: 13; Mk. 11: 17; Lk. 19: 46). Extortion (dishonest dealings) undoubtedly took place, but this was only part of the reason for Jesus’ anger; otherwise, He would not have thrown out both the *sellors* and the *buyers* from the temple area (Matt. 21: 12; Mk. 11: 15) and forbidden anyone to carry merchandise through the temple (v. 16).

The key to interpretation is found in *Mark* who provides a fuller quotation from Isa. 56: 7 to include, “for all the nations” (v. 17). There was only a limited space in the temple for Gentile worshippers (the Court of the Gentiles), beyond which they could not go upon pain of death; and this was the location of all the money-changers and animal merchants. Considering that as many as 150,000 Jews could be in Jerusalem at the Passover (120,000 more than the local population; Chamblin, p. 178), ***the Jews conducting business had made prayer and worship virtually impossible***. Amidst the bleating of sheep and the heckling over prices, the merchants and money changers had effectively crowded the Gentiles out of the temple altogether. Jesus is righteously indignant that the Gentiles had been “robbed” of their rightful privilege of using the temple in the way it was meant to be used (Wessel, pp. 727-728). Furthermore, Lane has noted the lack of evidence for any market activity in the temple area until the high priesthood of Caiaphas who initiated the temple markets in approximately AD 30 as a competitive alternative to the four markets already in existence on the Mount of Olives (Lane, pp. 403-404). Thus, using the Court of the Gentiles for commercial purposes was completely ***unnecessary*** in light of the markets outside the temple which had been used for many years. It is also quite likely that Caiaphas was receiving a lucrative (very profitable) percentage of the concession fee (privilege fee) for doing business. As mentioned earlier, the priesthood of Jesus’ day was thoroughly corrupt.

[I remember years ago attending a piano concert in a local church auditorium featuring a very well-known Christian pianist. After the concert, the artist busily occupied himself with autographing and selling cassette tapes of his music. While I don’t identify church buildings

with the OT temple, I found myself somewhat sickened by the use of the church as a record shop. Some other venue for buying and selling would have been more appropriate.]

The cleansing of the temple provides an explanation of Jesus' *brief visit in the temple the previous day as well as the cursing of the fig tree* (Mk. 11: 11-14). It was too late in the day for Jesus to accomplish His cleansing work, but by briefly surveying the temple area and observing the commercial atmosphere of a market *rather* than a place of worship, Jesus knew what needed to be done the following day. When cursing the fig tree just before entering the temple (Mk. 11: 12-15), Jesus was *enacting a parable* similar to the symbolical actions of prophets in the OT (cf. Isa. 20: 2-4; Ezek. 4: 1-3) (Wessel, p. 726; Lane, p. 400). The curse upon the tree was also a curse upon the religious corruption and shallowness of Israel, especially those in authority. It was not, however, a blanket condemnation of every single individual in Israel, some of whom had come to Him in genuine faith. This is certain from Matthew's reference to the blind and the lame whom Jesus healed *in the temple* as well as the children who were singing His praises *in the temple* (Matt. 21: 14-16; cf. Carson, p. 445). Thus, the atmosphere that day was rich with contrast—goodness and severity. One minute Jesus was turning over tables (Did He make a whip on this occasion as He did on the first?—Jn. 2: 15) and condemning the commercialization of the sacred place of prayer and worship. The next minute He was continuing His gracious work of healing the blind and the lame and receiving the praise of little children.

In the interpretation of the curse upon the fig tree, there is some ambiguity (uncertainty) based on a different understanding of Palestinian agriculture. For example, Wessel says that around the Jerusalem area, fig trees leaf out in March or April “but do not produce figs till June” (p. 726; also Lane, p. 400), while Carson maintains, “Fig leaves appear about the same time as the fruit or a little after”, but that the figs are not fully ripe or edible until June (cf. Chamblin for further explanation, pp. 185-186). If Carson is right, when Jesus saw a fig tree covered in leaves, He could *reasonably expect* to find figs on it, even if green and disagreeable to the taste (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 444). According to this interpretation, Mark's comment, “for it was not the season for figs”, does not imply that it was impossible for the tree to have figs at all, but that there would be no *ripe* figs suitable for eating. As it was, Jesus “found nothing but leaves”; that is, no figs of *any* kind, edible or ripe (v. 13c). This would remove any confusion about Jesus cursing a tree that was biologically incapable of producing *any* figs at this time of year, an act which appears to some scholars as a purposeless act unworthy of Jesus' stature. For example, T.W. Manson says,

It is a tale of miraculous power wasted in the service of ill temper (for the supernatural energy employed to blast the unfortunate tree might have been more usefully expended in forcing a crop of figs out of season); and as it stands it is simply incredible (quoted by Wessel, p. 726, from “The Cleansing of the Temple,” BJRL 33 [1951]: 259)

[On the contrary, what is “simply incredible” is Manson's blind audacity (boldness) in accusing the sinless Christ of “wasting miraculous power in the service of ill temper”.]

The lesson is the same regardless of how we interpret the biological data. The tree provided Jesus with a useful *analogy of Israel*—particularly its leaders—giving *false evidence of life* on the outside (many leaves), but bearing no fruit (Wessel, p. 726). As the lush foliage (leaves) of the tree gave one a false hope of something to eat, so also the temple ceremonies—including the

Passover feast—gave one the impression of spiritual life within the nation of Israel. Upon further examination, however, the external religious life of Israel proved to be a sham (deceptive counterfeit). ***It was a nation flourishing with religious activity but possessing no religious substance*** (similar to many churches which have large memberships and budgets but no spiritual weight—Rev. 3: 14-17). By cursing the fig tree, Jesus foreshadows the destruction of Israel in 70 AD. The reference to Jer. 7: 11, “a robber’s den”, confirms this interpretation since the context of that passage is ***Judah’s mistaken confidence*** in the presence of the temple as a guarantee against invasion by foreign oppressors. As robbers and bandits found refuge from arrest and prosecution by hiding in caves, Israel thought they could find refuge from judgment by “hiding” (not literally but figuratively) in the temple and its ceremonies (Chamblin, p. 179). Jeremiah gives his famous “Temple of the Lord” speech to disprove this theory, and God later confirmed that He was a true prophet by destroying the temple at the hand of Babylon in 587 BC. Thus, in His denunciation of the money changers and merchants, Jesus gives a forewarning of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Concerning the seeming discrepancy between *Mark* and *Matthew*, the disciples were amazed that the fig tree had withered “all at once” (Matt. 21: 20). We know from *Mark* that they did not discover the tree until the next day (11: 20), but this would still qualify for an immediate and miraculous judgment. Considering all the miracles Jesus had done in their presence, the most amazing thing is the comment that they were ***amazed***.

Jesus uses the incident to teach a second lesson on the necessity of faith and confidence in God’s ability to answer prayer (Mk. 11: 23-24; Matt. 21: 20-22). The promise Jesus makes, “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive”, begs the question: Do the “***all things***” literally include the moving of mountains? As mentioned above on Matt. 17: 20, moving mountains was ***proverbial for overcoming seemingly impossible difficulties***, and Jesus uses it the same way here as a hyperbole (exaggeration) for miraculous works. The disciples had already performed miracles (Lk. 10: 17; cf. Hendriksen, p. 775), and on one occasion had failed to do so because of the littleness of their faith (Matt. 17: 20a). But if they had “faith in God” (Mk. 11: 22) to do ***anything according to His will which promoted His kingdom, they could do it*** (cf. 1 Jn. 5: 14; “according to His will”). They should not doubt the power of God to perform ***mighty deeds related to the kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven*** (Matt. 6: 10). Thus, the prayer of ***faith*** must be rooted in the foundational prayer of Matt. 6: 9-13 in which the fundamental focus is the kingdom of God coming on earth. Jesus’ confidence in God to wither the fig tree was ***not*** faith in God to perform ***any arbitrary, purposeless act***, but rather a confident faith in God to perform ***according to His revealed covenant***—whether for blessing or cursing (cf. Chamblin, p. 187). In this particular case, God performed according to the curses of the covenant directed against a faithless nation (Deut. 27-28), but He will also accomplish blessings for those who believe His word and abide in His will (Jn. 15: 7, “***If*** you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask ***whatever*** you wish, and it shall be done for you.” Abiding in Christ effectively qualifies the motivation and content of our prayers, the “whatever”.)

The word for “doubt” (***diakrino***) is the same word used in James 1: 6, and it basically means “to be of a divided mind” (Hendriksen, p. 775, note). In that particular context, the Christian is instructed to pray for wisdom—something he can be assured is the will of God for his life as well as something which will promote the kingdom of God on earth. He should never doubt that God

wishes to grant Him Biblical wisdom in all situations, particularly those situations of trial and hardship in which he needs such wisdom to make the right decisions (v. 2).

***C. Jesus' Authority Questioned by the Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders —Matt. 21: 23-27; Mk. 11: 27-33; Lk. 20: 1-8***

Jesus and His disciples have been traveling back and forth between Bethany and Jerusalem (only two miles apart) on a daily basis; thus, we can understand Mark's comment, "And they came *again* to Jerusalem" (11: 27a). The "chief priests" consisted of former high priests and members of priestly families. The elders were non-priestly members of the Sanhedrin coming from influential Jewish families (Carson, p. 447). In spite of Jesus' prediction of His death at the hands of the chief priests and elders (Matt. 16: 21, this is the first recorded incident of any confrontation with them (Chamblin, p. 189). Having witnessed what Jesus had done on the previous day in casting out the money changers and merchants, the chief priests, scribes, and elders question His authority for such actions. But only if they could answer His question about *John's authority* to baptize would He be willing to answer their question. Did John have *his* authority from heaven, or did he receive it from men? The ball is now at the other end of the field and the religious leaders are now playing defense rather than offense. If John's authority was from heaven, they should have believed in him. But in what manner should they have demonstrated such belief? For one thing, they should have brought forth the fruits of righteous living in keeping with genuine repentance (Matt. 3: 7-10), but this is hardly what they were thinking about right now. The point they understood Jesus to be making is that if they had recognized *John's* authority, they should have also recognized *His* authority since John believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah (Jn. 1: 29; Jn. 3: 30). If they said John's authority was merely of human origin and, therefore, not from heaven, they would lose credibility with the multitudes—and possibly much more, their lives as well (Lk. 20: 6)—who recognized John's divinely appointed status as a prophet. Sitting on the fence and refusing to come down on either side, they said, "We do not know." Jesus has now demonstrated that He has no obligation to answer their question (v. 33), for if they failed to see the hand of God in John's ministry or in His own, it is only because their unbelief has blinded their minds to the truth (Carson, p. 448; cf. Matt. 11: 25).

***D. The Parable of the Two Sons—Matt. 21: 28-32***

This parable is found only in *Matthew* and is included within Jesus' controversy with the chief priests, scribes, and elders. We will be following the NASB which differs from the NIV concerning which of the two sons—the first or the second—obeyed the father's will (cf. Chamblin, pp. 190-191 and Carson, p. 449, for the textual problem). The difference does not affect the straightforward interpretation of the parable.

Immediately after refusing to identify the source of His authority, Jesus presents a parable illustrating the difference between the religious leadership and the despised segment of Jewish society—the tax gatherers and harlots—who were coming to Him in faith. The first son (according to the NASB) represents most of the Jewish population—particularly the chief priests, scribes, and elders to whom Jesus was speaking—who claimed to be obedient to their covenant responsibilities in keeping the Law (v. 28). The second son (v. 30) represented the tax-

collectors and harlots who had been openly disobedient and sinful but who repented at the preaching of John the Baptist and “regretted” their open defiance of God’s Law. The tax-collectors and harlots, then, will get into the kingdom of God before the hypocritical Jews who only *pretended* to be obedient to the Father’s will.

By the mention of John the Baptist, Jesus now answers the question which the Jewish leaders refused to answer previously. While they had refused to believe in John, many of the despised members of society had come to true repentance and had been baptized by him (Lk. 7: 29-30). However, the literal thousands (Matt. 3: 5; “all Judea”) whose lives had been changed under John’s preaching had *no affect* on the hard-hearted Jewish leaders—and those who followed them—who continued to view John as a maverick preacher acting on his own authority. Likewise, the *same* people who had repented at the preaching of John had also responded to Jesus’ preaching, people who were marginalized and hated by the Jewish leadership (cf. Lk. 7: 36-50, the immoral woman who wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair at the house of Simon the Pharisee; Lk. 19: 1-10, Zaccheus the tax-collector; Matt. 9: 36, the “sheep without a shepherd”). These overtly (openly) sinful people were the very ones who at first had rebelled against their covenant responsibilities as God’s “sons”, but had now “come home” to the Father to work in His vineyard (Lk. 15, the prodigal son). (Thus, the passage is not about the difference between Jews and Gentiles, but repentant Jews and unrepentant Jews.) There was, indeed, an inescapable connection between the acceptance or rejection of John and the acceptance or rejection of Jesus. (Chamblin, pp. 191-192, citing Lk. 7: 29-50). How could it be otherwise since John was the forerunner sent to prepare the way for Jesus?

### ***E. The Parable of the Vineyard Owner—Matt. 21: 33-46; Mk. 12: 1-12; Lk. 20: 9-19***

The present parable lends itself more to an allegorical interpretation than most other parables; thus, we will attempt below to discover the significant elements to be allegorized (cf. Chamblin, p. 193; Carson, p. 451; Hendriksen, p. 781; Geldenhuys, pp. 497-498).

“Listen to another parable” (Matt. 21: 33) indicates that the parable of the vineyard owner immediately follows the previous parable of the two sons. The metaphor of Israel as God’s vineyard was well-known (Jer. 12: 10), and Jesus’ quotation of Isa. 5 is an unwelcome reminder of Israel’s past unfaithfulness which immediately puts the chief priests, et al. (and others) on the defensive. The landowner who goes on a journey is God, and the renters or vinegrowers are the nation of Israel, particularly the Jewish leaders whom Jesus is addressing. God sends His slaves (the OT prophets) to Israel throughout its history to receive some of the “produce of the vineyard” (righteousness and justice—Isa. 5: 7), but instead of receiving the produce of the field, his slaves are mistreated, beaten, and murdered (cf. Matt. 23: 35; 1Kings 18: 4; Jer. 7: 25-26; 25: 4; 38: 6). *Matthew* mentions a group of three slaves of which one is beaten, a second killed, and a third stoned (v. 35)—killed slowly and painfully (Hendriksen, p. 782). Writing to the Jews, Matthew would understand the religious implications of stoning as a mark of religious apostasy (Chamblin, p. 193), precisely the accusation made against Jesus at His trial (Matt. 26: 65). *Mark* mentions three slaves sent individually, one beaten, a second wounded in the head, and a third killed, followed by “many others” who were treated the same way (a reference to the successive sending of the prophets throughout Israel’s history—Lane, p. 418). *Luke* mentions only three slaves all of whom are beaten but none killed.



[The differences have no affect upon the meaning or application of the parable; however they do make us wonder what Jesus actually said. Quite obviously, the same parable is being told by all three Synoptists who are using different details. This brings up the question of **Biblical inerrancy** and what is actually **required** for a Biblically inerrant text. Conservative scholars have long argued that **exhaustive, meticulous reporting of events** (or stories like the parables) is not necessary to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. The Synoptic writers simply reported the parable as they remembered hearing it or borrowed it from another reliable source, and as the Holy Spirit pleased to inspire them to write it without getting tied up in knots about **exactly** what Jesus said. Again, the meaning and application of the parable is exactly the same regardless of the details. If modern news reporters are inclined to call this “sloppy reporting”, the obvious response is that all modern reporters approach “the facts” of an event or story with certain assumptions about **what is important to the development of the story** and what isn’t. Given the very poor audience ratings of all the major news media in the US—to use one example—the question of accurate reporting by the news media is certainly not one to be taken for granted. We can be confident, however, that the Holy Spirit inspired each writer to report whatever was necessary.]

Finally, the vineyard owner sends his son to collect the proceeds of the vineyard, thinking that the renters will surely “respect” his son. Jesus is using a touch of irony (perhaps even sarcasm) to make His point. Parables do not require **strict realism**, and we are not to suppose that God the Father naively and unrealistically believed that the Jewish leaders would treat His Son **any differently** from the OT prophets. God sends the Son into the world knowing full well that His Son would be despised by His own countrymen, the Jews, and crucified on a cross—persecution worse than the other prophets had received from Israel. As God, the Son, Jesus knew that the Sanhedrin was plotting His death, and now at last He reveals His full knowledge of their schemes (Carson, p. 453). By speaking this way, Jesus shocks the Jewish leaders into understanding the implications of their hatred—they are not only despising **Him**, but **God**. God is sending His Son, “last of all” (Mk.) to receive the righteousness and justice which is due Him from a nation which had been given all the advantages of covenant love and commitment (Rom. 3: 1-2; 9: 4). There is a note of **finality** in *Mark*, “He had **one more** to send, a beloved son; he sent him **last of all** to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son’” The “beloved son” can be understood as the **only** son of the father (v. 6).

The patience of the vineyard owner for these rebellious vinegrowers appears **unrealistic**, and for a good reason. The patience and love of God extended to rebellious sinners is most unrealistic and **incomprehensible** (difficult to understand) (Hendriksen, p. 783). Why would God send His only Son into the world for sinners who repeatedly spurned His kindness? There is no reasonable explanation for it, only the profound declaration: “For God **so loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...” (Jn. 3: 16a). For most of the Jews living at this time, this would be the last opportunity for repentance. Although thousands would be saved at Pentecost and the years following, there would be multiple thousands who would never again hear the good news. They would perish miserably in the Jewish War of 66-70 AD, and finally in hell.

With a touch of sarcasm, Jesus says that the renters actually believed they could steal the Son’s

**inheritance** through an act of murder (a detail mentioned by all three writers). In ancient Palestine, it was legally possible for an inheritance to be claimed by anyone if the owner had died without a legal heir. Assuming the owner to be dead, the vinegrowers plot to kill the only surviving heir of the vineyard. Since the property would then have no legal owner, they could claim it as their own (Lane, p. 419). The problem with this thinking was that the owner was still alive. This was a **stinging rebuke** to the Jewish leaders, both religious and secular, to whom this parable is mainly directed. Presently they were repeating the tarnished history of the Jewish nation during which both corrupt priests (think of Amaziah; Amos 7) and kings (think of Ahab; et al.) had attempted to steal religious and political authority away from God, and by this usurpation (unlawful seizure), also steal the whole Jewish nation—**God's inheritance** (Isa. 19: 25; Jer. 12: 7-9; Joel 3: 2). In a more egregious (remarkably bad) act of theft, power politics, and murder, all five groups of religious and secular leadership—the chief priests, elders, Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians (Chamblin, p. 188)—are together conspiring against the Son of God to kill Him and steal the present generation of Jewish people away from God. They know that as long as Jesus is alive, His popularity and authority with the common people will continue to grow, leaving them with nothing but the left-overs of their previous power.

The statement was also a **warning**. What would the owner and father do with those lawless wretches who killed his son and attempted to steal his vineyard? In *Matthew*, Jesus allows the Jewish conspirators to answer this question (v. 41), but in *Mark* (v. 9) and *Luke* (v. 16), Jesus answers the question Himself. A possible resolution to the difference is something like this: Jesus asks the question, followed by their answer (Matt. 21: 41), followed in turn by Jesus' **repetition** of their answer (Mk. and Lk.), as if to say, "You have answered correctly." This solution becomes problematic as we read Luke's version which indicates a different response to Jesus' statement, "May it never be" (v. 16). However, they may have uttered this statement only **after fully understanding** that the parable applied to them (so also Hendriksen, p. 784). Thus, a possible solution becomes: Jesus' question, followed by the correct answer from the Jewish leaders, followed by Jesus' repetition of their answer, followed by the Jew's full awareness of Jesus' intended meaning, prompting a negative response, "May it never be."

Following the statement, "May it never be", Jesus sarcastically rebukes their ignorance of scripture ("Have you not even read this scripture?"—Mk.), knowing full well that they had **read** it, but that they were now **consciously and willfully disobeying it** (Carson, p. 453; Chamblin, p. 193). As Chamblin notes, Jesus had already accused the Pharisees of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—ascribing the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of demons with a **full awareness** that that was exactly what they were doing (Chamblin, p. 90; also Carson, pp. 290-291; also see commentary on Matt. 12: 31-32 above).

Ironically, Jesus quotes verses from the **same psalm** which the people were shouting as He rode into Jerusalem, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES" (Matt. 21: 42; taken from Ps. 118: 22-23). The crowd's acclamation, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD" comes from Ps. 118: 25-26. Upon hearing such praise from the multitudes lining the road into Jerusalem, the Pharisees had told Jesus to rebuke His followers for saying such things (Lk. 19: 39), and when children in the temple had voiced the same praises, the chief priests and scribes had become

angry (Matt. 21: 15). While the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees had **rejected** Jesus, the common people had **praised** Him. Therefore, those who had the greatest responsibility to recognize His greatness had cast Him aside as insignificant.

There is some debate about the original meaning of Ps. 118: 22. Some expositors believe the “builders” in v. 22 is a reference to the empire builders of the world—Persia in particular—which had overlooked Israel as insignificant in their plans for world dominion. Thus, the stone rejected is a reference to the nation of Israel (Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 818). Delitzsch disputes this view, arguing that Israel had always figured prominently in the empire building of mighty nations (*Psalms*, Vol. 3, p. 229), and considering the fact that the land of Palestine was a major thoroughfare from the East southward to Egypt, Israel was valued as a highway for armies and trade caravans. Rather, the “builders” refer to the religious leaders of Israel during the building of the second temple. While the foundation was being laid, the older priests, Levites, and heads of households wept when they saw how small the new temple would be in comparison with Solomon’s temple (Ezra 3: 10-13; Delitzsch, p. 228). Thus, the psalm is post-exilic (after the exile). As much as this view has in its favor, the old men watching the foundation being laid were not despising the cornerstone, but the *size* of the whole foundation. Another view is that of Lane, following Jeremias and Barnard, who believes the rejected stone refers historically to one of the stones gathered during the building of Solomon’s temple. This stone was rejected during the construction of the sanctuary but was chosen later as the keystone to the porch (Lane, p. 420 and notes). However true this may be, we have no Biblical verification of this story.

Siding with Leupold, my preference is to interpret v. 22 as **originally referring to Israel** (so also Carson, p. 733). In spite of the fact that the land was an important thoroughfare, the nation itself was despised as weak and lowly by the empire builders of world history. Even during the zenith (highest point) of Israel’s history during David’s and Solomon’s reigns, Israel was small in comparison to the ancient Egyptian Empire; and when this Psalm was written (most likely post-exile), it was surely weak and insignificant in comparison to the past empires of Assyria and Babylon, and in the context of Ps. 118, the vast Persian Empire. God had not chosen Israel because of its numerical or political strength but because He **loved** Israel (Deut. 7: 7-8). Israel was beloved for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and although belittled in the sight of the world, **the nation was the cornerstone of the kingdom of God from which the Christ would be born according to the flesh and would inaugurate a kingdom which would never end** (Dan. 2: 34-35, 44-45).

Christ’s reference to Ps. 118: 22 makes more sense in light of this interpretation. As the world had rejected Israel, the leaders of the nation now reject Christ—the beginning of a **new, spiritual Israel**. Refusing to believe the unmistakable fulfillment of OT prophecy in His teaching and healing, they had judged Him unworthy and rejected Him. In their pursuit of “a sanctuary” (Isa. 8: 14a), they rejected Jesus as an **insignificant person** who would not be able to deliver a political and military salvation. At worst He was considered dangerous (“a snare and a trap”—Isa. 8:14b). But He who was rejected by men is “choice and precious in the sight of God”, and whoever believes in this stone will not be disappointed (1 Pet. 2: 4-8). There is salvation in no one else (Acts 4: 11-12).

The conclusion and application of parable is now spelled out, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it”—a definite warning of what would most surely occur during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and beyond. The “renters” would be destroyed—including the Jewish religious and secular leadership, along with the unbelieving Jewish population who participated in Jesus’ crucifixion. (We will learn later that Jesus gave those who would listen—the believing Jews—advanced warning about the siege of Jerusalem which enabled them to escape unharmed to “the mountains”—Matt. 24: 16). The Jewish leaders were merely *renters or custodians* of God’s property; for God was always the rightful *owner* of His kingdom to whom they should have given utmost obedience. Having failed to recognize the time of their visitation (Lk. 19: 44), the temple would be destroyed and the religious and secular power of the chief priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, et al. over the Jewish people would be broken. There would be a clean break between Judaism and the Christian church in which Gentiles (“other vine-growers”, “a people producing the fruit of it [the kingdom]”—Matt. 21: 43) would be included as equal heirs of the kingdom of God (Eph. 3: 1-7). A people who were at one time *not* the people of God would now be included as God’s *inheritance* (1 Pet. 2: 9-10; cf. Hos. 1: 10; 2: 23; cf. Rom. 9: 25-26; 1 Pet. 2: 10). God will not be frustrated by His rebellious Jewish people, but will raise up another people, the Gentiles, who will pay Him the proceeds from His vineyard—righteousness, justice, godly living, and genuine worship—at the “proper seasons” (the entirety of the church age until Christ returns).

The conclusion of Jesus’ warning (Matt. 21: 44; Lk. 20: 18) is a subtle reference to Isa. 8: 14-15 and Dan. 2: 34, 45. In Rom. 9: 33, the Apostle Paul combines Isa. 8: 14-15 with Isa. 28: 16 to prove that Jesus was the “stumbling stone” that the Jews “stumbled over” in their efforts to achieve righteousness by “pursuing a law of righteousness” (9: 31). By combining the two passages, Paul shows that the *stone of stumbling* is also the *cornerstone* of the building, the *most important part of the foundation* upon which the whole edifice is built (cf. Eph. 2: 20). The Law forbade anyone from putting a stumbling block in front of a blind person which would make him fall: “You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a *stumbling block* before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD” (Lev. 19: 14; the word in the Greek version of the OT, the Septuagint, is *skandalon*, “a rock of offense”). The major principle in this commandment was protection for the weak and helpless who could not defend themselves against oppression and *fraud* (cf. Deut. 27: 18; R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, pp. 216, 250). It would be easy to lead a blind man astray for the purpose of taking advantage of him or to curse or slander a deaf man. The prophet Ezekiel uses the expression as a metaphor for temptation and sin (Ezek. 14: 3, 4, 7; 18: 30; 44: 12), a figure which is also employed by the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul (Matt. 16: 23; 18: 7; Rom. 14: 13). Without malicious intent, Peter tempted Christ to take possession of His kingdom without going to the cross; and Paul warned believers not to use their Christian liberty in such a way that a weaker brother is offended or caused to stumble into sin (see context in Rom. 14). The Jewish leaders (both religious and secular) viewed Jesus as a stumbling stone, a dangerous snare or trap, offensive to their ambitions of a restored political and military kingdom under their control.

Furthermore, if they stumbled over Him while He was still living, their fall becomes more acute (serious) after His death; thus, Paul also uses *skandalon* as a metaphor for the crucifixion of Christ which is a stumbling block to Jews who were demanding a political Messiah (1 Cor. 1: 23;

Gal. 5: 11). Because of their unbelief, Jesus the cornerstone actually became a stumbling block whom God purposely placed before *spiritually blind Jews* who refused to heed the message of salvation (cf. Rom. 9: 33, “Behold *I* [God] lay in Zion a stone of stumbling...”). Rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, they fell upon the stumbling stone and were broken to pieces (Lk. 20: 18).

Mixing the two metaphors of the *stumbling stone* and the *massive cornerstone*, Jesus also says that this huge cornerstone which was rejected by the builders will fall upon those who rejected it and will scatter them like dust, a possible reference to the stone of Dan. 2, cut out of the mountain without human hands (i.e. made without human intervention), which will crush all worldly kingdoms, including the Jewish kingdom. “The forthcoming judgment of God will crush this vaunted human kingdom (where the Pharisees’ religious humanism and the Sadducees’ secular humanism reign supreme), and erect on its ashes the everlasting Kingdom of God under Messiah’s rule” (Chamblin, p. 195).

Knowing that Jesus was warning them of their own destruction, the chief priests and Pharisees wanted to put an end to Him then and there, but they were afraid of the multitudes who believed that He was a prophet (vv. 45-46; cf. 21: 26). This begs the question of what happened between the time Jesus entered Jerusalem to the shouting of “Hosanna” and one week later as He was delivered over to Pilate to the cry of “Crucify Him!” What, or who, caused this reversal among the multitudes? We will explore this question later.

#### ***F. The Parable of the Wedding Feast—Matt. 22: 1-14***

This is the last of a series of three parables pronouncing judgment upon Israel, particularly its leaders. For the similarities shared by all three parables, see Chamblin, p. 196. While there are many similarities between this parable and that of Lk. 14: 16-24, there are also many differences.

##### ***Lk. 14: 16-24***

The host: a certain man  
 A big dinner  
 Three invitations (vv. 16, 22, 23)  
 Excuses from the invited guests  
 Worldly concern (land, oxen, marriage)  
 Indifference to the slaves offering invitation  
  
 Host becomes angry  
 Host passes over the invited guests (v. 24)  
 Invitation to poor, crippled, blind and lame  
     inside the city  
 Integrity of guests undefined  
 House filled with guests  
 All guests partake of dinner (assumed)

##### ***Matt. 22: 1-14***

The host: a king  
 A wedding feast for the king’s son  
 Three invitations (vv. 3, 4, 9)  
 Complete indifference (“paid no attention”)  
 Worldly concern (farm, business)  
 Indifference followed by hostility and  
     violence  
 King becomes enraged  
 King destroys murderers and burns city  
 Invitation to anyone on the highways  
     outside the city  
 Integrity of guests defined (“good and bad”)  
 Wedding hall filled with guests  
 Guests improperly clothed are expelled

It was customary to give an initial invitation to a feast, followed by a second invitation informing those originally invited that the preparations were ready (Carson, p. 456). The invitation to the wedding feast is the offer of the gospel (good news) *repeatedly* preached to the Jewish nation through the OT prophets (Heb. 4: 2). The Messiah (the son)—whom the prophets had

predicted—is now present among His people and the wedding feast is fully prepared. The Jews are given a final invitation to enjoy the fruit of forgiveness and reconciliation. This invitation is met first with rude indifference (vv. 3, 5) and, ultimately, violence (v. 6). Thus, we can see the similarity between this parable and the parable of the tenant vinegrowers who kill the king's slaves and ultimately His son. The king responds to this insult in the same way as the aggrieved (offended) vineyard owner; he kills the murderers, but goes beyond this by burning their city—yet another prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. By giving repeated warnings of judgment, Jesus is giving the Jewish leadership ample opportunity to change their minds about their conspiracy to kill Him.

The king's invitation goes out to *anyone and everyone*; however, not everyone who responds to the invitation is allowed to partake of the feast. He has provided his guests with the proper wedding garments, freshly washed, to replace their own garments soiled from their journey to the wedding hall (Chamblin, p. 197). Presumably, one man has refused this *freshly washed* wedding garment in preference to his own *soiled* garment; thus, his lack of preparation for the feast is his own fault, and he can blame no one else. The king is not acting harshly by throwing the man out of the wedding hall; he is merely responding to his insult in refusing his generous (and free) provisions. Jesus' use of hyperbole (exaggeration) in v. 13 reflects the eternal seriousness of insulting the king by refusing his grace.

As the king's invitation goes out to *all without exception*, the gospel is offered indiscriminately to *everyone without exception*, even Jews. The servants who go out on the highways leading out of the city “may be gathering [Jewish] refugees fleeing the holocaust” (Chamblin, pp. 197, 198). In the parable, not every previously invited guest suffers the king's wrath, only those who murdered his servants. These may represent the Sanhedrin and other Jewish leaders who actually *planned* Jesus' execution. Not all the Jews who cried, “Crucify him!”, were killed in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (most of them would already be dead by this time) or perished in hell. Remember Jesus' intercessory prayer on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for *they do not know what they are doing*” (Lk. 23: 34). This was a prayer for some of the Jews who were ignorantly complicit (agreeable) in Jesus' crucifixion, but not for the hard-hearted leadership who acted with full awareness of His identity as the Messiah. His intercession on the cross gives us reasonable assurance that many of the same Jews who demanded Jesus' crucifixion were later “pierced to the heart” at the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost and repented of their evil deed and their unbelief (Acts 2: 37). However, considering the historical reality that the *wedding hall*—the church—is filled mostly with Gentiles, not Jews, the invitation presented on the highways leading out of the destroyed city primarily represents the offer of the gospel to the Gentiles. This interpretation is consistent with Jesus' warning in the previous parable (21: 43) that the kingdom will be taken away from the Jews and given to the Gentiles.

Further, it should be noted that those gathered from the highways are “both evil and good”. *All kinds* of people were invited, those who were outwardly moral and those who weren't. The church is a mixed company of people coming from a variety of backgrounds. Some people have lived very moral lifestyles even before professing faith in Christ while others have lived lives of debauchery (immorality).

On the other hand, not everyone responding to the offer of the gospel is a genuine believer (c.f. Matt. 13, the parable of the sower). The man who refuses the wedding clothes represents false professors in the church who eventually will be cast out. The wedding clothes have been interpreted traditionally as the *imputed righteousness of Christ* as opposed to the *self-righteousness* of the false professor represented by his own garments. According to this interpretation, the man who is expelled from the wedding hall is a professing believer who responds outwardly to the offer of the gospel but rejects the very essence of the gospel, the imputed righteousness of Christ, in favor of his own self-righteousness (Gal. 3: 27). However, the imputed righteousness of Christ is never expressly taught in the parables of Jesus, and this doctrine is not formalized until the Pauline epistles (e.g. Rom. 3: 22; 4: 2-5; 5: 18; 9: 30; 10: 3-6; 2 Cor. 5: 21; Gal. 2: 21; 3: 6, 21; Phil. 3: 9). Thus, it may be a mistake to import the formal doctrine of imputed righteousness from the Pauline epistles into this parable. (But before anyone gets nervous, I am *not* saying there is no imputed righteousness taught in the gospels. Jesus' repeated summons to believe in Him [Jn. 3: 16], and His death on the cross along with His promise to the dying thief, certainly fit into this doctrine!) Another interpretation is offered by Chamblin (p. 199; along with Robert Gundry, F. F. Bruce, and William Hendriksen) which fits more consistently with Jesus' *repeated insistence upon good works and good character as evidence of true faith*.

The requirement of the proper wedding garment represents the *necessity of obedience*, not as the basis or cause of salvation, but as the evidence of salvation. This interpretation is consistent with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 17-48; 7: 13-29; cited in Chamblin) that unless one's *practical* righteousness—not imputed righteousness (see commentary above)—surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, he would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Furthermore, it is consistent with Jesus' emphasis in so many other parables which insist on the necessity of good works—the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18: 23-34); the two sons (Matt. 21: 28-32); the talents (Matt. 25: 14-30); the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25: 31-46); the good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 25-37); the rich fool (Lk. 12: 16-21); the wise servant (Lk. 12: 42-48); the barren fig tree (Lk. 13: 6-9); the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31); the minas (Lk. 19: 12-27); the house built on the rock (Matt. 7: 24-27); the candle under a bushel (Matt. 5: 14-16); and the sower (Matt. 13: 3-9). It is also consistent with the teaching of John the Baptist, with whom Jesus connected His own ministry (21: 23-27), who preached that one must bring forth good deeds in keeping with genuine repentance (Matt. 3: 8). Finally, it is consistent with the ongoing controversy with the Jewish leaders who pretended to be sons of Abraham but whose deeds demonstrated that they were sons of the devil (Jn. 8: 39-44).

The last verse of the parable makes no attempt to quantify how many people will eventually be saved in comparison to how many will be lost. The Bible gives us no final tally. Nor is it a reference to the doctrine of election per se. The “many” who are “called” represent the large multitudes who hear the universal call of the gospel and either reject it or become part of the professing church. Those who are chosen are the “few” (at least in Jesus' day) who demonstrate genuine faith by their deeds of righteousness (Chamblin, p. 199; cf. Matt. 25: 31-46, in which the sheep are distinguished from the goats not on the basis of their profession, but on the basis of their deeds—cf. Matt. 16: 27 and commentary above).

### ***G. Jesus Tested by the Scribes and Chief Priests about Submission to God or Caesar***

—*Matt. 22: 15-22; Mk. 12: 13-17; Lk. 20: 20-26*

By examining the context of this passage, it will be evident that all five elements of Jewish religious and secular authority (the chief priests, Pharisees, scribes, elders, and Herodians) are conspiring together to hand Jesus over to the Roman authorities (Lk. 20: 20). The Pharisees and Herodians—Jewish leaders sympathetic to Herod’s rule—were bitter enemies, but their common cause of eliminating Jesus brings them together.

Politics is often dirty business anywhere you go, and political opponents commonly attempt to trick each other into putting their feet firmly into their own mouths (an American expression for saying something stupid, something politicians frequently do). Palestine was a hot-bed of insurrection and discontent; therefore, one single slip of the tongue betraying political ambitions of any sort would bring Jesus face to face with charges of political subversion against Caesar, the accusation for which He is finally crucified. There was, of course, one main problem with their strategy: Jesus was not stupid. He could out-smart anyone, any time; and He did so on this particular occasion.

The tax in question was not the temple tax of Matt. 17: 24, but the poll tax or head tax levied by the Roman government upon all adult males in Judea. Failure to pay the tax was, therefore, a criminal offense against Caesar. It had been a hot political issue since its institution in AD 6 when Judea was made a Roman province directly governed by Roman officials (see notes, p. 4), and many Jews—the Zealots particularly—considered it blasphemous to pay taxes to Caesar. Jesus’ enemies hypocritically attempt to lure Him into a trap with flattery: “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and *defer to no one*; for You are not partial to any” (Matt. 22: 16; so also Mk. 12: 14; Lk. 20: 21). By “deferring to no one”, they meant Caesar himself and hoped Jesus would give them an unqualified “No” to the question of paying taxes. If He said, “No, it is not lawful to pay Caesar the poll tax”, it would be interpreted as political resistance against Caesar in which case He could be turned over to the Roman authorities. In fact, the Sanhedrin later accuses Jesus before Pilate on these very terms, that He forbade the payment of taxes to Caesar—which, of course, was an outright lie (Lk. 23:2).

On the other hand, by giving the poll tax, Jesus would be acknowledging that He was subject to the political authority of Caesar. The difficulty with this position was two-fold. First, Roman Caesars claimed the divine rights of gods walking on earth (see below). Thus, if Jesus simply said “Yes, it is lawful to pay Caesar the poll tax, this would be construed (interpreted) by the more radical Zealots as blasphemy against Yahweh, the only true God. Second, He would lose some support of the common people who considered the tax burdensome and distasteful (Chamblin, p. 200; Carson, p. 459), and He would lose credibility with the people as the Messiah who, they thought, had come to deliver them from the Romans (Geldenhuis, p. 503; Rushdoony, p. 720). There was no unqualified “yes” or “no” answer available to Jesus and His enemies knew it. It was a classic case of being “between a rock and a hard place”.

From Lk. 20: 20, it appears that they were expecting the negative answer, possibly because Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem as a king accepting the accolades (praises) of all the multitudes. Would He now give this up by accepting submission to Caesar? But Jesus gives neither an unqualified “no” nor an unqualified “yes”. Rather, He draws attention to the face and inscription imprinted



on the Roman coin, the denarius, the most common coin in the realm and the particular coin used to pay the tax. On one side of this coin was the face of Tiberius Caesar (who reigned as emperor of Rome from 14-37 AD) along with the words or inscription, “Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the *Divine* Augustus”—a blatant and blasphemous claim to semi-divinity. On the reverse side of the coin was the face of the emperor’s mother Livia portrayed as the earthly incarnation of the goddess Pax (“peace”) along with another inscription, “High Priest”—a reference to the emperor cult (Chamblin, p. 201; Hendriksen, p. 803). By asking the spies (Lk.) to produce the denarius themselves, Jesus forces them into an implicit admission that they, too, recognized Caesar’s political authority; for wherever an emperor’s coin was in use, his authority was present (Geldenhuys, p. 504; Lane, p. 424).

In the following statements, however, Jesus cleanly discriminates (separates) between *lawful submission* to Caesar’s political authority and *unlawful worship* of Caesar as a god. By saying, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”, Jesus admits that it is proper to pay one’s taxes to the lawful authorities, no matter what *kind* of authority—good or bad. One does not violate His religious conscience by submitting to political authority, however evil and corrupt it is. In fact, submission to political authority is actually *included* in one’s submission to God (cf. Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Pet. 2: 13-15 where Paul and Peter follow the Lord’s lead with regard to governing authorities, even ruthless ones like Caesar Nero). However, if Jesus failed to *qualify* His answer, He would be accused of submitting to Caesar’s claim to *divinity* and his right to be *worshipped*. Therefore, He added, “and to God the things that are God’s.” Tacitly (without words), He implies that Caesar was the lawful *political* authority, but this was as far as his authority extended. He could not claim for himself *religious* prerogatives which belonged only to God. Thus, Jesus made it clear that there was an authority which *transcended* (went beyond) Caesar’s, and that this higher authority was the only basis for Caesar’s authority.

There are obligations to the state which do not infringe the rights of God but are grounded in his appointment (cf. Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Tim. 2: 1-6; Tit. 3: 1f; 1 Pet. 2: 13-17). By recognizing the relative autonomy of the civil authority in the first part of his response, Jesus showed himself opposed to any belief in an essentially theocratic state [a state ruled directly by God without any earthly rulers] and to any expectation of an imminent eschatological consummation of his own mission. But by distinguishing so sharply between Caesar and God he tacitly [without words] protested against the idolatrous claims advanced on the coins. There is always inherent in civil authority a tendency to reach beyond its appointed function, a tendency which leads to self-transcendence. The temptation to self-glorification which always accompanies power was particularly clear in the extravagances of the imperial cult, with its deification of the state [the state becomes god walking on earth] and its civil head. Jesus emphatically rejected this insolent confusion between man and God; divine honors belong to God alone. The second part of his response, seen in the total context of Jesus’ life and teaching, shows that the duties toward God and Caesar, though distinct, are not completely separate, but are united and ruled by the higher principle of accomplishing in all things the will of God. Because men bear the image of God they owe their total allegiance to him (Lane, pp. 424-425, words in brackets mine).

As subsequent history would prove, Jesus’ teaching on this occasion would be crucial to the survival of the church through several waves of Roman persecution. Implicit (assumed) in the requirement to be law-abiding citizens of the Roman Empire was the requirement to declare Caesar as Lord, something the faithful could not do. As the alternative, they accepted brutal martyrdom. As Carson has noted, “Paganism customarily insisted even more strongly on the *unity of what we distinguish as civil and religious obligations*. Indeed, some decades later Christians faced the wrath of Rome because they refused to participate in emperor worship—a refusal the state judged as *treason*” (p. 459; emphasis mine).

Writing over half a century ago, Geldenhuys offers a prophetic warning of the increasing infringement upon religious liberty by governing authorities arrogating (seizing improperly) rights which belong only to God.

Modern trends in the world indicate that (as is already the case in many countries) the fiercest and most dangerous attacks by the world against the church of Christ will henceforth be delivered on the *political* front—*the state more and more demands the sole right over the life of its subjects*, even with regard to the forming of their characters and their philosophy of life. As happened during the first centuries after the foundation of Christianity, believers will more and more be called upon to choose between absolute loyalty to Christ and loyalty to secular authorities who deny and reject the supreme right of God. The faithful, however, must never be disobedient to Jesus' command to "render unto Caesar" the things which are really due to him (in accordance with the law of God (*Luke*, pp. 505-506; emphasis mine).

His predictions have proven true, for more Christians have been killed for their faith in Jesus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the centuries combined since the death and resurrection of Christ. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will probably prove to be far bloodier than the previous one. Modeling the proper Christian response shortly after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Apostle Peter—hailed before the Sanhedrin and warned to be silent about the resurrection of Christ—replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). Submission to the state is acceptable only to the point at which it violates the law of God. When called upon to obey the law of the state or the law of God, the choice is clear—we must obey God even if it means disobeying men.

Moreover, one of the more dangerous ways Christians bow the knee to statist religion is their insidious (slow and unnoticeable) but progressive dependence upon the state—rather than God—for financial and "social" security (Chamblin, p. 202). From cradle to grave, citizens are demanding increasing levels of goods and services—particularly health, education, and welfare—from the hands of "almighty" government seemingly unaware of the tremendous price they are paying in higher taxes, diminishing freedoms, and the undermining of religious values in the classroom (cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education*).

#### ***H. Jesus Tested by the Sadducees Concerning the Resurrection—Matt. 22: 23-33; Mk. 12: 18-27; Lk. 20: 27-40***

We encounter the Sadducees only three times in Matthew (chps. 3, 16, and 22) and only here in Mark and Luke. From the sheer number of references to Pharisees (100 times in the NT versus 14 times for the Sadducees—Wessel, p. 735), it is obvious that they were by far the more influential party during Jesus' ministry. According to Josephus (cited by Chamblin), the Sadducees appealed only to the wealthy class and had no support among the common masses while the Pharisees were greatly respected among the masses for their piety and their lack of discrimination among classes. While the Sadducees had their seat of power in the temple, the Pharisees' influence arose primarily from the synagogue; thus, when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the Sadducees virtually disappeared while the Pharisees continued to have great influence. Both groups had their scribes or theologians, although there were far more scribes among the Pharisees than among the Sadducees (For a detailed discussion of the origin and beliefs of Pharisees and Sadducees, as well as their particular emphasis and influence, see Knox Chamblin's unpublished class notes on *Matthew*, pp. 263-266. For some difference of opinion concerning the constituency of the high priesthood, see Lane, p. 426, and Wessel, p. 735, both

citing Josephus, *Antiquities*. They argue against the commonly held position that the Sadducees were the aristocratic party consisting of priestly families and the lay nobility).

The subject of the resurrection from the dead was a burning issue—among others—separating the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The fires were still burning when the Apostle Paul stood before the Sanhedrin almost 30 years later (Acts 23: 1-9). The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits; but the Pharisees believed in all three. Testing Jesus on this occasion, the Sadducees approach Him with a made-up story (or a story from the apocryphal book of *Tobit*—Lane, p. 427), yet one which represented a believable dilemma (difficult problem) if there really was a resurrection from the dead. It is worthy of note that they present a scenario (situation) in which a woman had been married to seven husbands, not a husband who had been married to seven wives, in which case there would be no dilemma (problem). Jewish males were permitted more than one wife, but women were not permitted multiple husbands.

In this particular case, the woman had been married to seven brothers, and the Sadducees refer to the law of levirate marriage in Deut. 25: 5-10. If a married man died without a male heir, his brother (whether married or unmarried) would be required to take his brother's widow as his wife. The first-born son from this new union would be named after the deceased brother. The purpose of this legislation—predating Moses (cf. Gen. 38: 8)—was to continue the hereditary line and the family inheritance of the deceased brother (Ruth 4: 5). Judah's son, Onan, had despised this generous provision for heirless males in Israel and had incurred God's wrath (Gen. 38: 9-10). According to the legislation of Deut. 25, violation did not receive the death penalty but resulted in public ridicule in the city gates (v. 9) eventually losing this negative stigma by the time of Ruth (4: 7, in which there is no mention of Ruth spitting the man in the face). Levirate marriage had been largely set aside by Jesus' day (Carson, p. 461).

Jesus already knew that their question was purely hypothetical, as well as hypocritical, since they did not believe in the possibility of either a bodily resurrection or the immortality of the soul (Chamblin, p. 264, citing Josephus, *Antiquities*). Therefore, He could have skipped the question altogether and moved on to the statement about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Thankfully, He answered the question not so much for the curiosity of the Sadducees, who would not accept His answer anyway, but for His disciples both then and now who would ponder such questions. So, whose wife would she be in the resurrection? Answer: She would not be the wife of any of them, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22: 30). Mark is more explicit about the prospect of resurrection, "For when they **rise from the dead**, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (v. 25). Luke distinguishes between the two different eons (*aion*), the present age and the age to come, "The sons of **this age** marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to **that age** and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage" (vv. 34-35).

Men and women who participate in the resurrection to life do not marry in heaven. If resurrected men had never been married on earth, neither will they "marry" in heaven. Women who had never been "given in marriage" in "this age" will never be "given in marriage" in "that age", the new age of the resurrection. The principle must also apply to those who were **previously married** in this age since this is precisely the question under consideration—what about the woman who had been married to seven men? Those who were married in this age will not

belong to a former husband or wife in the age to come. Rather, all of those participating in the resurrection to life will be “like angels in heaven”. The mention of angels by itself refuted Sadducean theology which did not allow for angels, but what precisely does Jesus mean by likening the “sons of God” or “sons of the resurrection” (Lk. 20: 36) to angels? Angels are “ministering spirits” (*pneuma*) who render helpful service to believers (Heb. 1: 14), and there is nothing in the scriptures indicating that they possess physical bodies like men, although they may *appear* in bodily form (Gen. 18: 1-2 compared with 19: 1-5). Yet it is clear from Paul’s epistles that believers will enjoy resurrected physical bodies (*soma*) in the age to come, imperishable bodies which cannot “die anymore” (Lk. 20:36; 1 Cor. 15: 35-58). Thus, the likeness to the angels which Jesus is making is a likeness in only *two particular respects*—the state of *marriage* and *immortality*. He is not saying that believers will be like the angels who do not possess physical bodies, but that believers will be like the angels *who do not marry and who do not die*.

The general consensus among commentators is that the procreation of the human race resulting from marriage will no longer be necessary because of *immortality*; thus, the marriage relationship as we now know it will no longer be necessary (Chamblin, Geldenhuys, Wessel and Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, p. 252, cited in Chamblin). This is certainly true, but the overwhelming emphasis in Genesis 2 is the *human companionship* of the marriage relationship, not procreation. It was not good that man should be alone; consequently, God ordained that man and woman would marry to deal with the problem of *loneliness* (cf. Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*). While it is true that man was commanded to fill the earth with fellow image-bearers, this function could have been accomplished without the companionship of marriage. (Solomon could populate the world far more efficiently with 700 concubines than he could with just one wife, but it is very doubtful that he had meaningful relationships with any of them.) Sexual relationships alone do not constitute intimate companionship nor do they produce offspring which become families. The relationship between husband and wife is an earthly picture of God’s eternal plan for the union between Christ and His church, an intimate union which demonstrates God’s love and companionship with His people—the pre-existing relationship upon which earthly marriage is based (Eph. 5: 32). God ordained the companionship between husband and wife precisely for the purpose of painting a picture of Christ’s future relationship to His church (Eph. 5: 22-28), a marriage relationship which is also presented in the OT between Yahweh and Israel (Hosea).

The sexual act between a husband and wife who truly love one another was the most meaningful way for God to depict the spiritual intimacy of the union between Christ and the church. Thus, sexual relationships in the age to come do not cease primarily because the human race no longer needs to propagate itself, but because the spiritual marriage between Christ and His church will be fully realized in the consummated kingdom of God. If propagation were the only issue, God could allow sexual relations without allowing conception. Christ and His fully sanctified church will be spiritually one (Eph. 5: 26-27). Furthermore, even as a husband and wife produce human offspring which become an earthly family, the relationship between Christ and the church, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, produces spiritual offspring which are incorporated into the church. This spiritual family—although a present reality—reaches its goal in the consummated kingdom in the new heaven and new earth. The people of God will be spiritually one as the household of faith—the heavenly family which had its eternal foundation in the

Trinitarian relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this new, consummated family God's people will relate to one another perfectly as brothers and sisters in Christ without the hindrance of sin. ("To live above with the saints we love; it is all glory. But to live below with the saints we know; well, that's another story!")

What, then, will become of the marriage relationships between believers in the resurrection? Will former marriages be annulled and will husbands and wives completely forget their former marriages? Previous relationships will not be forgotten but will be translated into a higher reality in keeping with their original goal in the eternal plan of God. Just as marriage on earth depicted the relationship between Christ and the church, former marriages will reach their intended goal of perfect intimacy without the necessity of sexual intercourse.

In that Day when sin is abolished—and with it our alienation from God and from each other—spouses shall become capable of relating to one another with far greater freedom and intimacy than is now possible or tolerable—or even imaginable. Such freedom and intimacy are disconcertingly elusive even in the best marriages; and they are sometimes woefully lacking even in marriages that remain formally intact. That Day will bring an immeasurable deepening of these relationships. As pride will then have been fully and finally conquered, the woman who in this life has been married to seven husbands will be free to love all seven of them without the slightest favoritism, exploitation or manipulation [perfectly, but not sexually]. And for the same reason, there will be no room for jealousy or suspicion on the part of the seven husbands—only room for returning her love in full. In that Day, the question of "Whose wife will she be?" will have become irrelevant (Chamblin, pp. 205-206, words in brackets mine).

But whether we can call such eternal relationships "marriages" is debatable, and it appears from the text that Jesus does not allow this terminology, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." The comparison with angels cannot be limited to their immortality, but must also include the fact that angels do not marry. Whatever this relationship will be, we can be confident that Christians who were formerly married in this life will not be disappointed with the new arrangement.

The reference to angels may also point to another comparison. The Apostle Paul's only reservation against marriage was that the obligations of marriage necessarily limited one's undivided devotion to God's service (1 Cor. 7: 32-35). The angels in heaven have but one purpose, undistracted worship and service to God. Included in this service is their ministry to the saints (Heb. 1: 14) which would seem unnecessary in the consummated kingdom. Thus, as the angels are undistracted in their devotion and service to the Lord, we shall also be wholly available and committed to the Lord's service in the new heaven and earth.

We come now to *Jesus' quotation of Ex. 3: 6*. Why would He use this quotation rather than Isa. 26: 19; Dan. 12: 2; or other OT texts which more explicitly mention a bodily resurrection from the grave? While accepting other parts of the OT canon, the Sadducees gave priority to the Pentateuch (which, to their embarrassment, told stories of angels; Gen. 19: 1). Thus, Jesus eliminates ahead of time any disagreement about scriptural authority by choosing the Sadducee's favored portion of the OT. Yet, the passage quoted contains considerable proof of the resurrection; otherwise, Jesus would not have used it. God speaks to Moses from the burning bush in terms of His covenant relationship with the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12: 1-3). In response to His promises to make them a people for Himself, to give them a land, and to be their God, He will now act on their behalf to deliver them from Egypt (Gen. 6: 3-7). It

is inconceivable, however, that God's mighty hand of salvation would serve only to grant temporal deliverance from slavery without conquering the ultimate enemy, death itself (1 Cor. 15: 26) (Chamblin, p. 207). (Comparably, it would be like a mother saving her small child from a spider while delivering him over to a lion.) Abraham's faith transcended all promises of earthly real estate, for he lived in the land of promise as an alien and sojourner rather than an owner, looking instead for another city with better foundations, whose builder and maker was God (Heb. 11: 8-10). The ultimate promise of God represented in the exodus and in the land of Canaan was Emmanuel, "God with us", and "it is unthinkable that he would ever allow death to sever that bond and bring that fellowship to an end" (Chamblin, p. 207). "***I am*** the God of Abraham", not "***I was*** the God of Abraham."

The concept "God of the dead" implies a blatant contradiction, especially in the context of the Sadducean understanding of death as extinction, without hope of resurrection. If God has assumed the task of protecting the patriarchs from misfortune during the course of their life, but fails to deliver them from that supreme misfortune which marks the definitive and absolute check upon their hopes, his protection is of little value. ***But it is inconceivable that God would provide for the patriarchs some partial tokens of deliverance and leave the final word to death, of which all the misfortunes and sufferings of human existence are only a foretaste.*** If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the promises of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula "the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" is the symbol. It is in fidelity to his covenant that God will resurrect the dead. In citing Ex. 3: 6 Jesus showed how resurrection faith is attached in a profound way to the central concept of biblical revelation, the covenant, and how the salvation promised by God to the patriarchs and their descendants in virtue of the covenant contains implicitly the assurance of the resurrection. It was failure to appreciate the essential link between God's covenant faithfulness and the resurrection which had led the Sadducees into their grievous error (Lane, p. 430; emphasis mine).

Luke tells us that some of the scribes complimented Jesus' answer, and did not have the courage to ask Him about anything else (20: 39-40).

***I. Jesus Tested by the Pharisees about the Greatest Commandment—Matt. 22: 34-40; Mk. 12: 28-34***

Learning that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees decided to try ***their*** wits against Him (Matt. 22: 34-35; "testing Him"). Given the lawyer's favorable response to Jesus' answer (Mk. 12: 32) along with Jesus' favorable disposition toward him (Mk. 12: 34), it is likely that he was sent by other Pharisees with malicious intent to test Jesus but was more sympathetic to Him than they were. By the combination of titles given to the man—"scribe" (Mk.) and "lawyer" (Matt.), we understand that a scribe was not someone who made copies of the scriptures, but one who was an expert in the Law, a theologian (Chamblin, pp. 208-209).

The rabbis commonly debated the "lightness" or "heaviness" of the 613 commandments which had been derived from questionable interpretations of the Law of Moses (Hendriksen, pp. 808-809; so also Wessel, Chamblin, Carson). Moreover, the "traditions" had acquired a status equal to the Law itself (cf. Matt. 15: 2-6 and commentary above). "...the rabbis of Jesus' day were much exercised to find summary statements of OT laws and establish their relative importance; and in all probability the question arose enough times in Jesus' ministry that he developed a fairly standard response to the question" (Carson, p. 463). "It was not surprising that a Jewish ***nomikos*** [an expert in the law] should ask this question. In the Jewish religion the law was central, obedience to the Law was crucial. So if there was in fact one 'greatest commandment'

in the Law, it mattered terribly that a scribe should identify it for himself and his listeners” (Chamblin, p. 208; words in brackets mine).

While the scribe asks only for the greatest commandment (singular), Jesus gives him *two* commandments, Deut. 6: 4-5 and Lev. 19: 18 (Matt. omits Deut. 6: 4 since his Jewish readers would assume it, while Mk. includes it for his Gentile readers who would not be familiar with it). The lawyer would quickly recognize that Jesus had summarized *all Ten Commandments* of the Decalogue in Ex. 20: 3-17—the *first four* dealing with one’s obligation to love God and the *last six* dealing with one’s obligation to love his neighbor. Jesus’ combination of the two OT texts (Deut 6 and Lev. 19) was not uncommon, and on a previous occasion a different lawyer had done the same thing (Carson, p. 464, citing Lk. 10: 25-28; but this is not the same occasion as Matt. 22 and the question presented to Jesus on that occasion was, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”). The separate divisions of the person into heart, soul, and mind (Matt.) or heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk.) do not need individual analysis, but is Hebrew parallelism representing the *whole person* who should love God with his *whole being*—a complete and undivided commitment. “The point is that God’s whole-hearted love must not be answered in a half-hearted manner” (Hendriksen, p. 809).

While putting the two commandments *together*, Jesus, nevertheless, makes a clear *distinction* between the two. The “great and foremost commandment” is distinguished from the “second” in Matt. 22: 38-39, and the “foremost” commandment is distinguished from the “second” in Mk. 12: 29, 31. Loving God is *primary* to loving one’s neighbor. He is our Creator by whom and for whom we live and exist (Acts 17: 24-28). All that we do must be grounded in our love for God, especially since the manifestation of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10: 31). Love for God is also primary for the simple reason that genuine love for one’s neighbor is *impossible* without love for God and must spring from one’s love for God. “We love, because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4: 19). Just as love for God must include our *emotions* and *thoughts*, so love for one’s neighbor must also include the same. Philanthropy can often be emotionally detached and distant, and it is possible to be kind to people without truly loving them (1 Cor. 13: 3; see also vv. 4-7 which describe the mental and emotional aspects of love). We may consider a person only an object of pity, but quickly forget him when out of sight (“out of sight and out of mind”), but genuine love for people also stirs the heart and the feelings (cf. Matt. 9: 36; “felt compassion”, *splanchnizomai*, to be moved in the inward parts or to feel something powerfully inside). Understood in this comprehensive sense, we more readily recognize how impossible it is to love one’s neighbor without loving God first, as well as recognize how inadequately we love our neighbor.

At the same time, love for one’s neighbor cannot be limited to emotion, but must include *action*. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the criterion (requirement) for inheriting the kingdom is not an emotional reaction to those in need, but the activity of helping them (Matt. 25: 31-46), and the good Samaritan did not merely feel sorry for the beaten traveler, but expended considerable energy and money restoring him to health (Lk. 10: 30-36). Following this emphasis in Jesus’ teaching James, His brother, says, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?” (James 2: 15-16). By the same reasoning, our love for God cannot be merely emotional and mental, but must *do* something; and

*this is precisely why the two commandments, although distinguished from one another, cannot be separated from one another.* How can we demonstrate our love for **God** unless we love our **neighbor** as we love ourselves, for “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn. 4: 20)? “Hate” can also mean *neglect* of a brother’s needs, for John also says, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us [in other words, Jesus did something]; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love *with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth*” (1 Jn. 3: 15-18). Mere talk has always been cheap. If action without love is “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13: 1), then “love” without action is disguised hatred.

Therefore, just as keeping individual laws (against murder, theft, adultery, etc.) cannot be a substitute for love—since love includes the heart, motive, and emotions—love also cannot replace the law. Jesus is not abolishing the law by substituting love (Matt. 5: 17); He is explaining the fulfillment of the law in the requirement to love. “Love *does no wrong* to a neighbor; therefore love is the *fulfillment of the law*” (Rom. 13: 10). As John Murray explains,

We are not to regard love as dispensing with law or as displacing law as if what has misleadingly been called “the law of love” has been substituted under the gospel for the law of commandments or precepts. Paul does not say that the law *is* love but that love *fulfills* the law and law has not in the least degree been depreciated or deprived of its sanction....It is the law that love fulfills...(Romans, pp. 160-161; emphasis mine).

...the main thought is that when love is in exercise, then all the commandments receive their fulfillment and so they can all be reduced to this demand (pp. 162-163).

It should also be understood that to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is not a command to love *ourselves* but to love *others* (Chamblin, p. 209). The often-quoted dictum so popular in the West, “Love yourself”, is hardly needed. (Even suicide is a selfish escape from reality.) Self-love and self-interest are natural principles of the human heart of which we scarcely need reminders. They are our normal pattern. What we need to be reminded of is the necessity to put ourselves in “others’ shoes” so that we might be stimulated to love them in ways that we would wish to be loved ourselves.

By quoting these two commandments, Jesus had summed up not only the Pentateuch (the Law) but also the *prophets* (Matt. 22: 40). This is true for two reasons. First, the entire history of redemption, including the witness of the OT prophets, demonstrated the love of God for His people (Hendriksen, p. 810). Second, even the OT prophets had shown the superiority of obedience to sacrifice and offerings (Wessel, p. 737; citing 1 Sam. 15: 22 and Hos. 6: 6). The scribe perceived the wisdom of Jesus’ answer and proved his understanding by including a reference to this witness, “To love is...much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mk. 12: 32-33). At this, Jesus encourages him to persist in his quest for the truth, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (v. 34).

We will never know until judgment whether this particular scribe made it into the kingdom or not, but we do know that not *all* the religious leaders of the Jews remained recalcitrant (stubbornly opposed) to Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea—an aristocrat who buried Jesus’ body in



his own tomb (Matt. 27: 57-60)—was a member of the Council (or Sanhedrin; Lk. 23: 50-53). Nicodemus—who came to Jesus by night and to whom Jesus addressed the most familiar words in the Bible (Jn. 3: 16)—was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews (Jn. 3: 1-2) who prepared Jesus' body with myrrh and aloes (Jn. 19: 38-40). After Jesus' ascension and Pentecost many of the priests in Jerusalem came to faith in Christ (Acts 6: 7). As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, all were not lost! God had chosen *some* of them to salvation.

***J. Jesus Questions the Pharisees about David's Prophecy in Ps. 110: 1—Matt. 22: 41-46; Mk. 12: 35-37; Lk. 20: 41-44***

As far as we can tell from the narrative, Jesus is still teaching in the temple. On the same day His authority has been challenged by the chief priests and elders, followed by Jesus' question about the teaching of John the Baptist, followed by the parables of the two sons, the landowner, the marriage feast, the testing of the Pharisees and Herodians about paying taxes to Caesar, the testing of the Sadducees about the resurrection, and the question about the greatest commandment. The chronological and spatial (place) indicators in *Matthew* are Matt. 21: 18; 21: 23; and 22: 23. In *Mark* they are 11: 12 (the next day after the triumphal entry when He cursed the fig tree); 11: 15 (the *same* day as He cursed the fig tree and cleansed of the temple); 11: 20 (the *next* day after the cleansing of the temple and the discovery of the withered tree); 11: 27 (His authority questioned while in the temple; the parables listed above), 12: 35 (His question to the Pharisees "in the temple"). He does not leave the temple until Mk. 13: 1 when He goes out to the Mount of Olives. The significance of this is that for *an entire day (Tuesday)* Jesus was in constant conflict with one or more groups which were conspiring to destroy Him—the chief priests, scribes, elders, Herodians, Pharisees and Sadducees. And the day is not yet over! The triumphal entry had occurred on Sunday, the cleansing of the temple on Monday. Things are happening very rapidly, and there is much to report in the few days leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection. Thus, it is no wonder that the synoptists spend so much space reporting on the last week of Jesus' life and ministry.

Chamblin (p. 208) has noted that the verb in Matt. 22: 34, "gathered together" (*sunago*), is the same verb used in the LXX (Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT) in Ps. 2: 2, "The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together [literally, "gather together"] Against the LORD and against His Anointed." Satan and the whole world of wicked men are arrayed on the battlefield in opposition to the kingdom of Christ crying, "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!" (Ps. 2: 3) The Pharisees are still "gathered together" (*sunago*) when Jesus goes on the offensive and asks *them* a question, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" (Matt. 22: 41-42). Interpreted from the perspective of Ps. 2: 2, the passage before us is very significantly positioned in the present context of *continual conflict* between Jesus and His enemies.

By using the word "Christ" (*Christou*), Jesus could only mean the Messiah, "which translated means Christ" (Jn. 1: 41; 4: 25). The long-awaited Messiah was expected to come from the *Davidic line* according to Yahweh's covenant promise to David (2 Sam. 7: 12-13; cf. Ps. 89: 3-4, 20, 24, 28, 34-37; Amos 9: 11; Mic. 5: 2; cited in Hendriksen, p. 811; see also Ps. 132: 10-11, 17-18; Isa. 9: 7; 11: 1, 10; 16: 5; 22: 22; 55: 3; Jer. 17: 24-25; 23: 5; 30: 9; 33: 15, 17, 20-26; Ezek. 24: 23-24; 37: 24-25; Hos. 3: 5; Zech. 12: 7-12). After the feeding of the five thousand

(occurring after the second Passover of His public ministry—Jn. 6: 4), some of the multitude were saying that Jesus was the Christ who had to be the offspring of David from Bethlehem (Jn. 7: 41-42; cited also in Hendriksen, p. 811). In His triumphal entry a few days before, the crowds had greeted Him with Messianic blessings, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!” (Mk. 11: 10; Matt. 21: 9). What is more, Jesus had often accepted the title, “Son of David”, ascribed to him by the common people (Matt. 9: 27; 15: 22; 20: 30-31), a fact which had infuriated the Jewish leaders (Lk. 19: 39b; Matt. 21: 15) (Hendriksen, p. 811).

***What was not expected, however, was a Messiah who was also God.*** Thus, Jesus’ self-revelation in this passage—though somewhat veiled (hidden)—is striking. The Pharisees answer His initial question correctly, according to the normal Jewish understanding of Messiah’s origin, “The son of David.” Jesus then follows this answer with another question following logically from Ps. 110. How does David—whose authorship of Ps. 110 and inspiration by the Holy Spirit is assumed (Matt. 22: 43)—call the Messiah his “Lord”? In other words, how can the Messiah be both ***David’s descendent*** and ***David’s Lord*** at the same time? By asking the question, Jesus is not casting any doubt upon the Davidic ancestry of the Messiah, but merely forcing the Pharisees into recognizing the obvious implications from the OT text—***the Messiah is not merely a human ruler but also a divine ruler*** (Geldenhuys, p. 515; so also Lane, p. 435; Carson, p. 468).

There is a distinction ***in person*** in the Hebrew text of Ps. 110: 1 between the “Lord” (***Yahweh***) who speaks and the “Lord” (***Adonai***) who is spoken to; yet, ***Adonai*** (the Lord who is spoken to) is, nevertheless, elevated to a position of exclusive honor at the right hand of ***Yahweh***, an honor which could never be given to a mere man (Chamblin, p. 210). Comparably, the “Ancient of Days” (God the Father) gives the “Son of Man” (Christ) an “everlasting dominion which will not pass away” (Dan. 7: 9-14; cited by Chamblin).

***But the deity of the Messiah also implies a great deal about the nature of His kingdom.*** The Jews were looking exclusively for a human kingdom likened to the earthly kingdom of David. But if the Messiah was also God, then His kingdom should be expected to be different from David’s; thus “Jesus seized the initiative to point to the disparity between the narrow political hopes associated with popular messianism and the intention of scripture” (Lane, p. 436, footnote). In other words, had the scribes been better theologians and exegetes, they would not have missed the obvious implications of Messiah’s deity from this psalm! (Chamblin, p. 210).

The point made is that David himself distinguished between his earthly, political sovereignty and the ***higher level of sovereignty assigned to the Messiah***. The Messiah is not only “son of David”; he is also, and especially, his Lord. ***His role is not to restore on earth the Davidic kingdom or the sovereignty of Israel.*** He does not simply ***extend*** the work of David, but comes to establish a wholly different Kingdom, the throne of which is situated at God’s right hand. It is thus the question of ***another kind of fulfillment to the promise than that which contemporary Judaism expected.*** The political-nationalistic concept of the messianic mission supported by the scribes is simplistic.

When Jesus posed his question within the Temple precincts he stood before his suffering and death (cf. Chs. 10: 32-34; 11: 18; 12: 12). He knew himself to be in a situation of conflict for the salvation of the people of God. The battle would not be fought against ***Rome*** or any other earthly power, and it had no national-political goals. ***It was rather against the demonic powers of the spiritual world that he set himself.*** Victory demanded the configuration with the suffering Servant in obedience to God, fully trusting in the ***vindication promised in Ps. 110: 1.*** God’s promise to David is fulfilled by the cross which, for Jesus, is the prelude to resurrection.

This interpretation strikes at the heart of the *national-political understanding of the Davidic promise*. To the question, “In what sense, then, is the Messiah David’s son?” no satisfactory answer could be given from a scribal viewpoint. Only from the perspective of the New Covenant is the answer provided: already in the exaltation of the Messiah to God’s right hand is the promise of everlasting dominion fulfilled (II Samuel 7: 13, 16; Ps. 110: 1). In this way the Scriptures affirming Davidic sonship and the Messiah as David’s Lord were united (Lane, pp. 437-438, emphasis mine).

Implicit in Jesus’ quotation of Ps. 110 is another warning to the Jewish religious leaders quite consistent with the previous warnings of the same day—in the parable of two sons (Matt. 21: 31-32); in the parable of the vineyard owner (Matt. 21: 43-44); and in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 22: 13-14). Doubtless the purpose of such warnings was to get them to reconsider their aim in putting Him to death as well as to submit to His reign. There wasn’t any doubt at this point that the Pharisees, considered as a whole, were viciously opposed to Jesus and could be considered His worst *enemies*. Ps. 110: 44 is a Messianic promise from the Lord (Yahweh) to David’s Lord (Christ, the Messiah) that He would put *Christ’s enemies* beneath His feet. The picture would be familiar to anyone in the ancient East. A conquered enemy, even a king, is placed face down in the dust before his conqueror, low enough for the conquering king to position his foot upon his neck, thus making the humiliated enemy a footstool (Lk. 20: 43; cf. Josh. 10: 24, cited in Hendriksen, p. 812). Presently the Pharisees and all the religious and political elite of Israel were conspiring to eliminate Jesus by using any means necessary. They thus imagined *themselves* as the conquerors and *Jesus* in the dust beneath *their* feet. They would, indeed, realize their goals through His crucifixion, but only momentarily. Christ the Messiah would rise from the dead and would be exalted at the right hand of God, and to Him every knee would one day bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2: 9-11). Through Ps. 110, Jesus was warning them to follow the advice of another Psalm, “Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled” (Ps. 2: 12a); as well as inviting them, “How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” (v. 12b). The gentle Savior is fully aware of His powers. He has the authority to lay His life down and to take it back again (Jn. 10: 17-18). He is fully confident in the Father’s covenant promise to David that he would not lack a man on the throne of Israel.

The legal experts had once again been stumped (reduced to silence) by Jesus’ superior knowledge of scripture and His wisdom in interpreting it. It seemed to please the crowds (Mk. 12: 37) that “The teacher who never attended the right schools (John 7: 15-18) confounds the greatest theologians in the land” (Carson, p. 468). Thus marks the end of any Pharisaical or Sadducean attempt to get the better of Jesus, “No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question” (Matt. 22: 46).

***K. The Fifth Great Discourse in Matthew (The Seven Woes against the Scribes and Pharisees)—Matt. 23: 1-39; Mk. 12: 38-40; Lk. 20: 45-47***

***1. Introductory complaints concerning the scribes and Pharisees***

According to Hendriksen, Matt. 23 is the Fifth Great Discourse in Matthew followed by the Olivet Discourse in Matt. 24: 1—26: 1). Mark and Luke give an abbreviated account of the same discourse in the passages cited above. Carson (contra Hendriksen) denies that this chapter is a formal discourse since it lacks the *characteristic ending* of the other formal discourses found

in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7: 28); the instructions to the disciples (11: 1); the parables of the kingdom (13: 53); Jesus' discourse to the disciples about rank in the kingdom of God, stumbling blocks, the lost sheep and forgiveness (19: 1); and the last discourse about the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming (26: 1) —namely the expression, “When Jesus had finished these words...”.

Chamblin includes the material of Matt. 23 with that of Matt. 24-25 to form one single discourse of three chapters with the characteristic ending of Matt. 26: 1. The “woes” of Matt. 23 correspond to the beatitudes of Matt. 5; the mountain context of Matt. 24: 3 to the mountain in Matt. 5: 1; the judgment of Matt. 25: 31-46 to the judgment of 7: 22-27. Even the length of the discourse (three chapters) corresponds to the length of the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7 (Chamblin, p. 211). Considering these striking similarities, Chamblin's combination has merit. The first problem with this conclusion is that the woes against the scribes and Pharisees are spoken in the *temple*, while the Matt. 24 is spoken on the *Mount of Olives* (compare Matt. 21: 23, Jesus coming *into* the temple, with Matt. 24: 1-3, Jesus coming *out* of the temple and going to the Mount of Olives). Secondly, the woes are spoken in the presence of the scribes, Pharisees, crowds, and disciples while the Olivet discourse is spoken privately to the disciples alone. Thirdly, the two themes are different (Hendriksen, p. 846). I'm inclined in favor of Hendriksen's view that Matt. 23 is the *fifth* great discourse and Matt. 24-25 is the *sixth*. A further observation is that the fifth and sixth discourses could be viewed as an *inclusio* to all the material in Matthew's gospel between Matt. 7 and Matt. 26. Jesus *begins* his Galilean teaching ministry with a long discourse on the characteristics of those who will inherit the kingdom of God (the Sermon on the Mount); and He *ends* His Judean teaching ministry with judgment upon those who refuse to repent and enter the kingdom. Thus structured: the Sermon on the Mount (First Great Discourse) ending with judgment and warning against those who refuse to act upon Jesus' teaching (Matt. 7: 13-29) [Matt. 8: 1—Matt. 22] the inclusion of the Fifth and Sixth Great Discourses ending with judgment and warning to those who do not believe and practice His teaching.

The verses in *Matthew* which are common to *Mark* and *Luke* are: Matt. 23: 6-7, “They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men”—corresponding to Mk. 12: 38-39 and Lk. 20: 46; also Matt. 23: 14, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation”—corresponding to Mk. 12: 40 and Lk. 20: 47. However, v. 14 is not found in the earliest manuscripts and could be a later scribal addition. In *Matthew*, Jesus directs His criticism to the scribes *and* the Pharisees, while in *Mark* and *Luke*, He directs it exclusively to the scribes. The reference to the scribes walking around in “long robes” is found only in *Mark* and *Luke*, but the tassels on their robes are noted in Matt. 23: 5. (Unless otherwise noted, all citations will be from *Matthew*.)

Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees—made privately to the disciples a year earlier—is now pronounced publicly (Carson, p. 471; Matt. 15: 7; 16: 5-12; cited in Carson). The scribes (*grammateus*) were trained theologians (a minority were Sadducees; most were Pharisees), but many of the Pharisees were laymen without the authority or the responsibility of teaching. By condemning the Pharisees as a group, Jesus primarily condemns their theological

position without condemning every single Pharisee—Pharisees like Nicodemus who became believers (Carson, p. 471).

By sitting in the seat of Moses (v. 2), the scribes and Pharisees had assumed the *authority* of Moses; thus usurping (taking without right) the authority which belonged only to Jesus who was greater than Moses (cf. Chamblin, p. 34, referring to Matt. 5: 1; cf. Heb. 3: 1-6). It would appear at first glance that Jesus actually accepted much of their doctrine but rejected their unwillingness to “practice what they preached” (v. 3). However, this interpretation would not be consistent with the predominant witness of the Synoptics in which Jesus is often *condemning* the “traditions” of the scribes and Pharisees as blatant violations of the Mosaic Law (Mk. 7: 1-13; Matt. 15: 9—“But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men”; cf. Isa. 29: 13). In the quotation of Isa. 29: 13, Jesus condemned the rote (mechanical and without feeling) formality of the Pharisees which was quite the same as the religious formality of the Jews in Isaiah’s day. They had a form of religion but no spiritual power to keep them from sinning (2 Tim. 3: 5). Thus, in light of Mk. 7 and Matt. 15, it seems inconsistent to interpret v. 3 as a positive encouragement to observe the commandments of the scribes and Pharisees which included 613 laws which had been added to the Law of Moses. Chamblin’s suggestion that “everything” includes only the legitimate OT law and not the “traditions” appears too selective (p. 211) since Jesus does not explicitly exclude the other 613 laws which were as authoritative for the Pharisees as the OT law.

How, then, should we interpret v. 3? Carson (following Jeremias) interprets Jesus’ statement as “biting irony, bordering on sarcasm” (p. 473). (Personally, I prefer not to soften it. It *is* sarcasm, plain and simple!) The Pharisees publicly portrayed the proper behavior of those who kept the Law, but in their private lives they failed miserably (“for they say things and do not do them”). To be sure, they zealously observed the *lighter* provisions of the law which they “should have done”—e.g. (for example) tithing a tenth of their garden herbs (v. 23). They also added some laws which were not in the Law of Moses—fasting twice a week (Mk. 2: 18; Lk. 18: 12); ceremonial washing required only of priests officiating at the altar (Matt. 15: 2 and commentary); etc. The kind of deeds they did were those external deeds to be paraded in front of men for the purpose of gaining recognition (v. 5), the very thing Jesus condemns in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6). Yet, when it came to the “weightier provisions of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness”, they were careless (v. 23). They were more concerned for making a show of keeping the Sabbath than for people who were hungry or sick on the Sabbath (Matt. 12: 1-2, 10). Adopting Hillel’s more liberal views, most of the Pharisees were notorious for easy divorce (Matt. 19: 3-12 and commentary). They remind me of church leaders who are horrified at the thought of having flowers in front of the pulpit or a cross on the back wall of the auditorium, but who exhibit their love of money through extravagant life-styles and lack of generosity to those in need (1 Tim. 3: 3b). By straining at gnats, all of us are in danger of swallowing camels (v. 24). Jesus’ irony in these verses is fully in keeping with general tone of condemnation throughout the rest of the chapter (Carson, p. 474).

The chiastic arrangement of vv. 2-4 is illustrated below (Carson, p. 473).

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| A: v. 2—the leaders have taken on Moses’ teaching authority | { irony |
| B: v. 3a—do what they say                                   | { irony |

B: v. 3b—do not what they do	{ nonironical advice
A': v. 4—their teaching merely binds men	{ nonironical advice

Thus, Jesus sarcastically tells the multitudes and His disciples to do everything the Pharisees tell them to do—“but not really” (with tongue in cheek)—and ***not to imitate their behavior by omitting the weightier provisions of the law***—provisions to which they gave lip service but did not do (provisions like not committing adultery by divorcing their wives for unlawful reasons and marrying other women or taking care of their aging parents).

Another thing they did was to place heavy burdens on people without lifting so much as a finger to help them bear these burdens. This was the net effect of all the 613 laws which they ***added*** to the Mosaic Law. Jesus alluded to the burdensome legalism of the Pharisees by inviting the multitudes to take up His yoke which was lighter and less burdensome. In this way they could find the true rest for their souls that they were looking for (Matt. 11: 28-30). Even Christian leaders can think of all kinds of arbitrary rules to place upon people. Years ago I heard about some preachers who were saying that a married couple could have sex on the Sabbath only if they were trying to have children. If sex was simply for pleasure, it was forbidden.

The ***phylacteries*** were parchments of OT passages worn in leather containers in ***literal obedience*** to the commandment of Deut. 6: 4-9. Tassels were worn on the hem of their robes in obedience to Num. 15: 38-39. The scribes and Pharisees enlarged their phylacteries and tassels to signify their superior spirituality to everyone else—much as someone today might carry a very large Bible to church to impress his undiscerning Christian friends (Chamblin, p. 211, quoting F. F. Bruce). They also wore long white robes to distinguish themselves from common people who wore bright colors (Mk. 12: 38; Lane, p. 440). Furthermore, the obsequious (obedient) manner in which they were treated by the common people increased their lust for recognition (vv. 6-7).

By the majority of the people the scribes were venerated with unbounded respect and awe. Their words were considered to possess sovereign authority. When a scribe passed by on the street or in the bazaar people rose respectfully. Only tradesmen at their work were exempted from this display of deference. The scribe was greeted with titles of deepest respect: “Rabbi,” “Father,” “Master,” and there is evidence that in the first century A.D. the designation “Rabbi” was undergoing a transition from its former status as a general title of honor to one reserved exclusively for ordained scribes. When the important men of Jerusalem gave a feast they considered it an ornament to the feast to have a distinguished scribe and his pupils there. The highest places were assigned them, and the scribe was given precedence in honor over the aged, and even over parents. In the synagogues as well the seat of honor was reserved for him; he sat at the front with his back to the chest containing the Torah, in full view of the congregation (Lane, p. 440).

Given such deferential treatment, it is not surprising that the scribes and Pharisees had an inflated estimation of their own importance. By way of contrast, Jesus instructs His disciples to ***avoid any pretense of superiority*** over the masses, thus shunning the title of “Rabbi,” “Teacher,” or “Father” (vv. 8-10). His disciples should render servant-leadership to the ones under their charge without demanding special honorific titles. Second Cor. 11: 5 and 12: 11 do not present serious objections to this principle since it was necessary in that context for Paul to defend his apostleship in order to preserve the integrity of the gospel. Neither is 1 Cor. 4: 15 an objection since Paul is simply stating a ***fact*** without suggesting a ***title*** (Hendriksen, p. 824; see also Paul’s characteristic greetings, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” which also state this fact). Only when the integrity of the gospel was at stake, or when important applications of the

gospel needed to be obeyed, did Paul use his unique calling as an integral part of his argument (cf. Gal. 1-2; 1Cor. 14: 37). Otherwise, he was content to grant his followers great liberty in making proper decisions based on their free appropriation of Scripture (Philemon, v. 14). Peter, as well, calls himself an apostle, but also a “fellow elder” (1 Pet. 1: 1; 5: 1).

In light of Jesus’ warning, one can’t help but wonder from whence, specifically, all the titles of distinction have arisen in the church—“Pope so-and-so”, “Father so-and-so”, “Bishop so-and-so”, “My Lord Bishop”, “His Grace”, “Most Holy Father”, “Reverend so-and-so” (?). These titles may be part of our hallowed ecclesiastical traditions, but they do not come from scripture; thus, if we insist on using them, let’s at least be honest about them. If it is the recognition of men that we are seeking, we will most certainly forfeit (lose) the recommendation of God on judgment day. Christ alone is our teacher, and we are all brothers (v. 8) who are *essentially*—if not *functionally*—equal to one another in the kingdom of God. Biblically, some Christians must discharge their duties as teachers and elders, but it is *not the office* which defines who they are, but *the service they render to fellow Christians and to Christ*, and if this service is not rendered in love, they are “noisy gongs” or “clanging cymbals” regardless of what title they possess—“Dr. Noisy Gong” does not have a distinguishing ring to it. (See 1 Tim. 3 on the offices of elder and deacon which are described primarily in terms of character and function, never in terms of position or status.) Reciprocally, functional leaders in the church are dependent upon others in the congregation to discharge their unique gifts for their benefit and edification.

Notice also that Jesus instructs the disciples not to accept the title of “leader” (v. 10). This does not mean, as some claim, that there can be no designated leaders in a congregation or submission to such leaders (Titus 1; 1 Tim. 3; Heb. 13: 17). Rather, Jesus’ focus is the *attitude* one has toward his responsibilities as a leader (see v. 12). If one’s focus is upon the *position, status, and recognition* of a leader, he may fall prey to pride (1 Tim. 3: 6); and the history of the church is littered with the shattered remains of former “leaders” whose exalted position got the best of them. The proper focus is service. If the Christian leader is consistently focused on serving other believers or unbelievers, then he is *not thinking of himself* (v. 11). But once the focus is upon himself—*his* ministry and *his* reputation as a leader—he is in big trouble and may not even know it.

I remember a story I once heard of two great Christian leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century whose names I have regretfully forgotten. As the two friends were conversing with one another, one of them noted how each of them had become famous leaders within the Christian church. The other calmly held out his cup of tea and said, “Put your finger in this tea.” The boastful friend did so, leaving only a small ripple which soon disappeared. “This is what we are,” the other said, “only a small ripple which will soon be forgotten.” It was not long after this that this proud Christian leader fell from the pinnacle of his popularity while the other continued to be used of God in a mighty way. Thus, Jesus’ warning and promise, *“Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted”* (v. 12). But Jesus is speaking of being exalted by God, not by men, for even the most notable among us will soon be forgotten by men, even as I have forgotten the names of these two well-known leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, if we are only humbling ourselves for the *express purpose* of being exalted by men at a future date, this essentially exposes the falseness of our humility. Most of us will live obscurely and die quietly with little acknowledgment of our labors. Our hope should be that our labors will neither

be in vain nor forgotten by the **Lord**, and if they are done for His honor, they won't (1 Cor. 15: 58; Heb. 6: 10).

Whatever we have from the Lord by way of abilities, gifts, responsibilities or opportunities has been divinely given on the basis of grace. Thus, if we have received such things by grace, we have no grounds for boasting in them (1 Cor. 4: 7). In spite of Jesus' warnings to the scribes (theologians), pride continues to parade itself within the hallowed halls of church presbyteries, synods, councils, and general assemblies. In presbyteries and general assemblies, in which all ruling and teaching elders are supposedly equal, there are always some who are a "tad more equal" than others—and, generally, they aren't the ones with the smaller churches, but the bigger ones. Somehow I think Jesus would disapprove. After all, we are all brothers equal in the sight of one Teacher and one Father in heaven who does not assess men the same way we do (1 Sam. 16: 7). Jesus' warning about accepting the esteem of men should make us wary about the incessant tendency toward celebrity-worship within the church. If Christian leaders should not **accept** it, then others should not be so disposed in **giving** it. In essence, what we are doing with our excessive adulation (praise) is setting leaders up for the fall, for it is easy to lose one's balance while standing on a pedestal. This in no sense eliminates the need for proper appreciation of our spiritual leaders, and lack of such is a sign of ingratitude to God who gave them (1 Thes. 5: 12-13); yet, we must be careful to pray for them rather than exalting them to a position belonging only to Christ. It is Christ who is seated in the chair of Moses, not our Christian leaders. In the final analysis, we have only one Leader to whom we owe our ultimate allegiance and submission, Christ alone (v. 10); all other leaders are secondary.

Certainly Jesus was not justifying that particularly perverse pride that cloaks itself in discourtesy [i.e. discourtesy toward those in authority]. Yet once this has been noted, we must say that the risen Christ is as displeased with those in his church who demand unquestioning submission to themselves and their opinions and confuse a reputation for showy piety with godly surrender to his teaching as he ever was with any Pharisee (Carson, p. 475; words in brackets mine).

The consummated kingdom of God will be the **great reversal** of many of our expectations about who is great in the kingdom of God and who isn't. We may be very surprised at how many poor widows are raised to exalted positions ahead of well-known pastors and theologians. In the Lukan passage which immediately follows, we will learn of one such widow.

## ***2. Seven Woes Directed to the Scribes and Pharisees***

Beginning in v. 13 Jesus commences His "woes" directed against the scribes and Pharisees. Three major complaints against them are registered in these verses: (1) they mislead people and hinder them from entering the kingdom of heaven; (2) they distort the commandments to avoid responsibility; (3) they emphasize the minor provisions of the Law and minimize the major provisions of the Law.

***a. The first and second woes: The scribes and Pharisees mislead the people and even hinder them from entering the kingdom of heaven (vv. 13, 15; note: v. 14 is not in the best manuscripts of Matthew).***

Historical evidence indicates that the Pharisees were zealously making converts to their cause from the first century until the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD (Carson, p. 478). Conversion to



Phariseeism consisted primarily in the acceptance of their teaching which essentially rendered their disciples resistant to the message of salvation Jesus was preaching. If salvation was the reward for keeping endless rules and regulations, then Jesus' offer of salvation through repentance and faith would go largely ignored. Commonly disciples go beyond their teachers in the practical expression of their devotion, and so it was with the disciples of the Pharisees. Apparently, some of them became twice the "son[s] of hell" as they were in their rigidity in keeping man-made rules and their lack of sympathy toward those who failed to keep them. When teachers encourage others to save themselves through keeping the law—particularly their interpretation of the law—they essentially shut them out of the kingdom of God. This is true because the only way into the kingdom of God is repentance and faith, not law-keeping (Gal. 2: 16). This does not imply that they are able to shut what God has opened, as if they are more powerful than God and able to frustrate His divine plan to save sinners who are ultimately damned (Hendriksen, p. 827). What it does mean is that God uses means—true doctrine—to accomplish the end of salvation. Sometimes wicked men teach what is false and many follow them in their falsehood to their own destruction.

About thirty years ago a false prophet in Guyana named Jim Jones persuaded 900 people to drink deadly poison. He and all his converts died—an appropriate physical conclusion symbolizing their spiritual destruction. Good men teach what is true and those who follow their teaching learn the way of salvation. God is a God of means, and in His eternal providence He does not eliminate either the means to perdition or salvation. As you are reading this, thousands of Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are fanning out all over the globe to convince people—many of them evangelicals—that their way of interpreting Scripture is the correct one. Millions will believe their pernicious (harmful and dangerous) doctrines and will fail to enter the narrow way which alone leads to salvation. It would be better for these Mormon and JW missionaries to have a millstone tied around their necks and be thrown into the sea than to make one person stumble (Matt. 18: 6).

***b. The third woe: The Pharisees distort the commandments to avoid responsibility (vv. 16-22).***

This passage is similar to Matt. 5: 33-37 (see commentary above), and the meaning is essentially the same here. The scribes and Pharisees, who did not want to be legally bound to keep their oaths, hid behind technicalities in order to default on their vows. If someone swore by the temple, he was not obligated to keep his vow; but if he swore by the gold in the temple, he was obligated. The same fallacious reasoning was applied to the altar and the offering on the altar. It is possible that the temple or the altar is named deceptively as the *surety* or *collateral* behind the vow. In other words, the debtor swears by the temple or the altar that he will repay his debt knowing that he has pledged nothing that personally belongs to him and that his creditor cannot take possession of either the temple or the altar. On the other hand, by swearing upon the gold or the offering, the debtor is pledging his personal collateral which may be seized by his creditor if he defaults on the loan (Chamblin, p. 212, citing Gundry, p. 463).

In both instances, the logic is fundamentally flawed. The temple was more important than the gold which was set apart ("sanctified") for a holy use in the temple. The temple sanctified the gold; the gold did not sanctify the temple. Likewise, the altar sanctified the offerings and not the other way around. Any attempt to avoid the responsibility of keeping one's vows through false

swearing was pure hypocrisy—an outright lie and a violation of the ninth commandment against bearing false witness. Thus, this practice fitted the usual Pharisaical hypocrisy accustomed to making a show of religion but denying the inward substance of the Law. False vows could be made boldly and loudly in the public eye—thus impressing the common folk—while the inwardly corrupt Pharisee had no intention of keeping them. Better not to make a vow at all than to make a vow hypocritically.

Most importantly, false swearing takes no account of God who alone is the Lord of His temple, the altar, and all the money and offerings associated with them (Chamblin, p. 212). We may be able to avoid liability by the clever use of language (crooked lawyers do it all the time) but we cannot deceive God nor persuade Him that we are not responsible when, in fact, we are. The “God factor” (the fact of God’s omniscient and omnipresent existence) is always the deciding factor of whether something is acceptable and ethical. The important thing is not what we can get away with legally, but what is right in God’s eyes. The Pharisees regularly devised clever schemes by which they could get around the ultimate implications of the Law while at the same time presenting themselves to the undiscerning public as scrupulous (careful) law-keepers. Another example of this was the practice of declaring their possessions, “corban”, in order to shield them from their aging parents (Mk. 7: 9-13; see commentary).

***c. The fourth woe: They emphasize the minor provisions of the Law and minimize the major provisions of the Law (vv. 23-24).***

The Pharisees were scrupulous about tithing, even going so far as tithing the herbs of their gardens—mint, dill, and cumin. According to Mosaic regulations, only the **major crops** of grain, new wine, and oil had to be tithed along with the **firstborn livestock** (Deut. 14: 22-23; Lev. 27: 30; cited in Hendriksen). It is doubtful that the insignificant produce of garden herbs was included in the commandment (Hendriksen, p. 831). Nevertheless, the religious zeal of the Pharisees exercised them to go beyond the specific regulations, if necessary, to ensure obedience to the Law. Of course, their zeal for the Law was commendable but not when it favored the lighter issues rather than the “weightier” issues of the Law like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. The tithing of garden herbs is only mentioned as one example among many regulations which dominated the Pharisees’ attention. There were many such lighter issues among the other 613 laws which were not even included in the Mosaic legislation.

However, the emphasis on the lighter versus the weightier matters of the Law was nothing new. Jesus had previously affirmed that there were two great commandments in the Law upon which all others depended (Matt. 22: 36-40). This does not give us the liberty to avoid the “lighter” issues, but it does indicate that not all the commandments carry equal weight. Besides, in the OT economy, breaking some commandments incurred much greater penalties than others. A thief could pay back what he stole four-fold; but murderers, adulterers, and idolaters had to forfeit their lives by execution. Many OT texts also give priority to some commandments above others.

Hos. 6:6 “For I delight in **loyalty** rather than sacrifice, And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings”

Mic. 6: 6-8, “With what shall I come to the LORD *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you But to do *justice*, to love *kindness*, And to walk humbly with your God?”

Isa. 1: 10-17, “Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah. ‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?’ Says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek *justice*, reprove the ruthless, *defend the orphan, plead for the widow*.” Notice the emphasis upon loyalty (faithfulness), justice, and kindness (mercy) toward the helpless.

If Jesus is alluding to these OT texts—and it is likely that He is—then the argument is from the lesser to the greater. If God is willing to give *priority* to some of His *expressed* commandments ahead of others, then how much more should the Pharisees give priority to justice, mercy, and faithfulness ahead of commandments like tithing garden herbs which cannot even be found in the Law.

In each of the OT citations above, there is never any indication that the LORD (translation of *Yahweh* by the NASB and NAB) was repealing (doing away with) the sacrificial requirements of the Law. Rather, He was emphasizing the major moral and social requirements which, regularly broken, made the sacrificial system necessary in the first place. The sacrificial system, as a whole, represented the atonement of sin and the resulting purification from sin which atonement produced. But if the person failed to repent of his sin, the sacrifice was merely a symbol void of any substance or atoning value. Thus, Israel’s emphasis on sacrificial ritual became a substitute for the reality of true atonement and forgiveness. Likewise, Jesus was not repealing the tithe in this passage although nothing definite can be proven about the continuity of tithing in the NT economy from this passage alone. The emphasis is on the relative importance of tithing compared to practicing justice, mercy, and faithfulness (cf. Carson, p. 481). Tithing symbolized the dedication of all one’s possessions—and therefore the whole person—to the Lord’s use (cf. 2 Cor. 8: 1-5). Yet, if the person himself remained cold and distant from the Lord and from His people, no amount of tithing would make up for his indifference. Following in the footsteps of their disobedient forefathers, the scribes and Pharisees were once again confusing the symbol for the substance. As sacrifice became more important than repentance and obedience, tithing became more important than whole-hearted commitment and dedication of one’s whole life to the Lord. Giving from our wealth is something we should never neglect, but it is no substitute for other forms of obedience, particularly the major commitment of offering the whole person to God without reservation—including one’s money.

The mention of straining gnats and swallowing camels is a reference to the rabbinic practice of filtering wine to strain out unclean insects (Chamblin, p. 213, quoting Gundry, p. 464). Ironically, camels were also unclean (Chamblin, citing Lev. 11: 4). In spite of this warning, “straining gnats and swallowing camels” has become a hobby within evangelical circles. For

example, the “regulative principle” of worship has become the preoccupation among many esteemed teaching and ruling elders within my own denomination. Stated succinctly (briefly), nothing should be allowed in worship services except what is expressly stated in the scriptures—generally stated: the preaching of the word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and the singing of hymns. A ballet dance choreographed to Handel’s *Messiah*, for instance, would not be allowed unless it is explicitly stated, “This is not part of the regular worship.” There are many differences of opinion among reformed scholars about how this principle should be applied, and this is not the time or space to debate the issue (cf. John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*). What I propose is that this issue is “lighter” compared to the “weightier” issues the church is facing (e.g. materialism—a euphemism for the worship of mammon—and indifference toward the lost). This is especially so for the reason that reformed scholars have not made an iron-clad exegetical case for *their particular interpretation* of the regulative principle. No one would argue that public worship should be a free-for-all allowing anything that suits someone’s fancy (belly dancing?). Furthermore, we should not depreciate the proper zeal for biblical worship among those debating the regulative principle. However, relatively few unbelievers are being reached by my denomination nation-wide—that is, if the number of *adult* baptisms is any indication. This alone would not be an indictment (accusation) if it were not for the fact that many unchurched people with tattoos all over their arms and rings in their navels and noses are being drawn into charismatic churches as well as evangelistic cults like the Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses. Is it more important that we force people to worship exactly as we do, or does God give us flexibility—within Biblical limits—to bring them under the sound teaching of the gospel? (Is the formula for incense still fixed—Lev. 10: 1-2—and are we living under the Old Covenant rather than the New?) Are we sure that our worship is the *only* way God would allow it (cf. Jn. 4: 23-24; in which Jesus’ emphasis is clearly *internal substance and not external form*)? One other reformed denomination in the US has had an illustrious century of protecting the basic fundamental tenets of our faith against modernism and liberalism but has become stagnant with less than 30,000 members. Is the truth this unpalatable (unappealing), or is it just the way we present it?

Could it be that we are overly concerned about a regulation which is *not* explicitly spelled out in Scripture (and if so, where?) rather than a principle which *is* spelled out (e.g. Matt. 28: 19-20 and Matt. 6: 24)? This is certainly not to imply that anything should be permitted in a worship service (1 Cor. 14); but are we omitting more important principles while splitting hairs with this one? The Apostle Paul instructed us not to elect elders to office who are not free from the love of money, yet for over fifty years (at least) the evangelical church has institutionalized greed and extravagance among its members and even among its elders. Writing over 100 years ago, Robert L. Dabney decried the trivial waste and extravagance of his generation in the face of countless millions in pagan lands who had never heard the gospel (*Lectures, Vol. 1*, “Principles of Christian Economy”). His generation was judged with a civil war. Do we hear many preachers or theologians prophetically denouncing million dollar homes or \$75,000 cars among wealthy evangelicals while missionaries are struggling to get their funding or while African pastors shepherd multiple congregations without any theological training? (Of course, the self-indulgent Christians who buy these symbols of success—and this is all they are—are often tithers who believe that the remaining 90% is theirs to dispose of as they please.) I seldom, if ever, hear an outcry against such things (except from John Piper), although materialism and greed are perhaps the epidemic sins of the American church. (More money is being spent by American

evangelicals on weight loss programs than on missions—Ralph Winter, *Perspectives in Missions*). It is time—past time—that we major on the majors.

***d. The fifth and sixth woes: They practice external religion rather than internal purity (vv. 25-28)***

This section is closely related to the previous one. Meticulous tithing can be used to obscure (hide) the more fundamental sins of injustice, lack of mercy, and faithlessness. The Pharisees used it this way in Jesus' day, and modern Pharisees in the church continue to use it this way. Substantial contributors to church treasuries can often get away with blatant sins for which others would be disciplined. Other Pharisees may legalistically give their ten percent but when they see someone in need, they close their heart against him (1 Jn. 3: 17). After all, they have already given their tithe for the month, and think nothing else is required. In the same way, meticulous attention to ceremonial cleanness obscured the more devastating impurity of the soul. The meaning of the passage is clear. The Pharisees debated the precise manner in which cups should be cleansed, but inwardly they were self-indulgent and full of robbery. Jesus will later refer to the Pharisees' practice of "devouring widows' houses" (Lk. 20: 47; Mk. 12: 40). Widows were regular contributors to the scribes who partially depended on the contributions of others to pursue their studies in the Law. Evidently they sometimes put undue pressure upon widows to contribute more than their finances would reasonably allow (Hendriksen, p. 833). Another helpful hint in understanding the accusation of v. 25 is Luke's passing comment that the Pharisees were "lovers of money" (16: 14), thus corroborating (strengthening) the claim that they were self-indulgent (greedy). "Intemperance" may not be accurate based on Jesus' own characterization of the Pharisees in Lk. 18: 12 ("I fast twice a week", not a likely description of someone who was intemperate in food and drink). However, as Hendriksen notes, the word "self-indulgence" (*akrasia*) literally means "lack of power" (Hendriksen, p. 834, and footnote) thus the inability to control one's appetite. I believe their lack of self-control was not related to food and drink (Carson, p. 482)—as if most scribes and Pharisees were fat gluttons and drunkards, in which case they would not have had the respect of the masses—but simply avarice (greed) which they could effectively hide.

Jesus' command to first clean the inside of the cup was a call to genuine repentance, for this is what they lacked. Heart-felt sorrow over sin—not as an offense against our own self-respect but as an offense against God—is the first true step toward inward renewal and purity. But the command does not imply the ability any more than the call to repentance implies the inward power to repent. Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 11: 18). We cannot clean ourselves up inwardly, and all self-efforts to do so end in failure which often leads to a lowering of moral standards defined in terms of externals. Perhaps if we pray enough, attend church regularly, tithe regularly, and abstain from openly immoral behavior, the outside of our cup will be clean enough to gain social approval or even a reputation for being spiritual. Inwardly, however, we are the same as before, helpless to renew our own hearts and minds. Perhaps this is why the scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus so much. He "had their number" so to speak. He knew the darkness of their hearts despite their outward pretensions, and this offended them and threatened them greatly.

The scribes and Pharisees were like whitewashed tombs, beautiful—to the common people—on the outside but full of dead men’s bones on the inside, the ultimate expression of ceremonial uncleanness (Num 5: 2; 9: 6; 19: 16). During the month before Passover, inconspicuous (hard to identify) gravestones were whitewashed to help pilgrims coming into Jerusalem to instantly identify them and avoid ritual defilement thus disqualifying them from eating the Passover (Carson, p. 482). By comparing them to whitewashed tombs (“whitewashed” may be a reference to their long white robes; see above), Jesus was giving the Pharisees the ultimate insult. They who were scrupulously careful about avoiding ritual uncleanness were themselves the **very source of defilement** (Carson, p. 483). As the Jews were defiled by coming into contact with graves or dead bodies, everyone who came into contact with the scribes and Pharisees became defiled with hypocrisy and lawlessness and rendered a “son of hell” worse than their teachers (v. 15). The very ones who made great claims for keeping the Law were themselves “lawless” when it came to the weightier matters of the Law. The sad fact was that unlike the whitewashed tombs which could be avoided, the Pharisees were pursued by people who did not recognize the danger of their company.

It is common for the disciple to take on the general characteristics and emphases of his teacher, especially one with superlative ability. In one of my pastorates, I distinctly remember a relative of someone in our church who had studied under a well-known Reformed Baptist pastor. I could have almost identified the source of his influence before he told me, for he had many of the profiles (characteristics) of his teacher—in this case, legalism and intellectual arrogance. The thing he lacked was his teacher’s superlative skills. We should beware of imitating models of the “ideal teacher” lest we drift away from the one superlative model, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was meek and lowly. Paul could say to the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 1: 11) within the context of giving up lawful liberties for the sake of others, precisely what Christ did when he gave up His prerogatives as the Son of God to become a man and die on the cross.

***e. The seventh woe: They reject the prophetic word and its messengers (vv. 29-36; Lk. 11: 37-54).***

It is doubtful that the present occasion is the same as that in Lk. 11: 37-54 although there are many similarities. On that occasion, Jesus was having lunch with a Pharisee, probably with other Pharisees invited, but here He is speaking to the multitudes and the disciples with the Pharisees present (23: 1). A lawyer (experts in the Mosaic Law) is present on both occasions (compare Lk. 11: 45 with Matt. 22: 35, the broader context of Matt. 23), but they were often present when Jesus taught. Rather than standing on our heads trying to reconcile the two passages as one event, it seems simpler to me to assume Jesus is simply repeating what he had said on many such occasions.

As the tomb of King David had been honored (Acts 2: 29), so the Pharisees had made a habit of building and maintaining elaborate tombs over the graves of OT prophets (Hendriksen, p. 835). By doing so they made a public statement to the masses that they were not like their ancestors who put the prophets to death (1 Kings 18: 4). The biting irony of this practice was that they were even now planning to put Christ to death, “the greatest prophet of all” (Hendriksen, p. 835; cf. Matt. 12: 14; 21: 38, cited by Hendriksen). In v. 30, Jesus’ quotation of the Pharisees is

evidence that they were, indeed, sons of those who killed the prophets; but the relationship with their prophet-killing ancestors was much more than biological. Their hatred of Jesus and the “prophets and wise men and scribes” whom He would later send to them (v. 34) would be sufficient proof that they were spiritual descendents of the devil who was a murderer and liar from the beginning (Jn. 8: 44). They were, in Jesus’ own words, “serpents”, a “brood [offspring] of vipers [snakes]” who were filling up (*plēroō*; finish or complete) the full measure of their fathers’ murderous activities (v. 32). How will such people escape the sentence of hell when they are intent on murdering the only one who can bring them salvation?

Abel was murdered by his brother Cain, and Zechariah by the command of King Joash at the instigation (incite to action) of wicked Jews (2 Chron. 24: 20-22). Although called the son of Jehoiada in the OT text, Berechiah was his father and Jehoiada the priest his grandfather (cf. Hendriksen, p. 838; also *NAB Study Bible*, notes). Further, the story of Abel occurs in *Genesis* and the story of Zechariah in *2 Chronicles*, the end of the Hebrew OT. Thus, Jesus is saying that the blood of all the prophets shed throughout the history of the world up until that day will fall upon the present generation of the Jews. This prediction does not violate the principle of guilt found in the Law, “Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* sons, nor shall sons be put to death for *their* fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24: 16). In actual fact, the present generation of the Jews will do the same thing as their fathers. They will condemn Christ to death; they will stone Stephen (Acts 7); and they will either execute other believers directly (Acts 26: 10) or have them put to death by the Roman state (e.g. James, Peter, Paul). In prediction of the Jew’s self-maledictory oath of Matt. 27: 25 (“His blood shall be on us and on our children!”; cf. Gen. 15), Jesus says that the blood of the righteous in every generation from Abel to Zechariah will be upon their heads (v. 35; cf. Ezek. 18: 13). Christ himself is the “Prophet” promised in Deut. 18: 15-19 who is the fulfillment of all the prophets given to the Jews to bring them to repentance. But because of their rebellious hearts, they refused to listen to these prophets and will suffer the consequences (Deut. 18: 19) even before all the present generation expires (v. 36). From 66 AD to 70 AD, the Jews rebelled against their Roman oppressors who destroyed Jerusalem and killed thousands of Jews in the process.

### ***3. Jesus’ lament for the nation of Israel (vv. 37-39)***

God takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33: 11), and Jesus now laments the future destruction of Jerusalem and the death of its inhabitants. He had often looked upon the multitudes in Galilee with pity as sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9: 36). John’s gospel indicates frequent visits to Jerusalem which are not reported in the Synoptics (Jn. 2: 14; 5: 14; 7: 14, 28; 8: 2; 10: 22, 23; cited by Hendriksen, p. 840); thus, we can understand the words, “how often”. He presents another picture here of a mother hen tenderly and cautiously gathering her chicks under her wings to protect them from hawks and other predators, a common sight to anyone who has lived in an agricultural society. The capital city of Jerusalem represents the whole nation of the Jews both politically and religiously. As a nation, they had both rejected the prophets and Jesus who had later spoken to the multitudes in parables so that hearing, they would not hear and seeing, they would not see (cf. commentary on Matt. 13).

The question arises: How can Jesus (God) desire something He chooses not to accomplish (cf. Isa. 46: 10)? It is not as if Jesus does not have the power to turn the resistance of the masses into

willing compliance, and it is clear from the text that he has compassion for them; he desires them to come to him. So why don't they come? Repentance is the gift of God (Acts 11: 18), and for a reason known only to Him, God did not grant repentance to the Jews during Christ's earthly ministry nor has He done so throughout ancient and modern history to this present day. In Rom. 11: 11, Paul argues that by their "transgression" (their unbelief) salvation has come to the Gentiles and has resulted in "riches for the world" and "reconciliation" (vv. 12, 15). God has "shut up" the Jewish nation in disobedience that he might show mercy to the Gentiles (v. 32). Yet, the Jews as a nation are still beloved for the sake of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, et al; v. 28), and one day—when "the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (v. 25)—God will show mercy to the Jews by moving them to jealousy (v. 11), removing their hardness of heart, and bringing them to the Christ; "thus all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). They will no longer be "unwilling". (For an extended explanation, see John Murray, *Romans*).

For now, their "house" will be left in desolation. Jesus intends a double meaning. "**Your** house" (not "**my** house" or "my **father's** house"; Lk. 2: 49; Jn. 2: 16; cf. Chamblin, p. 213) is a reference to the temple upon which the Jews had based so much of their confidence in the continuing mercies of God (Jer. 7: 4). The temple was symbolic of the "Immanuel" principle, "God with us", but they had forgotten that the temple had been abandoned by God and destroyed in 587 BC because of idolatry. God cannot be contained in a physical temple (1 Kings 8: 27). But this was a long time ago, and the Jews believed that they had mended their idolatrous ways. Nevertheless, God will abandon His physical temple and His people once again for rejecting their Messiah, the true temple—Immanuel in the flesh. In 70 AD rampaging Roman armies would not leave one stone left upon another (Matt. 24: 1-2; Mk. 13: 1-2; Lk. 21: 5-6). Spiritually, the temple is left "desolate" roughly 40 years *before* it is physically destroyed, for the moment Christ exits the temple for the last time (24: 1; Chamblin, p. 213), God abandons it forever. As Christ breathes his last upon the cross and says, "It is finished", the six-inch thick veil separating the holy place from the holy of holies is torn from top to bottom revealing full access to God by every believer putting his trust in Christ. A "better covenant" with "better promises", a "better hope", and an eternal "high priest" replaces the Old Covenant consisting of types and shadows (Heb. 7: 19, 22; 8: 1, 6). God would not recognize the next forty years of slaughtered animals and their blood sprinkled upon the altar.

When considering the word, "blessed", v. 39 appears confusing. That every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord at His second coming is admitted (Phil. 2: 10-11). However, will those who are damned eternally greet His coming with, "Blessed"? The solution comes from interpreting Jesus' remarks as a reference to the *believing* Jews of a future generation. I have already mentioned the hope of the Apostle Paul that eventually the Jewish race as a whole will once again return to God by embracing their Messiah. This has not yet occurred, but this appears to be Paul's conviction in Rom. 11. Thus, when Christ returns in glory, His appearing will be met with the praise and joy of millions of Jewish Christians who are happy to see Him (cf. Chamblin, p. 213).

#### ***L. Jesus Praises the Poor Widow— Mk. 12: 41-44; Lk. 21: 1-4***

The incident of the poor widow probably occurred just after the discourse of the Seven Woes against the Pharisees. Receptacles for the temple treasury were located in the Court of the



Women (Lane, p. 442) since this was the only part of the temple allowed to women. After preaching against the Pharisees, Jesus rested by sitting down for a while (Mk. 12: 41; Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 919). While resting He noticed that rich people were putting their sizable contributions into the treasury—possibly with much pomp and ceremony, especially if they happened to be Pharisees (Lk. 20: 46)—while this widow put in her two copper coins worth about one-thirtieth of a day's wage. Naturally, everyone but Jesus was oblivious (unaware) of the widow's offering but **very aware** of the large sums given by the rich. This became another one of those “teachable moments” for Jesus' disciples who were inclined to think just like everyone else—wrongly. Thus, Jesus calls them aside for this significant moment in their education (Mk. 12: 43; cf. Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 940; *Mark*, p. 507, citing Mk. 3: 13 and 8:1 as other important teachable moments).

In Jesus' estimation, it was not the **amount** of money being given which determined its value in God's (His) eyes; rather, it was the measure of the **commitment and sacrifice** which the gift represented. The rich were giving out of their abundance; consequently, they were making very little sacrifice relative to their wealth. ***Their giving would make little if any difference in their life-style.*** The widow, on the other hand, was totally committed in her giving and apparently convinced that God would supply her needs in spite of the fact that she had nothing left. We should not reason from this incident that Jesus requires every believer to give all he has to the Lord's work, although He did require this of the rich ruler whose money was his god. On the other hand, the story helps adjust our attitudes in other ways. Jesus does not criticize the rich for giving large amounts, but it is equally clear that He was not impressed with their offering, either. We, however, are often **very** impressed with large donations from the rich while treating small donations as insignificant—let's be honest. Our criteria (means of assessment) are entirely worldly and have little resemblance to the mind of Christ. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50: 10; this is a synecdoche, or part for the whole; thus, God owns **everything**, including the rich man's money and his ability to make money). Therefore, God is not impressed with the amount but the attitudes and motives behind the gift; **we** are the only ones impressed with the amount. Some people tithing on 100,000 Ush per month (10, 000 Ush) are making a much greater sacrifice than someone giving \$2000 per month who is earning \$240,000 per year. The second person can easily live on the remainder (even after taxes), but 90,000 Ush (\$45 US) is not much to pay for food, clothing, shelter, let alone school fees. So, who's giving the most and who's making the biggest sacrifice? Yet, since you can't build church buildings with 10,000 Ush, the poor man's gift is considered insignificant while the rich man is a hero. The lesson to the disciples is thus, two-fold. Don't defer to the wealthy as if they were something special (cf. James 2: 1-5) but learn the lesson of total commitment from this poor, seemingly insignificant widow.

Another lesson is also intended. Ignoring the chapter divisions in *Luke*, the helpless widow (as representative of all widows in Palestine) is contrasted with Pharisaical abuse, self-importance, and affluence (20: 46-47). Nothing is clearly said about **how** the scribes and Pharisees “devoured widows' houses”, but possibly the widows were being pressured into supporting the scribes and Pharisees beyond reasonable means. At the very least, they were the victims of extortion (Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 910). Thus, the very religious system designed to help widows (cf. Ex. 22: 22; Deut. 10: 18; 14: 29; 24: 19) was oppressing them and rendering them more destitute than ever (Joel B. Green, *Luke*, pp. 728-729). Widows were being taught to tithe, but

the responsibility of the covenant community to care for them was being neglected. This was nothing but more Pharisaical legalism and hypocrisy, the same variety which often plagues the modern evangelical church. The importance of tithing is often driven home with forcefulness, but the more affluent members are seldom reminded of their responsibility to care for those in need (1 Tim. 6: 17-18). The tithe (ten percent) is paid to the church treasury—as prescribed by most pastoral preaching—for salaries (understandably), building programs (often unnecessary monuments to success), Sunday morning bulletins, choir robes, and coffee (US churches), but many believers lack even the necessary essentials to live on.

***M. The Sixth Great Discourse in Matthew—The Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24: 1—25: 46)***

***1. Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming—Matt. 24: 1-42; Mk. 13: 1-33; Lk. 21: 5-36***

***a. The disciples' question (Matt. 24: 1-3; Mk. 13: 1-4; Lk. 21: 5-7)***

In consideration of the question of whether this is the sixth great discourse in *Matthew* or a continuation of the fifth, see above. After the incident with the poor widow in the Court of Women, Jesus and His disciples leave the temple. As they are leaving, the disciples stop a moment to admire the architecture; “Teacher, behold what *wonderful* stones and what *wonderful* buildings!” (Mk. 13: 1) He promptly tells them that a day would come when the whole edifice would be demolished. While Luke omits the delay in the disciples’ response, Matthew and Mark indicate that it was not until Jesus reached the Mount of Olives that the two sets of brothers (Peter and Andrew, James and John; Matt. 4: 18, 21) questioned Him about His shocking revelation—so shocking, in fact, that it evokes (calls forth) the conclusion that Christ was talking about His future “coming” (*parousia*) *and* the end of the age. Jesus does not correct the *misunderstanding* that the end of the present age must come at the *same time* as the destruction of the temple. Indeed, He admits later that even *He* does not know the day or the hour of His return, but only the Father in heaven (Mk. 13: 32; Matt. 24: 36). Instead, he weaves the two events together—His coming and the end of the age (one event) and the destruction of the temple (a second event)—as if they were one in a mastery of prophetic foreshortening (cf. Isa. 11; in which Isaiah foretells the first and second coming of Christ as a single event). But as we shall see below, Jesus is not being deceptive or deliberately confusing in His explanation. There are significant clues to the effect that these are separate events.

***b. Preliminary signs (Matt. 24: 4-14; Mk. 13: 5-13; Lk. 21: 8-19)***

In order that His disciples not be misled, several signs are given to them. First, false Christs will arise (Matt. 24: 5; Mk. 13: 6; Lk. 21: 8—From this point forward, verses without chapters will be cited in the order of the Gospel accounts, Matt., Mk. and Lk.). Second, there will be wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation (vv. 6-7a, 7-8a, 9-10). Thirdly, there will be famines (caused by draughts and wars) and earthquakes (vv. 7a, 8a, 11). Luke adds “plagues”, “terrors” and “great signs from heaven” (v. 11). The disciples should not be alarmed by such things since they are merely the *beginning of the end, not the end itself*—like the beginning of birth pangs but not the regular, frequent contractions which constitute active labor. It is interesting that Paul uses this same analogy in Rom. 8: 22 with the verb form of the same word (*sunodinō*, “birth

pangs”, compared with *ōdin*). The earth itself is likened to a woman about to give birth. The “baby” is the new heaven and new earth unspoiled by the futility of man’s sin (Rom. 8: 18-25). Little did the disciples know that Jesus was describing the next 2000 years of world history—false Messiahs, wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes, terrors. What He means by “great signs from heaven” we will leave for later. At any rate, we now know—2000 plus years later—that the destruction of the temple and His second coming were *two* distinct events, not *one*.

Luke adds, “But *before* all these things”, the disciples will endure intense persecution, a persecution which Christ has already described previously (cf. Matt. 10: 16-22, where much of the same language is used). Considering the similarity of language, we may be inclined to interpret the coming of the Son of Man in Matt. 10: 23 along with that of Matt. 24: 3 as the same event, which means that Jesus was also using prophetic foreshortening in Matt. 10 (cf. commentary). However, in Matt. 10 the disciples would not finish the job of evangelizing the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes, while in Matt. 24 and Mk. 13, the gospel will be preached to *all the nations* before the end comes.

The description of vv. 9-14; vv. 9-13; and vv. 12-19 (respectively in Matt., Mk., and Lk.) is one which accurately summarizes the *history of the church* from the first century, beginning with the book of *Acts* and the martyrdom of Stephen, to this very day. All the apostles except John died a martyr’s death. Both Paul and Peter were beheaded in Rome. The followers of Christ would first be arrested by their Jewish persecutors who would subsequently turn them over to the civil magistrates of the Roman Empire. The afflictions of the Apostle Paul are recorded in *Acts* and his epistles. But the persecutions mentioned in these texts are not limited to the first century. The first three centuries of the church were characterized by intense persecution up until 313 AD when Emperor Constantine made the Christian faith legal in the Edict of Milan. Thousands of French Huguenots (Calvinists) were slaughtered during the period of the counterreformation in France, a country now left spiritually “desolate” through its murder of believers. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen more martyrdoms than all the other nineteen centuries combined, and the 21<sup>st</sup> may well surpass the last century in blood spilled for the sake of Christ. During this period of time, many professing Christians have abandoned their faith completely because of persecution, but those who endure to the end—namely, those who are truly chosen—will be saved (Matt. v. 13). Christ did not come to bring peace on earth among *all* men, but a sword between members of the same family, between fathers and sons, mothers and daughters. A man’s enemies may very well be the members of his household (Matt. 10: 36), and this has certainly been true in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other countries where Christians have been murdered by members of their own families after their conversion to Christianity. It is, therefore, disrespectful to the millions of Christian martyrs throughout the history of the world to limit the application of Jesus’ words to the persecution of Christians only until 70 AD.

While the verse clusters above accurately describe the history of the church under persecution for the last 2000 years, vv. 6-7; 7-8; and 10-11a (respectively) accurately describe the *history of the world* for the same period. The world has been a place of unceasing wars and rumors of wars, nation rising up against nation, famines, earthquakes, and plagues. Half of Pompey had been left in ruins by a volcanic eruption in 63 AD (Geldenhuis, *Luke*, p. 531, note) followed by its total annihilation by the same volcano, Mt. Vesuvius, in 79 AD. There were also famines in the reigns of both Claudius and Nero previous to 68 AD (Geldenhuis, p. 531; cf. Hendriksen,

*Matthew*, pp. 852-853, for an excellent treatment of vv. 6-7, including the many severe earthquakes which have occurred in the last 2000 years). Such catastrophic events should not alarm or surprise the disciples, ***nor should they distract them away from their primary purpose of preaching the gospel to the nations*** (v. 14; Chamblin, p. 216). Such occurrences also should not distract the modern church from its mission, nor stimulate its scholars into frenzied attempts to calculate the timing of Christ's return. Additionally, the occurrence of such things should not fool the disciples into believing false Christs who would exploit these events to prove the validity of their claims to be ***the*** Christ (vv. 4-5, 11; Carson, p. 498). These events ***do not*** signal the ***end (telos)***, and the disciples must not allow themselves to be confused. They are but the ***"beginning of birth pangs"*** (v. 8), or, one might say, the "beginning of the end."

The connection between "wars and rumors of wars" and the destruction of Jerusalem described in Matt. 24: 15-25 should be noted. When the disciples of Jesus hear rumors of war between Judea and Rome before AD 66 and actually see the armies beginning to gather around Jerusalem, they should know that these things, however significant, do not signal the time of His ***coming*** or the ***end of the age***. They are only the beginning. This contradicts the popular preterist interpretation of Matt. 24 which insists that Jesus returned in 70 AD during the destruction of Jerusalem. Had He returned at the end of the Jewish War in 70 AD, He would have contradicted His express statements, "but that is not yet the end" (v. 6b) and "But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs" (v. 8).

The ***end*** will not come until the gospel has been preached to all the nations (vv. 14, 10). The preterists (those who believe Christ literally returned in 70 AD) would interpret the fulfillment of this verse in the missionary enterprise of the Apostle Paul who took the gospel to Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Rome, and possibly to Spain—the known nations of the Roman Empire. Thus, by 70 AD the gospel had been preached in all the nations of the Roman Empire; but in light of the expansion of the gospel in the last 2000 years, it is unlikely that Christ was referring to the gospel's proclamation merely to the Roman Empire.

It is true that all the predictions found in this section occurred in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but we must interpret them as a foreshadowing of the greater consummation of the gospel mission, as well as the intensified persecution of believers, occurring in the subsequent history of the church.

### ***c. The destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24: 15-25; Mk. 13: 14-23; Lk. 21: 20-24)***

In this section Jesus shifts the emphasis to the more imminent (near) persecution facing Christians in Judea before and during 70 AD. The context makes it clear that Christ is not speaking to the general multitudes but only the disciples, specifically Peter, James, John (the inner circle) and Andrew, Peter's brother. He now gives "advance warning" (vv. 25, 23; no reference in Lk.) that Jerusalem will be invaded as well as instructions about what to do when this happens. The "abomination of desolation" mentioned in *Matthew* and *Mark* is identified in *Luke* as invading armies (v. 20; since Luke's Gentile readers would not be as familiar with Jewish history). The phrase, "abomination of desolation" would have been immediately understood by the disciples (and subsequent Jewish readers—"let the ***reader*** understand"—that is, the reader of *Daniel*) as a reference to the desolation of the temple by Antiochus IV,

Epiphanes, from 167-164 BC when he set up a statue of Jupiter (some expositors say Zeus) in the temple and forced Jewish priests to offer unclean sacrifices of pigs (Dan. 11: 31; 12: 11), an egregious (outstanding for negative characteristics) offense giving rise to the Maccabean revolt (cf. my notes on *Daniel*, p. 142, as well as *Synoptics*, p. 2). Jesus had no need to explain any of this history which would have been as well-known in His day as the Jewish holocaust of the 1940's, the Rwandan genocide of 1994, or the horrendous reign of Idi Amin (1971-1979) in the past century.

Just as the abomination of desolation (in *Daniel*) is equated with the presence of unclean (uncircumcised) Gentiles (Seleucids) in the temple precincts, the abomination of desolation (Matt. and Mk.) refers to the presence of Roman armies within the city of Jerusalem whose military banners (something like flags on tall poles) boasted the picture of the Roman emperor whom they worshipped as a god. After occupying the city, Roman soldiers would take these blasphemous banners inside the temple precincts and offer sacrifices to them there. Three weeks previous to this sacrilege the regular daily sacrifices had already been suspended. Thus, in the Jewish mind, the details of Daniel's prophecy were repeated in the events of 70 AD (Chamblin, p. 218; citing F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, p. 224).

He now gives them instructions about what to do when they see these things taking place. They will have adequate advance warning about the approaching of Roman armies since the Jewish rebellion against Roman oppression would take place from 66 AD to 70 AD. Furthermore, "rumors of war" had been circulating from 62-66 AD (Lane, p. 458). Just as Nebuchadnezzar's armies laid siege to Jerusalem for eighteen months before taking the city (2 Kings 25: 1-3), the Roman general Titus does the same thing to weaken the resistance of the Jewish forces. Ravaged by starvation, the Jewish population resorted to terrible atrocities against one another, possibly even the cannibalism of infant children (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*; Carson, p. 501, citing Josephus, V. 10. 2-3; although I found no indisputable reference to cannibalism in Josephus). It was a time of unspeakable horror in Jerusalem, prompting Jesus to predict it as "a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" (v. 21). Considering the atrocities against the Jews and against mankind in general since 70 AD, it may be confusing that Jesus would say this; yet Carson has pointed out that there has never been "so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem (p. 501). Geldenhuys elaborates further,

After a siege of about five months by a mighty Roman army under the command of Titus, the son of the emperor Vespasian, the Romans eventually overwhelmed the whole city, completely destroyed and plundered the temple and slew tens of thousands of the Jews, men, women and children. And when they were satiated with the slaughter, they carried off the remainder (except the weak and the aged, whom they killed without exception) as prisoners of war, so that not a single Jew was left alive in the city. For many years after the destruction of the city no Jew was again allowed in the city or even in its surroundings. Only on the day on which the destruction of the temple was commemorated every year were they allowed to go and mourn from the hills in the vicinity of the destroyed city. The first Jews who were again permitted to inhabit a part of the destroyed city were the Christians of Jewish descent who had fled to Pella and who had some time after the conclusion of the Roman-Jewish war received permission to inhabit a certain portion of the ruined city (pp. 528-529).

Furthermore, according to the view that this is the tribulation of 70 AD, Jesus is not including every atrocity against *mankind* in the history of the world, but the greatest tribulation against the *Jews* that ever happened (cf. Chamblin, p. 218).

Hendriksen, on the other hand, argues that the “tribulation” of v. 21 is *not* the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is the period mentioned also in Rev. 11: 7-9; 20: 3b, 7-9a. For the sake of God’s chosen ones [the Christian elect from all nations, not only the Jewish elect] in order that not all might have to die a violent death, the days of this final tribulation shall be cut short. Herein, too, the love of God is made manifest. It should hardly be necessary to add that justice is not done to the concept of history and which surpasses any other distress in its intensity, if it is referred solely to the sorrows experienced during the fall of Jerusalem (p. 860; words in brackets mine for clarification of his position).

Hendriksen’s position is consistent with the possible temporal connection between the tribulation of v. 21 and the coming of the Son of Man in vv. 29-31 (Matt.). The word, “immediately” (*eutheōs*; v. 29) in *Matthew* generally denotes a quick succession of events (cf. Matt. 4: 20, 22; 8: 3; 13: 5; 14: 22, 31; 20: 34; 21: 2; 26: 49, 74; 27: 48). Thus, *immediately* after the tribulation mentioned in v. 21, the Son of Man will appear in the clouds, and the end will come; and unless “those days” had been shortened—namely, the tribulation immediately before the coming of Christ—even elect believers would have been killed. This interpretation also connects “*those days*” in v. 29 with “*those days*” in v. 22 which are shortened for the sake of the elect. Further, “*those days*” in v. 22 refer back to the great tribulation in v. 21.

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it appears inconsistent with the other connecting words in the passage. For example, “*those days*” of v. 22 (Matt.) can be connected to “*those days*” in v. 19 which clearly refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. More significantly, vv. 15-20 is connected to v. 21 by the clause, “For then there will be a great tribulation”. “For then” is *gar tote* in which *gar* “for” is explanatory of the preceding section, vv. 15-20. In other words, Jesus is using v. 21 to explain or clarify the distress of vv. 15-20—it will be a great tribulation never seen before now nor shall ever be seen again. (Incidentally, the identity of vv. 15-20 with the destruction of Jerusalem is not disputed by any commentators other than dispensationalists who believe that vv. 15-28 refer to the Great Tribulation after the rapture of the church in 1 Thes. 4—a position which Carson judges as “historically implausible in reference to both the history of Jesus and the history of interpretation”; p. 495). Thus, Hendriksen’s position must ignore the *possible*—though uncertain—temporal connection between “those days” in v. 22 and v. 19 (see also Mk., vv. 17, 19, 20, for the same connections), but also the more significant explanatory clause at the beginning of v. 21. However, Hendriksen is not alone in minimizing the temporal significance of “*those days*”. Lane remarks,

Juxtaposed [side by side] to the false hopes which will mislead many of the people in the critical moment [vv. 21-22] is the assurance that the period of suffering and distress will be followed by final redemption when the Son of Man will be manifested in power and glory [vv. 24-27]. The correspondence between these two phases in God’s eschatological program is indicated only in a *general way*: “in those days, after that tribulation...” “In those days” is a stereotyped expression in the OT that came to acquire distinctly eschatological associations from the contexts in which it occurs (e.g. Jer. 3: 16, 18; 31: 29; 33: 15f.; Joel 2: 28...; Zech. 8: 23). In itself, however, *it has no determined temporal value*. In verse 24 this phrase designates a period subsequent to the days of tribulation described in verses 19-20, *but the matter of chronological sequence is left imprecise*. It is clear from the structure of the discourse that the parousia cannot take place until after all the preliminary events

announced in verses 5-23 have occurred. They are necessary precursors to the coming of the glorified Son of Man, yet in themselves they do not determine the time of that event (*Mark*, p. 474; words in brackets and emphasis mine).

Rather than putting weight upon “those days”, Lane makes a logical deduction from v. 19, “For those days will be a *time of* tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, ***and never will.***”

The significant addition “and never shall be” clearly indicates that the tribulation is not the distress which accompanies the last days. As great as the oppression will be, it is nevertheless not to be immediately followed by the end, for time will be extended, with the possibility of other, though lesser, tribulations (*Mark*, p. 472).

Carson concurs (agrees) by saying,

That Jesus in v. 21 promises that such “great distress” [great tribulation] is never to be equaled implies that it cannot refer to the Tribulation at the ***end of the age*** [that is, just before the parousia]; for if what happens next is the Millennium or the new heaven and the new earth, it seems inane [foolish] to say that such “great distress” will not take place again (*Matthew*, p. 501; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

In other words, if the tribulation Jesus is describing is the tribulation ***immediately before*** the coming of the Son of Man (Hendriksen’s position)—at which time the present age will end and the new heaven and earth will begin—then it is unnecessary even to speak about the possibility of a ***worse*** tribulation occurring, for there will be no time remaining in the present age for such a tribulation to occur. The end of the age will be upon us.

Carson, likewise, does not put exegetical significance on “those days” in v. 22, saying,

Many problems in interpreting the Olivet Discourse relate to the assumption that “those days” refers to the period described in vv. 15-21 and also to v. 29. But there are excellent reasons [see below] for concluding that ***vv. 22-28 refer to the general period of distress introduced by vv. 4-14 and that therefore “those days” refers to the entire period of which vv. 15-21 are only one part***—the “great distress” (v. 21) (p. 502; emphasis mine).

He, therefore, suggests a break between v. 21 and v. 22 (Matt.) as if in the latter verse Jesus is no longer speaking ***exclusively*** about the carnage in 70 AD but the entire period from vv. 4-14 (Matt.) which includes the whole of world history (see discussion above) leading up to the return of Christ (p. 502). ***One*** reason given for this view is that the term “the elect” generally refers to all believers (but see Rom. 11: 7 referring to elect Jews).

***Second***, “no life” is ***pasa sarx*** (“all flesh”) which normally refers to all mankind (cf. Lk. 3: 6; Rom. 3: 20; 1 Cor. 1: 29; 15: 39; Gal. 2: 16; 1 Pet. 1: 24; as well as OT references from the LXX including but not limited to Gen. 6: 12; 6: 17; 9: 15).

***Third***, the warning against false prophets (false Christs) found in vv. 5 and 11 is repeated in vv. 23, 24, and 26 thus connecting the two sections together. Carson admits that these arguments (plus three others not included here) are not decisive, but “If they are correct,

then v. 22 tells us that this age of evangelism and distress—wars, famines, persecution, hatred, false prophets—will become so bad that, if not checked, no one would survive. In a century that has seen two world wars, now lives under the threat of extinction by nuclear holocaust, and has had more Christian martyrs than all the previous centuries put together, Jesus’ prediction does not seem farfetched. But the age will not run its course;

it will be cut short... This promise enables believers to look for God's sovereign, climactic intervention without predicting dates (Carson, p. 503).

In spite of the merits of this argument, it seems unnatural to apply Jesus' words in vv. 22-28 to anything other than the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. I am convinced, therefore, that the designation, "*those days*", has some temporal significance and that the use of this phrase connects the events of vv. 15-20 with the events of vv. 22-25. I am also convinced that the clause, "*For then*" (v. 21), is used by Jesus to *explain* the significance of vv. 15-20—it is a "great tribulation" for the Jewish nation, and no one else, which has no equal either before this time or afterwards. Having committed myself (for now) to this position, I will have to admit some discomfort in minimizing the "*immediately*" of Matt. v. 29. However, it seems senseless for Jesus to say, "nor ever will" (v. 21) if the great tribulation of v. 21 immediately precedes the very end of the age in which case there would be no time for another tribulation. (This of course leaves open for question the exact meaning of "immediately".) Furthermore, Lane has noted the *strong adversative*, "but" (*allá*; v. 24, Mk.), which distinguishes the events associated with the *parousia* from the events associated with Jerusalem's destruction (p. 473, footnote). So interpreted, unless the carnage (blood-letting) against the *Jewish nation*—including elect Jews—had been limited to a few years (from 66-70 AD), not even the elect Jewish believers living in Judea would have physically survived ("been saved"), but for the sake of those who were chosen, God cuts the Jewish rebellion short to leave Himself an elect Jewish remnant throughout Judea (so also Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 3, pp. 137-139).

Having taken this position, it must be admitted that some of the events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem have been repeated, and will continue to be repeated, throughout human history and especially in relation to the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ. This is so especially in regard to the existence of false prophets and the persecution of believers (the elect from *every* nation). Thus, many of the elements of Matt., vv. 15-25 (and its synoptic counterparts) *foreshadow* end-time events. This explains why Jesus so masterfully blends the two "distinguishable" but somewhat "inseparable" epochs together (cf. Chamblin, p. 220; citing 2 Thes. 2: 4, a text remarkably similar to Dan. 11: 31 and 12: 11).

Jewish Christians must not stay in Jerusalem and Judea until the situation goes from bad to worse (vv. 16, 14, 21, respectively). As soon as they see the armies gathering outside the city (Lk. 21: 20), they must leave the city and escape to the mountains. The danger will be so urgent that those who were on the housetops (houses were built with flat roofs) should not consider carrying any valuables with them but should escape immediately, perhaps even leaping from roof to roof (Chamblin, p. 218). They should leave their homes like those who are escaping from a burning house, taking nothing with them. Those who are laboring in the fields should not even return to their homes to get their one and only cloak to keep them warm at night (Ex. 22: 27; Deut. 24: 13). Hopefully, their escape will not occur during the winter months which would be especially difficult for pregnant women or nursing mothers; and they should also pray that it will not occur on the Sabbath when zealous Pharisees might forbid them to travel (The Pharisees had strict regulations about traveling on the Sabbath).

Christians living in Jerusalem during the Jewish War heeded Jesus' warnings communicated to them by their leaders for 40 years previous to this event. They did just what He told them to do; they escaped from Jerusalem and fled to the mountains. The ancient historian, Eusebius,



believes that Christians escaped to the mountain city of Pella in Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

On the other hand, the people of the Jerusalem church were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. (*Ecclesiastical History*, III. V. 3; cited in Hendriksen, p. 858).

Their abandonment of Jerusalem and the Jewish cause (rebellion against Rome), furthermore, completed the rift (separation) between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews living in Judea. Before 70 AD, the distinction between them was vague to many people, and believers continued worshipping in the synagogues on the Sabbath; but afterwards the Christian sect (“the Way”; Acts 9: 2) became very distinct as the religion following Jesus Christ who was crucified. They were no longer welcomed into orthodox Jewish circles.

Jesus then repeats His warning about the appearance of false Christs who would arise and lead people astray, if possible, even the elect (vv. 24, 22, Matt. and Mk, respectively). But this was *not* possible, even though these false prophets would be able to display “signs and wonders” (cf. 2 Cor. 2: 12; Heb. 2: 4; Matt. 7: 21-23). The end result is that Christians would be delivered, but Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Gentiles (“trampled under foot”) and the Jewish nation subdued by them “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (v. 24, Lk.).

In his description of the spiritual hardening of the Jews (Rom. 11: 25b), Paul uses a similar phrase, “a partial hardening has happened to Israel until *the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*”. Therefore, there appears to be a double meaning to the phrase, “trampled under foot until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” On the one hand, it refers to the *physical* oppression of the Jews by the Gentiles. For how long? As it turns out, much longer than the Jewish War from 66-70 AD. Anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) has become a well-established fact for 2000 years of human history continuing to this very day even in European countries like France (see *World*—a Christian news magazine—“*Living in the Past*”, June 6, 2009). The most well-known oppression of the Jewish nation occurred during the holocaust of the Third Reich (World War II) in which the Nazi “solution” to the “Jewish question” consisted in the extermination of six million Jews throughout Germany and German-occupied European nations such as France and Hungary. It occurs today by the Palestinians who continue to shoot missiles into Judean cities randomly targeting the civilian Jewish population rather than military outposts. (The modern liberal media, of course, blames such aggression upon the Jewish mistreatment of Palestinians. The truth of the matter is that Hamas, the Palestinian political organization in power, has the total annihilation of Israel as their stated political objective and are financially supported by Syria and Iran which also desire the total destruction of Israel. The president of Iran, Amadenijad, has even denied the historicity of the Jewish holocaust of WWII.)

“Trampled under foot” *may* also have a *spiritual* meaning—emphasis upon “may”. While the covenant blessings should have belonged to the Jewish nation, the Jews forfeited these blessings because of disobedience. This resulted in the gospel and the covenant blessings of gospel obedience going to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 13: 46; cf. Acts 2: 33, 39; 2 Cor. 1: 20. All the covenant blessings—“the promises”—are summed up in Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit). Thus, the Gentiles have trampled the Jewish people underfoot—in a manner of speaking—by receiving the promises which originally belonged to the Jews alone. But this figurative “trampling” was designed by God ultimately to make His chosen nation jealous of the Gentiles so that eventually

they, too, would repent and believe (Rom. 10: 19; 11: 11). The divine hardening of the Jews predicted in *Isaiah* 6, continuing throughout Jesus' ministry in Palestine (cf. Matt. 13: 14-15) and throughout Paul's missionary enterprise (Rom. 11: 7-8), would not continue forever. There is a terminus (end) to their hardening and the trampling which results from it—both physical and spiritual. The question remains: When will it end? It will end when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25b).

But what constitutes the “fullness of the Gentiles”? The term “come in” (*eiserchomai*) is generally used in the NT for entering into the kingdom of God (Mk. 9: 43; 10: 15; Lk. 13: 24; 18: 17; Jn. 10: 9; Rev. 21: 27; cf. Murray, p. 93). This could refer to the **full number** of elect Gentiles who will be converted to the gospel throughout the duration of Christian missions (cf. Leon Morris, *Romans*, p. 420; Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, p. 719). However, Rom. 11: 12 runs counter to this interpretation, “Now if their [the Jew's] transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, **how much more** will their fulfillment be!” In other words, their **transgression** and unbelief has resulted in riches for the Gentile nations, but how much more (the argument from the lesser to the greater) will their **conversion** result in riches. Concerning v. 12, John Murray remarks,

...the fullness of Israel will involve for the Gentiles a much greater enjoyment of gospel blessing than that occasioned by Israel's unbelief. Thus there awaits the Gentiles, in their distinctive identity as such, gospel blessing **far surpassing anything experienced during the period of Israel's apostasy**, and this unprecedented [never occurring before] enrichment will be occasioned by the conversion of Israel on a scale commensurate [equal] with that of their earlier disobedience. We are not informed at this point what this unprecedented blessing will be. But in view of the thought governing the context, namely, the conversion of the Gentiles and then that of Israel, we should expect that the enlarged blessing would be the expansion of the success attending the gospel and the kingdom of God (*Romans*, Vol. 2, p. 79, words in brackets and emphasis mine).

Thus, if the “fullness of the Gentiles” consists of the full number of elect Gentiles “coming into” the kingdom, how then could any **richer** blessings be given to them resulting from the conversion of the Jews (cf. Murray, p. 95)? Commenting on v. 25, Murray says,

The contextual data, therefore, point to the conclusion that “the fullness of the Gentiles” refers to blessing for the Gentiles that is parallel and similar to the expansion of blessing for Israel denoted by “their fullness” (v. 12) and the “receiving” (v. 15) (p. 95).

Paul's conviction seems to be that the wholesale conversion of **most (?)** of the Jewish nation (though not every single Jew) will result in an expansion of the kingdom of God on earth which has heretofore been unknown—an expansion which will result in unimaginable blessings to the whole world, including Gentiles (a possible argument for postmillennialism). It is not difficult to imagine why this will be so. When the Jews realize that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is their Messiah, a holy zeal for evangelism and missions will be unleashed upon the world the likes of which have never been seen resulting in unimaginable covenant blessings. One cannot help but wish to be alive on earth when this happens, but we are given no indication of when this will take place; and if present circumstances are any indication, the restoration of Israel will be a long time coming.

Returning to Lk. 21: 24, Jesus' words have both a **proximate (near)** and **typological** fulfillment. On the one hand Jerusalem will be destroyed in 70 AD and the Jews either killed or scattered to

the nations, the proximate fulfillment. The scattering of the Jews throughout the world is known today as the Jewish Diaspora. Typologically, the destruction in 70 AD foreshadows the oppression of the Jewish nation and their forfeiture of covenant blessings to the Gentiles from the time of their rejection of Christ until the present day—a period of 2000 years and still counting (Matt. 27: 25; “And all the people said, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!”). Furthermore, the trampling of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple were a *type* of the events surrounding the return of Christ, even as Noah’s flood was a type of the destruction of the world (Matt. 24: 37-39). We will also see in the parables following that the disciples’ most essential need was not the exact timing of events but the need for alertness—the need to be ready *whenever* these things took place, whether the invasion of Roman armies or the coming of Christ. And so it is with us. We don’t need to know when Christ will return. If we did He would have told us! What we *do* need to know is whether we are presently ready to meet Him when He does return by seeking the realization of His kingdom rather than our own kingdom.

*d. The second coming of Christ and the end of the age (Matt. 24: 26-31; Mk. 13: 24-27; Lk. 21: 25-28)*

The text now gives more detail about the events surrounding the return of Christ of which the destruction of Jerusalem is a type. Beginning with this section, Chamblin notes “a remarkable shift in language” from that of vv. 15-25—language describing “cosmic” events of an apocalyptic nature (pp. 218-219). Verse 26 recalls the warning about false Christs in v. 24 (Mk. v. 22). All sorts of false rumors will circulate about Christ’s return, and many false prophets will attempt to imitate Him. Even as John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, some false Christs will make their “debut” (formal entrance) in the wilderness to validate their claims to authenticity (Chamblin, p. 216). But it is clear from the text that when Christ truly returns, everyone will know simultaneously (at the same time) and unmistakably that He is here. Anyone caught in a thunderstorm can see the lightening, and Jesus’ coming will be like lightening flashing from one end of the sky to the other all over the world, from the east to the west (v. 27). No one will be able to miss it. In the same way, whenever someone sees the circling of vultures overhead, there is a dead body somewhere—no doubt about it (v. 28). The point of comparison Jesus is making with this analogy is that the certainty of the sign eliminates any doubt. When you see vultures circling, make no mistake about it; something is dead. Alternatively, He could also be indicating that at the point in time when He returns, the world’s spiritual decomposition (decay) will have reached its worst, thus requiring His imminent return (cf. Gen. 6: 11; which may be an argument *against* postmillennialism).

Likewise, the display of powers in the sky will signal the *unmistakable* return of Christ. There will be no room for speculation. Celestial signs will confirm His appearing (v. 29). It is not likely that Matthew is speaking of an eclipse of the sun by the moon which last only moments, but something like the darkening of the sky occurring at Jesus’ crucifixion lasting three hours (Matt. 27: 45). Furthermore, stars falling from the heavens will not resemble the normal meteor shower observed from time to time, nor will the powers shaken in the heavens resemble an ordinary thunder storm. Men do not faint from uncontrollable fear at such ordinary phenomena, nor are whole nations driven into confusion by roaring seas (Lk. vv. 25-26; cf. Dan. 7: 2), a

possible reference to a massive, world-wide tsunami the likes of which has never been seen (even when Indonesia was hit in 2004, killing over 100,000). Jesus would not mention *normal* astronomical and geophysical phenomena as *unmistakable* signs of His coming, and He has already warned the disciples not to confuse such normal phenomena as signs of the *parousia* (Matt., vv. 7-8; Lk. v. 7). Rather, His coming would be attended by *abnormal, extraordinary* phenomena. Furthermore, all of these signs are connected temporally with what follows by the words, “and then” (v. 30). When these celestial and geophysical signs appear, so also will appear the Son of Man Himself “coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (vv. 30, 26, 27; respectively). When the people of God see this, they should know that their final and eschatological redemption is near at hand (Lk. v. 28). (For the many OT references made in vv. 29-31, Matt., see Hendriksen, p. 862.)

The quotation from Dan. 7: 13 is a definitive reference to the everlasting kingdom which will be given to Christ by the “Ancient of Days” (God the Father) (Lk. 20: 42-43). The kingdoms of this world will boast of their might and power (Dan. 7: 8), but in the end the last kingdom will be destroyed (Dan. 7: 24-26), the kingdom of Christ established on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6: 10), and the kingdom given into the hands of the elect for human administration and development (Dan. 7: 27; Matt. 5: 5; Lk. 12: 32). This same revelation of Christ’s return was undoubtedly given to the Apostle Paul at some point in his life—perhaps in Arabia (Gal. 1: 17)—for Paul repeats the description in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Many of the same elements are there: the Son of Man descending from heaven in the clouds, the gathering of His elect people in the air (sky; Matt. v. 31), and the trumpet sound (1 Thes. 4: 16-17). Further, there is also the terrifying judgment of the wicked (1 Thes. 5: 3) corresponding to “men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things coming upon the world” (Lk. v. 26) and the mourning of “all the tribes of the earth” (Matt. v. 30; cf. Rev. 6: 12-17 where many of the other descriptions are also present—the darkened sky, stars falling from the sky, celestial and geophysical upheaval, and terror). The gathering of the elect by the *angels* can be traced back to Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares in which the wheat are gathered into the barn (the elect into his kingdom) and the tares are uprooted and burned (Matt. 13: 30, 36-43). Paul’s exhortation to believers to be alert and sober (5: 3-7) corresponds to Jesus’ warning not to live a life of “dissipation and drunkenness” and preoccupation with the world (Lk. v. 34).

What the Synoptic texts do *not* say, however, is *how long* after the tribulation these final events will occur. That is, they do not tell us how long Jesus’ return will be delayed after the destruction of Jerusalem, the “great tribulation”. As we read the text, the timing of Christ’s return seems imminent (soon) after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (see the discussion above). The nearness of it seems to be confirmed by vv. 34, 30, 32 (respectively) containing the phrase “this generation” (see below). The disciples assumed from the beginning of their question (Matt. 24: 3), that the destruction of the temple and the return of Christ must be at the same *time*, and while Christ distinguishes the two events in *substance* (they are different events), He does not clearly distinguish them in *time* but weaves them together as one big event. Yet, however intricately He weaves them together, there are hints throughout the discourse that the timing must also be different (see above).

The first event is localized in *Judea*. Those who are living in Judea must flee to the mountains when they see the abomination of desolation (Matt. v. 16; Mk. v. 14; Lk. v. 21). However, the cataclysmic events of the *coming of he Son of Man* are not confined to Judea but apply

universally to “all the tribes of the earth” (Matt. v. 30), “from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven” (Mk. v. 27), and “among nations”, “upon the world” and “upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth” (Lk. vv. 25, 26, 35). Furthermore, Matthew will later report Jesus’ comparison of His coming to the “days of Noah” and the flood which was *universal* in scope. Preterists like Milton S. Terry may argue for a *localized flood* in order to build a case for the return of Christ in 70 AD, but all such attempts appear to be special pleading and conjecture (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, “*The Gospel Apocalypse*”, pp. 438-452; 542-544).

*e. The parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24: 32-35; Mk. 13: 28-31; Lk. 21: 29-33)*

Earlier, Jesus had said, “Behold, I have told you in advance” (vv. 25, 23, respectively), an advance warning concerning the abomination of desolation and the invading armies of Rome. There was, therefore, no excuse for believers living in Jerusalem and Judea to be caught off guard and perish with the unbelieving Jewish population, nor was there any excuse for believing false prophets. Likewise, the parable of the fig tree is designed to alert the disciples to the signs of the times. When the fig tree produces its leaves, this is an unmistakable sign that summer is near. Likewise, when they “see all these things” (Matt., v. 33) or “when you see these things happening” (Mk., v. 29), they should recognize that “He” or “it” is near, right at the door. Whether we translate the verb, *estin*, as “He is near” or “it is near” determines our interpretation of the rest of the text, for Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, *this generation* will not pass away until *all these things* [*panta tauta*] take place” (v. 34) (see discussion below). If Jesus had only said, “*some* of these things” we would not have so much difference of opinion among evangelical scholars, but He didn’t say this. He said, “*all* these things”. The antecedent of “all these things” appears to be the climactic events pertaining to the *parousia* and the *end of the age*, including world-wide judgment. But Jesus did *not* return during the generation of those who were listening to this discourse; at least, this is the opinion of most evangelical scholars even since the preterist theory became popular. There are relatively few preterists who claim that He *did* return, and such scholars argue that, otherwise, His words must be deceptive or mistaken, neither of which is possible (cf. Terry, *Hermeneutics*, p. 457).

Jesus confessed that no one, not even He, knew the day or hour when “these things” would take place. Analogously, no one knew the day or the hour when the deluge (flood) would come upon the earth. Everyone was going about their normal routine eating, drinking, marrying, etc. until the day Noah entered the ark (v. 38; cf. Lk. v. 34). By then, it was too late to escape. The description in vv. 40-41 (Matt.) has been interpreted by dispensationalists as a pre-tribulation rapture of believers. They believe in a postponed judgment of unbelievers 1000 years afterwards. This interpretation is based on Rev. 20: 5; but Matt. 25: 31-46 depicts a judgment of believers and unbelievers concurrently (at the same time) (see also 1 Thes. 4: 13—5: 3). According to the dispensationalist scheme, unbelievers would be left on earth for 1000 years with the inexplicable (unexplainable) disappearance of millions of believers. Aside from the efforts of Terry (not a dispensationalist) to eradicate the universality of Matt. 24, it seems on the surface of the text to depict the world-wide rapture of the church at the final judgment and the concurrent judgment of the wicked according to the scenario (series of events) outlined by Paul in 1 Thes. 4: 13—5: 3. In that scenario, deceased believers (the dead in Christ) will rise from their graves and meet the Lord in the air after which believers who are still living will be joined with them. This “coming of the Lord” in chapter 4 is described in 5: 2 as the “day of the Lord”

in which Christ will come as a “thief in the night” (cf. Matt. 24: 43-44) and render destruction upon those who are saying “Peace and safety” (cf. v. 38; Matt.). Yet, commenting on Matt. 24: 40-41, Terry says,

At the resurrection of Jesus “many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming forth out of the tombs, they entered into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matt. 27: 52, 53). But that wonderful event was not made a phenomenon visible to the world. So, there appears *no sufficient reason for denying that at the judgment of Jerusalem* [in 70 AD] many other bodies of the saints which slept [were dead] arose, and many living saints were miraculously translated [caught up into heaven like Elijah] (p. 448, words in brackets and emphasis mine).

“No sufficient reason” except that we have no proof for such a theory. The conclusion of Jesus’ picture (v. 42) is the need for alertness and readiness, for no one knows the time when Christ will return—the same readiness and alertness urged by Paul in 1 Thes. 5: 3-7. Yet, under the preterist scheme we may ask why Jesus’ previous instructions to flee to the mountains would have any relevance for believers in Thessalonica waiting to meet the Lord in the air? If by exegetical necessity we must equate Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD with the coming of the Lord (or day of the Lord) in 1 Thes. 4—5, then some Judean believers remained in the mountains after Jesus’ *parousia* (appearing) while others were taken up into heaven; unless of course, those fleeing into the mountains were also raptured. However, this would be contrary to known historical fact that Christians in Judea did, indeed, escape to Pella, a mountainous city about 50 miles away (see Eusebius’ quote above). But if the *parousia* took place in 70 AD, why would Jesus trouble His disciples by requiring them to escape to the mountains? Why not let them experience the rapture from their rooftops? It would also seem inconsistent to maintain that the angels gathered only a *sampling* of the elect from the four winds but left *others*. Furthermore, it would seem very strange that the catastrophic events happening in Jerusalem in 70 AD would have any great urgency for believers living 900 miles away (as the crow flies) in Thessalonica, especially since Thessalonica was not in rebellion against the Roman state. As far as I know, there is no record in the writings of the church fathers of Christians disappearing either in Jerusalem or Thessalonica during 70 AD.

We must note, however, the obvious exegetical connection between Jesus’ teaching on the *parousia* in this discourse (the Olivet Discourse) and Paul’s teaching in *1 Thessalonians*. Paul proceeds to instruct the Thessalonican Christians “by the word of the Lord” (4: 15), a reference to this very discourse. What is objectionable is the preterist theory that Christ returned during the catastrophic events of Jerusalem’s destruction—events which most evangelical theologians interpret as a type or foreshadowing of the *parousia*, but not the *parousia* itself. It seems to me that an interpreter must stand on his head to make the facts configure properly with the preterist position—and we have not even examined 2 Pet. 3. Furthermore, he must put undue weight on the questionable report of Josephus claiming the appearance of “chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding cities” of Judea (Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 451, citing Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, vi., 5, 3). In that same section, Josephus tells the story of a priest about to sacrifice a heifer in the temple, a heifer which gives birth to a *lamb*. God can cause such things to happen supernaturally; this is not the question. The question is whether we put more weight upon Josephus’ account than the preponderance (greater in amount) of scriptures indicating a *singular, universal* coming of

Christ at some point in the future. There is no definitive evidence in the NT that Christ will come more than two times, once at His birth and then at His return, the *parousia*.

But we still have not resolved the sentence which presents many of the problems, “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” Lane (*Mark*) argues that the “all these things” of v. 30 corresponds to “these things” in v. 29, both of which refer the disciples back to the “complex of events preliminary to its fulfillment in verses 5-23” which *excludes* the events of the *parousia* in vv. 24-27 (p. 480). “These events [vv. 24-27] represent the end and cannot constitute a preliminary sign of something else. The phrase ‘these things’ in verse 29 refers to the entire discourse from verses 5-23, with special reference to the material evidence provided in verses 14-23. The parallel phrase in verse 30 provides the same perspective. Before the passing of a *generation*, Jerusalem and the Temple will lie in ruins” (p. 478, emphasis mine). In other words, everything Christ has told the disciples from v. 5 to v. 23 is only preliminary (introductory) to His coming and the end of the age (the disciples’ full question occurs only in *Matthew*). He has warned them not to be fooled by these preliminary events to conclude that His coming and the end will be marked by *these events* (v. 7, “but that is not yet the end”). Wars, rumors of wars, the proclamations of false Christs, famines or earthquakes—*none* of this is a sign that the end has come already. Rather, the sign of the end is marked by the events of vv. 24-27, *supernatural* signs which will be unmistakable and public to everyone living. Thus, “this generation” of the Jews now living would not die until these *preliminary* events took place, but this says *nothing* about the timing of the coming of Christ or the end of the age. If, indeed, “all these things” of v. 33 includes the *parousia* itself, the verse makes no sense (cf. Carson, p. 507), for it could then be paraphrased, “So, you too, when you see all these things—including the coming of Christ in the clouds—recognize that Christ is right at the door”. In other words, if they see Christ coming in the clouds, it should be very obvious that He is near, and the statement would be unnecessary.

As noted above, Lane believes that “it is near” refers to the events surrounding the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Jesus solemnly affirms that the generation contemporary with his disciples will witness the fulfillment of his prophetic word, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dismantling of the Temple. With this word Jesus responds to the initial question of the disciples regarding the time when “these things” will take place (p. 480).

This brings up the question of whether *estin* should be translated “He is near” or “it is near.” The NASB and NAB renders the phrase, “*He* is near”; but there is no definite pronoun, “He”, in the sentence; and the verb *estin* could be, and is, rendered “*it* is near” by the KJV, NKJ, and other commentators (Hendriksen, p. 866-867). Thus, when the disciples see the events of vv. 5-23 unfolding, they should realize that “it”—namely, the destruction of Jerusalem—is *near*, but they should make no conclusions about the coming of Christ or the end of the age, for the events before and during 70 AD are merely preliminary for this final event of human history.

For the sake of consistency, it would seem that Jesus could not, on the one hand, tell the disciples that no one knows the day or the hour of His return (vv. 36, 32) but on the other say that “this generation” will be living when this happens. To object that “this generation” is less specific than “the day or the hour” seems useless trifling with the text. What Jesus intended to say about

His return and the end of the age is that it was *impossible* to determine with any degree of accuracy, and since He Himself did not know when it would happen, He offered no time frame for it. But He *did* offer a time frame for the destruction of Jerusalem in answer to the disciples' original question: "When will *these things* happen", that is, "When will the temple be torn down?" (vv. 3, 4, 7, respectively)

Hendriksen does not share the conviction that "this generation" must refer to the generation of Jews living at the time Jesus makes His predictions (cf. Lane, p. 480; Carson, p. 507); rather, "this generation" refers to the *Jewish people in general*. In his words, "the Jewish people shall not pass away until all the things which he has been predicting—events stretching all the way to, and including, the glorious second coming—have taken place" (p. 868). His reasons include the following: (1) in scripture, "generation" can refer to "a *kind* of people or race" (emphasis mine, citing Deut. 32: 5, 20; Ps. 12: 7; 78: 8; where the same Greek word, *genea* is used in the Greek translation of the OT, the LXX. Other supporting references could be added to this list including Ps. 73: 15; 112: 2); (2) the continuance of the *Jewish race* was not something which could be taken for granted, considering that they had rejected their Messiah in spite of seeing His miraculous deeds (pp. 868-869). It was God's mercy which restrained Him from utterly destroying them from the face of the earth. "They are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Rom. 11: 28).

As noted above, Carson holds the same view as Lane, that "this generation" cannot reasonably mean anything other than Jesus' contemporaries (the people living when He spoke), but adds,

Yet it does not follow that Jesus mistakenly thought the Parousia would occur within his hearers' lifetime. If our interpretation of this chapter is right, all that v. 34 demands is that the distress of vv. 4-28, including Jerusalem's fall, happen within the lifetime of the generation then living. This does *not* mean that the distress must *end* within that time but only that "all these things" must happen within it. Therefore v. 34 sets a *terminus a quo* [beginning point] for the Parousia: it cannot happen till the events of vv. 4-28 take place, all within a generation of A.D. 30. But there is no *terminus ad quem* [destination point or ending] to this distress other than the Parousia itself, and "only the Father" knows when it will happen (v. 36) (*Matthew*, p. 507; words emphasized in bold italics his, words emphasized with underlining, mine; words in brackets mine).

Calvin also interprets the "all these things" of v. 34 (Matt.) as the *afflictions* attending the generation of Jews living at the time of Jesus' prediction, but not the coming of Christ.

Now though the same evils were perpetrated in uninterrupted succession for many ages afterwards, yet what Christ said was true, that, before the close of a single generation, believers would feel in reality, and by undoubted experience, the truth of his prediction; for the apostles endured the same things which we see in the present day. And yet it was not the design of Christ to promise to his followers that their calamities would be terminated within a short time, (for then he would have contradicted himself, having previously warned them that the end was not yet;) but, in order to encourage them to perseverance, he expressly foretold that those things related to their own age. The meaning therefore is: "This prophecy does not relate to evils that are distant, and which posterity will see after the lapse of many centuries, but which are now hanging over you, and ready to fall in one mass, so that *there is no part of it which the present generation will not experience*" [which of course, must exclude the parousia]. So then while our Lord heaps upon a single generation every kind of calamities, he does not by any means exempt future ages from the same kind of sufferings, but only enjoins the disciples to be prepared for enduring them all with firmness (Calvin, *Harmony*, Vol. 3, pp. 151-152; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

By saying, "My words will not pass away", Christ was identifying His word with the very word of God (Isa. 40: 8).



*f. The need for readiness (Matt. 24: 36-42; Mk. 13: 32-33; Lk. 21: 34-36)*

Speaking from the *perspective* of His true humanity with all of its sin-*less* limitations, Jesus says that even He does not know the day or the hour of His return, but the Father alone. Notice that “*that day*” (v. 36, Matt.) is distinguished from “*those days*” (vv. 19, 22, 29; Matt.) “For” (*gar*; v. 37) connects the uncertainty of the timing with the events of the flood. No one knew when the flood would come, either; and it took everyone but Noah and his family by surprise. Beginning in this section, Jesus wishes to prepare the disciples for the inevitability of His coming. Just as God had promised Noah that He would destroy the world with a flood, Christ promises that the Son of Man will return in glory, but the timing is left indefinite. And because it is indefinite, they must be *ready* when it does come. Readiness does not imply exact precision, for even Noah did not know the exact day when God would judge mankind with a flood. Nevertheless, he and his family were ready when it happened. The ark was stocked with every necessary provision, and the animals had already been corralled into their respective places. All Noah had to do was get on board.

The negative aspect of the coming of the Son of Man—given only passing mention earlier (Matt., v. 30; “then all the tribes of the earth will mourn”; Lk., v. 26)—is now given full expression with its typological relationship to the flood. Both salvation and judgment came with the flood; and so it will be with the coming of the Son of Man. The elect will be gathered together to be with Christ, but the wicked will be rooted up from the kingdom for judgment. Furthermore, if the analogy is carried through, salvation and judgment will be occurring at the same time, against the dispensationalist theory that the judgment of the wicked occurs 1000 years after the rapture of the church. The concurrent salvation of God’s people and the destruction of His enemies is a recurring theme throughout the scriptures—passing through the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army; conquering the land of Canaan; the military campaigns of King David, etc. If God’s people must blissfully inhabit the new heaven and new earth, it is self-evident that the wicked must not be given a place in this new creation.

But it is also clear from the text that mankind will be utterly unprepared for this event, even as mankind was unprepared for the flood. When Christ returns men, women, and children will be going about their normal routines heedless of the more pressing concerns of knowing God and doing His will (vv. 38-41). They will be totally immersed and preoccupied with the things of this world which are transient and passing away (Lk. v. 34a) and will not understand anything until destruction comes upon them (Lk. v. 34b; 1 Thes. 5: 3). And although God has left mankind with many evidences of a world-wide flood which covered the earth—evidence which gives him ample warning of future destruction—he is still skeptical about the prospect of being judged by a holy and righteous God (2 Pet. 3: 3-10). It is small wonder, then, that the godless are so zealous to find proofs for the theory of evolution teaching that man evolved from lower life forms. Some how or other, he must get rid of God before whom he must give an account of his life.

The suddenness of the *parousia* is made vivid in vv. 40-41. Two people, perhaps from the same family, will be working together side by side when, all of a sudden, one of them will disappear. The literalness of this scene is supported by the description of the *parousia* in 1 Thes. 4: 17, “Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them [resurrected believers]

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.” Those who are not believers will, therefore, *remain* on the earth to suffer the terrifying judgment of the Lord (Rev. 6).

## ***2. Parables preparing the disciples for the second coming of Christ—Matt. 24: 43—25: 46***

Jesus’ allusion to the flood has introduced the subject of *readiness and the need to be alert*, and v. 42 serves as the *formal heading* for the full series of parables designed for the purpose of preparing the disciples to be ready when the Son of Man appears, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”

### ***a. The parable of the thief at night—Matt. 24: 43-44***

In this parable Jesus likens Himself to a thief breaking into a man’s home (cf. 1 Thes. 5: 2-4; 2 Pet. 3: 10; Rev. 3: 3; 16: 15). The point of comparison is not that Christ is taking something that does not belong to Him, nor that Christ is coming in a secret rapture and departing before being discovered. As we have seen from the texts above, the *parousia* is a public event which cannot be missed—even for those who would wish to miss it. The point of comparison is the element of *surprise*. If the owner of the house had been looking for the thief and alert, he would have been ready to defend his house, but as it is, he was careless. The disciples must, therefore, be ready for His coming; but since Jesus has already told them that no one *knows* when He is coming, they must be ready *at all times*. Jesus cautions the disciples against carelessness and presumptuousness, thinking that they can get ready at just the right time without any wasted energy on spiritual things—like the people who plan to get religious when they are too old to get much pleasure from the world. They will *then* prepare to meet God, but not before. The tendency is always toward laziness and preoccupation with the things in life which are less important.

The parable also begs the question: What constitutes readiness, or how can a disciple of Jesus be ready to meet Him when He comes? This question is answered immediately in the next parable.

### ***b. The parable of the sensible slave and the evil slave—Matt. 24: 45-51; Mk. 13: 34-37***

Christ is preparing His disciples for His imminent departure just a few days from now. Analogously, the slave in this parable has been left behind by his master who has gone on a journey and has put him in charge of his household slaves. The purpose of his being in charge is to *serve* his fellow slaves and care for their welfare, and he must do this continuously and faithfully until his master returns. Like a good servant, he does not have to be watched, and he is not looking over his shoulder waiting until his master is in sight before he carries out his duties. He will, therefore, not be startled or frightened when His master comes back at an unexpected time, and he will have nothing to hide. Thus, the question: How can I be ready to meet the Son of Man? is answered very simply, “serving others faithfully and continually”. He who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven will be servant of all (Lk. 22: 26). Those who are truly watchful for the coming of Christ are not lounging around in easy chairs or indulging in excessive entertainment; they are actively engaged in kingdom work.

A reward is promised for faithful service (v. 47). The exact nature of the reward is left indefinite, but the implication is that the new creation will be handed over to the stewardship of believers (“he will put him in charge of *all* his possessions”). All we have to do is look around us. God is fabulously wealthy, and there is plenty to go around. For the time being, according to His inscrutable providence, He has chosen to allow the wicked to feast upon the His riches of His common grace while many of the righteous have very little; but one day the wicked will be cast out of His kingdom, and He will delight in distributing His wealth exclusively to His people (Prov. 13: 22; Matt. 5: 5). The type of this reality is found in the occupation of the land of Canaan. God forced His people to wander for 40 years in a desert wilderness while the wicked Canaanites were enjoying the land flowing with milk and honey. Then, when the iniquity of the Canaanites was complete, God removed them from the land and gave it to His people (Gen. 15: 6).

Contrarily, punishment is promised to the evil servant who uses his authority and privilege as an opportunity to mistreat those under his care. Presumptuously, he reasons that his master will not come back for a long time, giving him ample opportunity to immerse himself in immoral and selfish living before he returns—*if* he returns. He will be surprised when his master comes back unexpectedly. The wicked slave represents any unbeliever. In this life, God has given everyone, believer and unbeliever alike, the opportunity to serve others with the gifts and talents He has graciously given to them—money, education, social status, mental and physical abilities. What they do with these gifts and talents is a matter of personal choice and responsibility, but they will one day be accountable to God for every gift and privilege improperly used. His judgment is graphically described as being “cut in pieces” and put in a place where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth”—hell. Therefore, Jesus is not speaking about two kinds of believers—one who is interested in serving Christ and another who uses his opportunities and privileges selfishly. Rather, He is speaking about the true believer and the unbeliever who is a “hypocrite” (v. 51). This could mean that he is a professing believer who has betrayed the confidence placed in him by the Master. (Judas Iscariot comes to mind.) It is not necessary to identify the wicked slave with exactness, for God has been good to *all* people, letting the sun shine on the righteous and wicked alike (Matt. 5: 45). To some He has even granted abundance, but this abundance has not been used to bring glory to God.

### *c. The parable of the ten virgins—Matt. 25: 1-13*

The connection between this parable and the coming of Christ is made obvious in v. 13, “Be on the alert then, for *you do not know the day nor the hour*” (cf. v. 36, Matt.). As there were two kinds of slaves contrasted in the previous parable, so there are now two kinds of virgins contrasted here—the wise and the foolish. It was customary in Jewish weddings for the bridegroom to participate in various ceremonies at the bride’s house; thus, the ten virgins may have been bridesmaids. It is not necessary for the reader to understand such customs—which are not explained—to reap the benefits of the parable. There are also other elements of the parable which simply fill out the details but are not essential to the main truth taught. For example, the number ten is a number signifying completeness and may simply represent the complete number of humanity. Other than that, the interpreter shouldn’t allow his imagination to run wild in identifying their exact identity. The virginity of the women is also not important to the central truth of the parable.

The main point of the parable has already been introduced in Matt. 24: 42; and this meaning is confirmed in the concluding statement, “Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (v. 13). But while the parable of the thief illustrates the *unexpectedness* of the Christ’s return, and the parable of the two slaves the need for *active watchfulness*, this third parable emphasizes the need *to be prepared if Christ delays long in coming* (Carson, p. 312). The foolish virgins took their lamps but no oil. This means that they took no *extra* oil, for it would be pointless to bring the lamp with no oil at all. Furthermore, v. 8 indicates, that their lamps were “going out”, implying that they were lit at some point. Thus, some interpreters go astray by interpreting the oil as the Holy Spirit and making the point that the Holy Spirit cannot be transferred from one person to the other. Of course, He *can’t*, but that is not the point of this parable. All the virgins must have had some oil, but five of them did not have enough. They carelessly assumed that the bridegroom would come out to meet them sooner rather than later, and they were *not prepared for His delay*.

We should also not put any emphasis on the fact that the virgins fell asleep, as if to interpret their sleepiness as laziness or lack of watchfulness. Watchfulness has been covered in the first and second parables. Had only five of them fallen asleep, we may have reason to make some point of this, but in fact, *all ten* of the virgins fell asleep. When the bridegroom finally arrived, the five prudent virgins were prepared to meet him, but the oil in the others’ lamps had run out. A request is made to borrow some of their oil, a request which is denied (v. 9). I should hope the preacher of this parable will not make a point of this, either; namely, that we should not be selfish with the gospel and keep it to ourselves while others are in desperate need of it. This would be a classic illustration of making the parable “walk on all fours” (cf. my *Hermeneutics*, “*Interpreting Parables*”). Had the five prudent virgins shared their oil, they would have forfeited their own opportunity to follow the bridegroom to the wedding feast, a journey which occurred at midnight (v. 6). While the gospel should always be shared, *one cannot share his personal preparation to meet Christ* (Carson, p. 514; Hendriksen, p. 878). Speaking as a Presbyterian, however much we may cherish our covenantal theology by including our children into the visible, local church, one day they will stand individually before God either *with* proven faith or *without* it. One thing is certain, they will stand or fall without *their parents*!

While the foolish virgins were feverishly attempting to correct their error, the bridegroom arrived suddenly (v. 6), and the virgins who were *ready* accompanied Him to the wedding feast. After entering, the door was shut. The wedding feast is an obvious reference to the coming of the Messiah whose appearance the Jews believed would be accompanied by a fabulous feast (cf. Lk. 14, and commentary above). The door is doubtlessly the door of opportunity into the kingdom of God (cf. Jn. 10: 7b; “I am the door of the sheep.”). From the context in *Matthew* and *Mark*, Jesus is talking about being prepared for the parousia, His coming at the end of the age, but it is equally clear that all the preparations for His coming must be made in a relatively short life on earth; for the point of the parable is being ready even in the face of a long *delay*. There can be *no* preparations made after death, for “inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment” (Heb. 9: 27). There will be no *re*-evaluation of one’s life *after* the parousia, only judgment. Once the door is shut, there will be no opening it, however much people plea for Christ to let them in (v. 11)—or however much they plea for Christ to give them another chance at living a life of obedience. The question posed at the end of the parable is just

the reverse of the question we often ask others in our evangelism. The question is not so much whether one knows the Lord, but does the Lord know *him* (v. 12).

The accent in the parable's climax, upon the judgment in store for false disciples, summons *all* disciples soberly to reflect upon their condition and to consider their patterns of conduct—for subtle danger might be to regard Jesus' warnings as intended for *other* disciples, least of all for oneself. In v. 13 Jesus urgently warns professing disciples to demonstrate the authenticity of their profession by diligent, unstinting obedience to his teachings. He calls for *habitual* obedience, for a *life* of good works, as distinct from a desperate attempt at the very end to make up for years of negligence and disobedience (as illustrated here by the foolish virgin's last-minute purchase of oil). Moreover, an established pattern of obedience will help one to remain steadfast in the face of mounting pressures as the End approaches. "Otherwise, intensified persecution during the tribulation may tempt professing disciples into antinomianism as a way of escape" (Gundry, 502). Perhaps we are also meant to infer from vv. 7-9 that one person's good works cannot somehow be transferred to someone else's account at the End! (Chamblin, p. 223, emphasis his)

#### *d. The parable of the talents—Matt. 25: 14-30*

The similarity of this parable with the one about the two slaves is evident. A man is going on a journey and before leaving entrusts his possessions to his slaves—three of them this time (vv. 14-15). He gives to each of them the possessions appropriate to their individual abilities—five talents, two, or one, all of which were considerable sums of money (cf. Lk. 19: 11-27, in which each slave is given the same amount, one mina). One talent was worth 60 minas, and a mina was worth three month's wages. Thus, the one talent despised by the third slave was worth  $60 \times 3 = 180$  month's wages or 15 years' wages (NASB Study Bible, 1999, note on Lk. 19; Hendriksen says 20 years' wages, p. 879, as does Carson, p. 516). The two slaves entrusted with five or two talents make a 100 % return, doubling their master's investment, while the slave with one talent does not even bother to invest the money but buries it in the ground—the motivation for doing so provided later in the parable.

After a "*long time*", the master returns and requires each slave to give an *account* of what he has done with his money—for the money is *his* not *theirs*. The two faithful slaves receive the same verbal reward, "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (vv. 21, 23). (This is also contrasted with Lk. 19 in which the two faithful slaves receive different rewards according to the return on their investment. But then, they were both given the *same* amount in the beginning, while here each is given a *different* amount appropriate to his ability.) The understatement in the master's praise is worthy of note, "You were faithful with a *few* things". Money worth 15 to 20 years' labor was not exactly a "few things". Even the one talent of money required burying in the ground rather than stuffing under a mattress.

The enthusiasm of the first two slaves in serving their master is now contrasted with the grudging contempt of the third who accuses his master of being a hard, cruel man who doesn't have to work for a living (vv. 24-25). By telling his master, "See, you have what is yours", the man is lying, for the master has been defrauded of any increase from his investment. He has even lost the interest he could have easily made from the bank. The question remains open whether the master would have been displeased had the slave lost money even after diligent efforts, but the parable is not primarily concerned with economics, but stewardship of anything—time, money,

or abilities—God has given us. Thus, it is assumed in the parable that any genuine effort would have produced positive results, as well as a positive response from the master.

The master's reply (v. 26) is not an admission that the slave's negative opinion of him was an accurate one, for the master proves by his generosity to the other two slaves that the faithless slave has not been fair in his evaluation. Rather, he assumes the truth of the accusation for the sake of his argument. *If* the slave knew he was a greedy, unforgiving, lazy despot, *then* he could have at least taken a no-risk approach and let the bank handle the money. If the master then lost anything, he could blame the bank and not his slave. Therefore, the slave's inaction makes no sense at all even assuming the worst about him. Determined to get a return, the master then takes the talent (again, no small sum) away from the faithless slave and gives it to the one who has the most ability and has made the biggest return. Apparently, both faithful slaves get to keep the principle (the original amount) as well as the increase from the investment (Chamblin, p. 225). The conclusion of the parable is found in vv. 29-30.

Once again, in preparing His disciples for His departure, Christ presents Himself as a master going away on a journey which takes a "long time". Although respecting His real humanity, Jesus did not know the day or the hour of His return, He seems to imply here that it would be a long wait (Hendriksen, p. 878). But there is still much ambiguity, for just how long is a long time? As he departs, He entrusts His slaves (the disciples, representing all *professing* believers) with an enormous amount of wealth. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what this wealth represents, and perhaps we should not be too narrow in our interpretation (so also Carson, p. 516). It may represent the gospel. It may also represent anything which God has entrusted to us used for the proclamation of this gospel and the promotion of the kingdom of God on earth—spiritual gifts, natural abilities, money, time, land, houses—virtually anything which may be *invested* to facilitate the growth of the kingdom. To fully understand this, we must recognize that the kingdom of God and the church are *not* the same thing. The church is *part* of this kingdom; the church is the *agency* of this kingdom; but the church does not fully constitute or *encompass* this kingdom. *The kingdom is a sphere of existence wherever God's reign and rule are extended in heaven or on earth*, and this includes everywhere (Matt. 28: 18). Consequently, Christians are commanded to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy *will* be done, on earth as it is in heaven"; and we are commanded to live in such a way that this is accomplished as Christ instructs us in the Sermon on the Mount. The primary goal is to be useful, not "churchy".

Interpreted this way, we may say that the *enormous wealth* entrusted to each of us is the wealth of a *life* endowed with various levels of potential, but *each* one very valuable. Life is precious and must not be wasted but fully employed to the service of God who gave it. Each slave in the parable belongs to the master as well as the money entrusted to him. The question raised is: How are we using what God has given us in seeking the kingdom of God on earth? Are we being good stewards of the life He has given us with its enormous potential for good? As I write this, I am indebted to hundreds of Christians who are donating their money and prayers for the cause of missions. They are doctors, teachers, investors, theologians, pastors, veterinarians, accountants, technicians, store clerks, and people from all walks of life who are using their time and money to promote the kingdom of God in Africa. But this is only part of their contribution. They are also using their abilities and influence as a witness in their jobs, in their homes and communities, and as members of the body of Christ. They are being salt and light wherever

God's providence has led them vocationally, geographically, and according to their particular interests. The whole point of living is to contribute to something which is dear to the heart of God. People are dear to God, and He proved this by sending His Son to die for them. Thus, helping people both physically and spiritually is dear to His heart (cf. Matt. 25: 31-46, where one's concern for others or lack of it either validates his faith or falsifies it). Also dear to His heart is His rule, His reign, His kingdom, and His law. God purposed to redeem a people for Himself who are zealous for good works (Eph. 2: 10; Tit. 2: 14), not lawless rebels who make empty professions of faith.

Jesus is "going on a journey" (v. 14): he shall ascend to the Father. During his absence, he demands that this people not only wait for his return but also that their lives be productive. ("Vigilance is not simply a matter of fervour, joy, or even faith—it entails active and responsible service," (Hill, 328) (Chamblin, p. 224).

We must beware of a Christianity which is mere religious piety—a good devotional life consisting of bible reading and prayer, and regular church attendance. These things are good and necessary, but they are only the means to the end, not the end itself. The end is a truly holy life evidenced by good works and concern for others. I believe Christ is more pleased with people who may be a little rough around the edges who actually *do* something with their faith to someone who has a seemingly flawless character who does *very little*. We sin not just by *committing* error, but by *omitting* good. The third slave is condemned, not because he did something wrong, but because he did *nothing*.

Having said this, it must be recognized from the parable that not every believer has the *same capacity for doing good*. Each slave received a different sum of money to invest. We are born with varying abilities, and our circumstances in life often dictate the opportunities we have. I am an average teacher, and I can write a little, but I am setting myself up for frustration if I believe I would ever, in five life-times, think, teach, and write as well as hundreds of well-published scholars—some of whom were my teachers—who far surpass me in intelligence, education, and godliness. I cannot give away what I don't have (2 Cor. 8: 12), but I *can* give away what I *do* have. According to this parable, God will not judge me negatively for failing to be the *best* in comparison to others. He did not chide the second slave for failing to earn five more talents like the first slave. He will judge me (2 Cor. 5: 10) on the basis of genuine effort to use efficiently what was entrusted to me, and for doing so He will give me the *same* approval as those who accomplished ten times as much with greater abilities. On the Day of Judgment, no child of God need forfeit His smile because of limited ability. All of us have the same opportunity to win His approval through consistent effort (not to be confused with salvation by works).

Another lesson from the parable is that behavior follows attitude. The faithful slaves labored without knowing that they would have any ownership in the increase of their investments only to discover that they were also working for themselves. They trusted their master implicitly (without testing him) to do the right thing, and their behavior followed from this attitude. The third slave mistrusted and feared his master, and his behavior also followed. Thus, our labor, whether grudgingly measured, or willingly and joyfully sowed, will reflect whether or not we *know* the God whom we serve. While we don't know the full measure that will be given to faithful believers for their service, the parable demonstrates that we should never accuse God of being stingy. He will reward our efforts overwhelmingly in the new heaven and earth, and we will discover that in laboring for the Lord we were also doing ourselves a favor. Fundamentally,

the reward to those who served the Lord will be yet *more opportunity* for serving Him (Chamblin, p. 225) without the constraints of a fallen world. We should take note of the understatement of vv. 21 and 23—"a few things". Whatever our stewardship has been in this life, it is, indeed, small and insignificant in comparison to the stewardship we will receive in the new heaven and earth where resources have no scarcity, where there are no time limitations, and where our minds and bodies are working at optimum capacity.

We must not limit the application of the parable only to professing believers, both true and false. Everyone has been given a life, and he will be judged eternally on the basis of whether he has used this life for God or not. All those who are genuinely saved will have used their lives well in one degree or another; those who are lost will have buried their life in the ground—viewed from God's perspective who expects to receive honor from a person's life. "The tragic irony of the story is that the last slave experiences just what he feared—the master's wrath" (Chamblin, p. 225). "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it" (Lk. 9: 24a).

Lastly, although the parable is not technically about economics, it presents some important implications for economics. The master distributes his wealth *unequally* according to each person's *capability*, and at the end of the story takes the one talent away from the lazy slave and gives it to the one who has the most. Thus, Christian socialists should reexamine their fundamental ideas of government redistribution of wealth according to need and government ownership of the means of production (an emergency experiment going on right now in the US with government part-ownership in GM and many banking institutions, an experiment bound to fail). One reason the capitalist system has produced the wealthiest countries in the world is that it has provided the opportunity for high-energy, highly-capable people to make lots of money, money which in turn has been reinvested in companies which provide millions of jobs to others who don't have as much productive potential. It is an incontrovertible fact that if the world's wealth was redistributed equally among every individual, everyone would be poor and there would be no investment capital driving the world's economy. Secondly on this score, Jesus is not against certain kinds of interest; otherwise, the master in the story would not have admonished the slave for failing to put his money in the bank. While loaning to the poor or to another Israelite at interest was forbidden, loaning for business purposes to foreigners was not (Ex. 22: 25; Deut. 23: 19-20).

*e. The parable of the sheep and the goats (the final judgment)—Matt. 25: 31-46*

When Christ returns in glory, He will sit on His throne and the nations will be gathered before Him for judgment. Attending Him will be the holy angels who will take part in gathering the elect from the four winds (Matt. 24: 31), the wheat from the tares (Matt. 13: 39). They will also gather all the wicked out of the kingdom and cast them into hell (Matt. 13: 41-42). By "nations", we are to understand the whole world. As disciples will be made among all the nations (Matt. 28: 19), so each person living among the nations will be individually judged. The intent is to show that Christ will sit as a king (not "stand" as a subject) in judgment over all people, Jew and Gentile. He will be finally and rightfully acknowledged by everyone as the supreme, sovereign ruler of the universe (Phil. 2: 9-11).



As to timing, the text says nothing about “the day” although it is assumed throughout the parables from v. 13. On “the day of the Lord” or “the coming of the Lord” the bodies of believers will be resurrected from their graves and those who are alive on that day will join them in the air to meet the Lord (1 Thes. 4—5). The duration of that event seems almost instantaneous, although “day” may not be a literal 24 hour day. So here, the **judgment according to works** may take a long time, if indeed, we may still call it time.

Using a familiar metaphor, Jesus says that He will separate the sheep from the goats (goats, **tragōn**; used on only here and in Heb. 9—10; for sheep, **próbata**, see Matt. 9: 6; 10: 6; 18: 12; Jn. 10: 11, 16, 26; passim, “here and there”). In ancient Palestine, shepherds often herded sheep and goats together during the day and separated them at night (Carson, p. 521). The sheep are gathered on the right hand, the place of honor; Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father (Lk. 22: 69). They, and they alone, are those who “**hear**” Christ’s voice and “**follow**” Him (Jn. 10: 3-4), and the parable itself will highlight the importance of following Christ in selfless obedience. Those who do not hear and follow are **not** the “sheep” for whom Christ laid down His life (Jn. 10: 11, 15), and they demonstrate this by their apathy and unwillingness to follow Christ in showing love and self-sacrifice for others. To the sheep will be granted the kingdom of God which was prepared for them before the world began, for all those who are elect will certainly believe and follow Him (Jn. 6: 37-39). No true sheep will be lost; all will be found (Jn. 10: 16, where “will hear” is future tense).

The gift of the kingdom is an inheritance (v. 34) bestowed by the Father; thus, it is not something earned as wages. The good deeds described in vv. 35-36 are the fruits of God’s grace, not the basis for it. The inheritance is the fulfillment of the promise Christ repeatedly made to those who believe (Jn. 14: 2; Lk. 12: 32; Matt. 8: 11; 13: 44-45; 16: 19; 5: 5, note the word “blessed”, although the Greek words are different). The kingdom is prepared as a dwelling “place” for believers, the elect before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4), a place where believers can realize their full potential as human beings made in the image of God unmarred and unhindered by sin. It is a **place** because believers will dwell there in their glorified bodies which are not omnipresent but confined by space.

The remainder of the parable speaks about the selfless concern of the sheep for those in need and the “goatish” disregard of others. Those who have shown love are called “righteous” and the other “accursed ones”. The criterion (condition) of judgment is not based on a mere **profession** of Christ’s identity. Both the “righteous” and the “accursed ones” address the King as “**Lord**” (vv. 37, 44), but such a profession is no longer on the basis of faith, but sight. Christ’s identity is no longer in question; the only question which remains is one of destination. The criterion of judgment is works which either **validate or falsify the credibility of one’s profession** (Matt. 7: 24-27; James 2: 14-26; brother of Jesus who reflected much of Jesus’ teaching in his own epistle).

Those who are in need are identified as Christ’s “brothers”, but who are Christ’s brothers? Some theologians have insisted that they are **anyone** who is hungry, poor, or distressed. Ronald J. Sider, for instance, has said that “Jesus warned his followers in the strongest possible words that those who do not feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the prisoners will experience eternal damnation” (*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., p. 66; quoted in Chamblin, p. 227).

Likewise, Desmond Tutu, an Anglican bishop in South Africa, says that it “would be whether we fed or did not feed the hungry, whether we clothed or did not clothe the naked, whether we visited the imprisoned or did not, which would say what our final destination was going to be” (*“Christian Witness in South Africa,” Reformed Journal*, Oct. 1985, p. 13; quoted in Chamblin, p. 226).

However, in another context, Jesus uses the term “brothers” (*adelphoi*) exclusively for His **disciples**, specifically “whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 12: 49-50; cf. Matt. 23: 8; 28: 8-20; cited in Chamblin). In vv. 34-45, the people of the nations are judged according to how they treated Jesus’ disciples; not simply the eleven, but anyone bringing the message of the gospel or bearing witness to the gospel. The commentary on Matt. 25: 31-46 is, therefore, Jesus’ instructions to the disciples in Matt. 10 along with the blessings promised to those who would aid them on their way (Chamblin, p. 227).

He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward (Matt. 10: 40-42).

According to Chamblin,

The people of the nations respond to the “brothers” precisely in their capacity as bearers of Jesus’ preaching and teaching; note the repeated “because he is” in 10: 40-42. The “sheep” are those who respond favorably to the Gospel of the Kingdom and its bearers, and the “goats” those who respond unfavorably... The services described in 25: 35-36 are largely if not entirely rendered on account of the brothers’ experience of deprivation and persecution on account of Christ (cf. 5: 1-12; 10: 16-23; 24: 9-14)... Jesus is issuing a solemn warning to those who receive the witness of his followers, and who demonstrate their attitude to the **message** by the way they treat the **messengers**. How the people of the nations receive that witness, will determine their final destiny (Chamblin, pp. 227-228, emphasis his).

Carson concurs saying,

As people respond to his disciples, or “brothers,” and align themselves with their distress and afflictions, they align themselves with the Messiah who identifies himself with them (v. 45). True disciples will love one another and serve the least brother with compassion; in so doing they unconsciously serve Christ. Those who have little sympathy for the gospel of the kingdom will remain indifferent and, in so doing, reject King Messiah... We must not think that the Bible is unconcerned for the poor and the oppressed (Deut. 15: 11; Matt. 22: 37-40; 26: 11; Gal. 2: 10). But that is not the center of interest here (p. 522).

In spite of the near connection with the persecution of believers in Matt. 24: 9-13 and the contextual argument mentioned above, I feel uncomfortable restricting the application of this parable to the **believing poor** only. Carson has acknowledged other texts applicable for the purpose of caring for the poor, but even the ones noted are the same genre applying to the Israelite brother (Deut. 15: 11), the Christian brother (Gal. 2: 10) and one’s neighbor (Matt. 22: 37-40). The last text is most important. “Neighbor” was invariably interpreted by the Israelites as fellow Israelites and the quoted text in Lev. 19: 18 specifically reads “the sons of **your** people”. Attempting to justify his lack of love for strangers, the lawyer asked Jesus the question, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replies with the parable of the Good Samaritan who didn’t ask any questions or seek any information about the beaten man beside the road (Lk. 10).

Our neighbor is *anyone* who needs our help. Some of the helpless will be believers. Others will not. Still others will become believers because we are helping them in the name of Christ.

As NT texts go, this one is the most explicit in laying out the obligations of believers to relieve the afflictions of the poor and needy. Furthermore, the contextual indicators in Matt. 10 restricting Jesus' words to relieving distressed disciples and those identified as believers are lacking in the *immediate* context of this passage. Beyond any doubt, the responsibility of believers is first to their own brethren, and this is abundantly supported by the analogy of faith (1 Jn. 3: 17; Gal. 6: 10b [but there is also 6: 10a, "all men"]; Gal. 2: 10 compared with 2 Cor. 8: 1-4; James 2: 14-16). Also beyond any doubt is the reference to "brothers" in the present passage. However, much of the time it is not easy to determine one's identity as a "brother". The feeding of the 5000 and the 4000 indicates no discrimination in Jesus' compassion for the hungry multitudes, and He gives us at least a little hint that the feeding of the hungry was more than just a secondary sideline to His ministry (Lk. 9: 13a; "*You* give them something to eat."). Present on both these occasions were believers and unbelievers. He also healed believers and unbelievers; in fact, much of His time was spent performing works of mercy thus drawing attention to a salvation comprehending both the soul and the body; and I suspect the present discourse acutely reminded the disciples of His comprehensive ministry of the gospel. It should also go without saying that the outpouring of Christian love for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the sick, and the refugee—indiscriminately for believer and unbeliever alike—accompanied by the proclamation of the gospel, will *produce* those who are our brothers in Christ. Must we restrict His words to those who are *already* "brothers"?

Another feature in the parable, as previously implied, is the *condition* of those whom the righteous help. They are hungry, thirsty, strangers isolated from loved ones, inadequately clothed, sick, imprisoned, crippled, homeless, refugees of war and famine, etc. (Jesus was not attempting to give an exhaustive list.) If applied generally, we may add the insane; for there are millions of insane or mentally handicapped people living on the streets throughout the world. Although Jesus is not excusing apathy toward the rich and middle class, He is pointing out the obvious: It is more often the poor, unemployed, orphaned, displaced, mentally and/or physically sick, criminal elements of society who are desperate for help. (I mention "criminal" because I do not limit Jesus' concern to those in prison for their faith. I think He meant real criminals, real sinners—like the one who died beside Him. Having spent a considerable amount of time teaching and evangelizing prisoners, I have come to the conclusion that most of them are just ordinary sinners like everyone else. Given the same set of social and environmental circumstances, I could have easily made the same poor decisions and ended up incarcerated just like them. Again, if we restrict Jesus' meaning to those who are already brothers, such people are not included in this text.) Jesus also recognizes that helping the poor and dispossessed is messy business requiring a great deal of patience and expense. It is always inconvenient, for the poor need a *lot* of help; and most people would rather minister those who don't need *as much* help, if any at all—the rich and middle class—like the church I heard about which developed a Sunday afternoon "boat" ministry to wealthy yachting enthusiasts. Well, okay. They need the gospel, too, but so much for self-sacrificial ministry.

We may assume that the gospel of the kingdom was expressed within the context of providing physical needs, but it may be significant that He says nothing about it here. He had fed the five

thousand, and later the four thousand. He had healed the leper and made the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear. Helping the needy was *always* part of His gospel ministry, not just an add-on extra. The salvation He came to give was a full-orbed salvation proclaiming the Year of Jubilee (Matt. 11: 5; Lk. 4: 18-19). The alleviation (lessening) of physical suffering was designed to draw attention to the message of repentance and faith by which men could be *eternally* saved, but this does not imply that it was secondary and unessential. Now, less than a week before His crucifixion, He reminds the disciples that His concern for the helpless was as acute (intense) as ever. The *very criterion* by which the world of men would be judged and by which they would be ushered into eternal life or eternal punishment was their concern for the needy or lack of it. Profession was not enough; the practice of the gospel was essential.

There has been much ink spilled over the issue of “gospel” versus “mercy ministry”, and bible-believing evangelicalism has often erred on the side of preaching a gospel concerned only for the soul as if people were disembodied spirits. Liberals, on the other hand, have erred on the side of preaching a “gospel” which seeks first, “What shall we eat, drink, or with what shall we clothe ourselves” rather than the *kingdom of God and His righteousness*. There is no need, or excuse, for this dichotomy (separation) of priorities. *If* we care about people’s souls, *then* we are also concerned with whether they have food, clothing, and shelter. We care about their sick children and their aging parents. We care that they don’t have the necessary medical facilities, and that they are dying of treatable diseases by the millions. But that is a big *if*, and much of our “concern” is nothing but pious rhetoric, mere talk (1 Jn. 3: 18).

Neither the righteous nor the accursed ones recognized Christ in any of these situations. “When did we see you?” I do not take this to mean that the righteous were not conscious of their motivation for helping others, namely, the glory of Christ. Only that which we do for Christ’s sake will be fully acknowledged as a good deed. What is implied is that the righteous ministered to the helpless with *no respect of persons*, even helping *the least Christ’s brothers, those to whom no one else was paying attention*. It did not matter to the righteous who these people were; they were just people made in the image of God, however insignificant to anyone else. Previously, Jesus had encouraged a room full of Pharisees not to invite dinner guests who could pay them back, but to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind—those who could not repay their kindness (Lk. 14: 13, and context). At the end of that parable, He proclaims that God was doing just that—inviting the discarded of society to partake of the Messianic feast when He arrived.

The accursed ones, on the other hand, did not notice anyone of *particular importance*, certainly not Christ Himself, for certainly if they had seen *Him* in need, they would have rushed to His rescue. Such thinking fails to reckon with the identity that Christ shares with His people; for if they are persecuted, He is persecuted (Acts 9: 4). If they are neglected, He is neglected; and how can we say we love Him whom we have never seen if we fail to love the ones right in front of our faces (1 Jn. 4: 20).

As with the other parables, this one teaches us to be actively watchful for the Lord’s return. How do we do this? By caring for Christ’s “least” ones as if they were Christ Himself, because in His estimation, they *are* (cf. Matt. 18, Christ’s “little” ones). Notice also that watchfulness implies doing the seemingly insignificant, little things in life. Doing such common things doesn’t result

in any newspaper headlines, and it doesn't merit in any banquets or gold plaques in our honor. Most of God's people will drift quietly and imperceptibly into eternity mourned only by a few close friends and family. No one will ever know what they did. But Christ knows. He is not encouraging His people to be superstars but to be faithful in the "little things" which mean so much to Him (cf. Hendriksen, pp. 888-889).

***N. Jesus Teaches Daily in the Temple and Retires at Evening on the Mount of Olives***  
**—Lk. 21: 37-38**

This short segment indicates Jesus' practice the last few days of His earthly life. Each day He was teaching the "people" (distinguished from the unresponsive "crowds"; Liefeld, p. 1023) in the temple while at night, thoroughly exhausted from this daily routine, He would retire to the solitude of the Mount of Olives. Luke, therefore, implies that the sixth discourse (found in *Matthew*) was not the last time Jesus taught in the temple. There were other occasions not recorded.

***O. The Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders Plot to Kill Jesus—Mat. 26: 1-5; Mk. 14: 1-2; Lk. 22: 1-2***

The characteristic conclusion of all but one of the major discourses of Jesus in *Matthew* is found in v. 1, "When Jesus had *finished* all these words" (*teléō*; cf. Matt. 7: 28; 13: 53; 11: 1; 19: 1; the fifth discourse lacks the characteristic ending).

It was now two days before the Passover. The chief priests, scribes, and elders of the Jews devise a plot to kill Him, but this is not the first time they had considered His assassination (Jn. 5: 18; Matt. 12: 14; and other references). While His teaching (some of it against the scribes and Pharisees; e.g. Matt. 23: 1-39) incited hatred, His miraculous deeds incited fear, especially the raising of Lazarus of Bethany only five kilometers (3 miles) from Jerusalem, the power-base of the Sanhedrin. John takes us inside this power-base in the story of the raising of Lazarus shortly before the Passover. When some Jews report this miracle to the Pharisees (who were more in touch with the common people than were the priests) the Pharisees take the report to the **chief priests who dominated the highest judicial body of Palestine, the Sanhedrin**. An informal meeting is called during which they admit, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (Jn. 11: 47-48). Therefore, their fear of Jesus' popular support was connected with its political consequences. Amid all the Messianic expectations aroused by Jesus' ministry, the people could choose to anoint Him as king. If this happened Rome would intervene militarily thus **ending the Sanhedrin's broad political powers** over the people ("our nation") and the temple ("our place"). Under Roman sanction, the Sanhedrin controlled all the internal affairs of the nation, and this was not just another money-changer's table they would allow Jesus to overturn.

In Jesus' day the (seventy?) members of the Sanhedrin were dominated by the chief priests, i.e. priests drawn from the extended family of the high priest, who presided over it (as the seventy-first member?). Virtually all the priests were Sadducees. The Pharisees constituted an influential minority; most of them were scribes. The rest of the members were elders, landed aristocrats of mixed (or few) theological views... The Pharisees allied

themselves with the chief priests, and the problem of Jesus was put on the Sanhedrin's agenda (D.A. Carson, *John*, p. 420).

Thus, their intense concern was not so much for the people or even the temple, but for themselves. In spite of their admission that miraculous deeds had been accomplished (Jn. 11: 47), their opposition to Jesus is intensified by their lust for power.

It has always been the case that those whose minds are made up to oppose what Christ stands for will not be convinced by any amount of evidence. In this spirit these men recognize that the miracles have taken place, but find in this a reason for more wholehearted opposition, not for faith. In their hardness of heart they continue on their own chosen line and refuse to consider the evidence before their eyes (Leon Morris, *John*, p. 565).

Morris also observes that from the raising of Lazarus onward the *chief priests*, not the Pharisees, take the initiative in putting Jesus to death.

In all four gospels the Pharisees are Jesus' principal opponents throughout His ministry, but in all four they are *rarely mentioned* in connection with the events associated with the Passion (p. 565, emphasis mine).

In the present text, Matthew reports that the *chief priests and the elders* (a minority element in the Sanhedrin) get together to plot Jesus' death while Mark and Luke report that the *chief priests and scribes* (another minority element) plot His death. The Sanhedrin has the most to lose politically if Jesus' popularity brings down the wrath of the Roman government. Ironically, by rejecting their Messiah's offer of salvation from sin, the Sanhedrin brought upon themselves, the nation, and the temple the very destruction they were attempting to avoid.

Afraid of inciting a riot among His supporters, especially large numbers from Galilee visiting Jerusalem for the Passover, they plan to assassinate Jesus "by stealth" or "treachery" (*dolos*) away from the public eye (vv. 4, 1). Whether this means that they were going to use the Roman government to do their dirty work, or hire an assassin, is left unclear; however, Judas' willingness to betray Jesus was too good of an opportunity to pass up until Passover was over. (Hendriksen, p. 897). Thus, in the providence of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was crucified at Passover, the Antitype of the type (Jn. 1: 29). At virtually the same time the Sanhedrin was plotting His death (perhaps the very moment; Hendriksen, p. 898), Jesus declared that He would be crucified at Passover (v. 2), demonstrating that even during His passion He is still in control. No one can *take* His life from Him by force; He lays it down voluntarily (Jn. 10: 17-18).

Carson describes this periscope as a "masterpiece of irony." "The Judge of the universe, King Messiah, the glorious Son of Man, is about to be judged" (p. 523).

***P. Jesus Anointed for Burial—Matt. 26: 6-13; Mk. 14: 3-9; Jn. 12: 1-11***

The similarities in this periscope (short story) could lead us to interpret it as the same anointing we find in Lk. 7: 36-50.

- (1) In both stories, Jesus is in the home of a man named *Simon*.
- (2) He is anointed with perfume by a woman.

But this is where the similarity ends and the glaring differences begin.

- (1) In Lk. 7, Simon is a *self-satisfied Pharisee* while here Simon is a *leper*. This could not be the same Simon.
- (2) In Lk. 7 the woman is an unnamed sinner, most likely a prostitute, while here nothing is said about her character.
- (3) In *Matthew* and *Mark*, the woman anoints His *head*, not His *feet*. (But see below.)
- (4) In Lk. 7, Simon the Pharisee questions Jesus' stature as a prophet for not knowing the character of the woman, while in the present text, the disciples criticize the woman for wasting money which could have been given to the poor.
- (5) The incident in Lk. 7 occurs early in Jesus' ministry, possibly after a year. Note the connection between the question of John the Baptist in prison and the anointing in Lk. 7 (vv. 18-23; see vv. 1-17 for context). No definite temporal connections are given for the present text ("Now when" and "While" are very indefinite temporal markers), but John's gospel fills in the necessary chronological details. It occurs *six days* before the Passover (compare Jn. 11: 1-2 with Jn. 12: 1-3). This is not a contradiction to Matt. 26: 2 ("two days") because Matthew and Mark insert the story *out of chronological sequence*, using it *thematically* to highlight Jesus' statement about His preparation for burial.
- (6) The anointing in Lk. 7 takes place in Nain of Galilee while this one occurs in Bethany of Judea. There is no transition in location from Lk. 7: 11 to 7: 37 ("in the city") (so also Joel B. Green, *Luke*, p. 305).
- (7) While Jesus comments on the woman's great love for Him in Lk. 7, His main point in the present anointing is His preparation for burial six days later.

However, on (3) above, John says Mary anointed Jesus' *feet* and *wiped them with her hair*, something we *don't* find in the present text but *do* find in Lk. 7. But once again, if we take the position that the woman of Lk. 7 was Mary, we have the problem of location and timing. The incident in Lk. 7 took place in Nain of Galilee, not Bethany of Judea. It also took place early in Jesus' ministry shortly after the question from John the Baptist. It appears, then, that *Mary of Bethany* anointed *both* His head *and* His feet and *wiped His feet with her hair*. This leaves the final problem of the anointing occurring in the house of Simon the leper while in *John* the anointing appears to occur in the house of Lazarus. The solution is that Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus were all present on this occasion, but the dinner was actually served at the home of Simon the leper (presumably a cured leper), a mutual friend of the three (Jn. 12: 2-3; Matt. 26: 6; Mk. 14: 3).

So much for sorting out the details! I have done so partly to demonstrate that attention to details prevents us from assuming contradictions in the Bible.

It was customary in Jewish burials to wrap the body in linen which had been treated with spices and perfume (Jn. 19: 40). Mark supplies the cost, 300 denarii or almost a year's wages. The question emerges whether Mary had more understanding of Jesus' imminent crucifixion than did the disciples. (She could scarcely have had less.) Did she know, as Jesus said, that she was preparing Him for burial; or did Jesus say this as a matter of fact without reference to Mary's intent? He had already made multiple predictions of His death before now, (Matt. 16: 21; 17: 22-23; 20: 18), but these predictions had passed over the disciples heads unnoticed. Arguments

had arisen among them about who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven even until His last Passover with them moments before His betrayal (Lk. 22: 24; cf. Lk. 9: 46; Matt. 18: 1; Mk. 9: 34). Mary, on the other hand, had listened attentively at her Master's feet (Lk. 10: 38-42); and if the disciples didn't seem to "get it"; perhaps Mary *did* (so also Hendriksen, p. 901).

At any rate, even if this had not been six days before Jesus' death, would this *still* have been a *waste* (Mk. v. 4)? (And did the disciples ever realize how offensive this complaint sounded to Christ?) Is it a waste to lavish Jesus with worship, honor, and affection considering His invaluable (too great to measure) sacrifice? The worship and adoration of Jesus Christ takes priority over everything else, even charity to the poor; besides, they are not mutually exclusive as if only one can be accomplished but not the other (v. 11). Further, we may question our zeal to help the poor when our love for Christ is only lukewarm or non-existent, like that of Judas (Chamblin, p. 231). Our love for Christ is the fountainhead for any good deed, and the more lavish our love for Him, the more lavish it will be for others. After Jesus departed, there would no longer be any earthly opportunity to show kindness to Him directly, but only indirectly through kindness to others (Matt. 25: 31-46). Knowing this, Mary, not caring how her kindness would be interpreted, does the *most extravagant* thing she is capable of doing. She takes what she has and spends all of it on Christ. For this act of kindness, Jesus makes certain that her story will be told wherever the gospel is preached; and so it is that the Holy Spirit inspired three of four gospel writers to record it.

We must be ever so careful in applying this story, lest we fail to distinguish between the Old and the New Covenant. In the OT, both the tabernacle and the temple were built with lavish extravagance, sparing no expense in wood, fabric, silver, gold, and precious gems. Nothing was too good or too expensive for a building which represented the very presence of God with His people. But we no longer live in the Old Covenant, nor do we need a physical temple. The temple of Christ's body is now extended through His church—not the church as a building but the church as His people, the corporate temple of the Holy Spirit. The obsolescence (termination) of the physical temple was dramatically portrayed both in biblical and secular history. In biblical history, the veil of the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom when Christ's atoning sacrifice was completed (Matt. 27: 51). A purely human priesthood was replaced by the high-priesthood of the God-man, Jesus Christ. The Holy of Holies was replaced by ready access to God the Father through the perfect mediation of Christ. Animal offerings were replaced by the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. In secular history, the fabulous temple begun by Herod the Great in 19 BC was completed only a few years before it was utterly destroyed in 70 AD (Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 922; drawing from various Jewish sources). Clearly, God was finished with the physical temple; and since Christ is no longer with us physically, we worship Him in spirit and in truth through public and private worship and by showing kindness to all men, especially the household of faith.

It would be unwise, therefore, to use this passage to promote elaborate building programs or expensive auditoriums under the banner, "Only the best for God." God wants our best, but we must determine from the scriptures how to properly define it. Otherwise, we end up chasing our tails doing all sorts of things in the name of Christian ministry which don't need to be done while neglecting the more necessary things. Money and human resources spent on one thing cannot be spent on something else; some ministries have to be sacrificed to make room for others.



***Q. Judas Iscariot Bargains with the Chief Priests over the Betrayal of Jesus—Matt. 26: 14-16; Mk. 14: 10-11; Lk. 22: 3-6***

There is a striking contrast between this story and the previous one. On the one hand Mary is willing to make a sacrificial gift of expensive perfume to prepare Jesus' body for burial. On the other, Judas is willing to sell Him into the hands of the chief priests for the paltry (little) sum of thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave gored by an ox (Ex. 21: 32). It was also the valuation of the prophet Zechariah's wages by the nation of Israel, thus indicating their disdain for the word of Yahweh (Zech. 11: 12; Chamblin, p. 232).

All three Synoptists mention that he was one of the twelve disciples, making the contrast with Mary more vivid. Considering their fear of Jesus' popularity with the multitudes, the betrayal must have come as a pleasant surprise (Hendriksen, p. 902). No information is given in the gospels as to why Judas betrays Christ. The most common theory is that he had Zealot tendencies and wished Jesus to assume the role of a military Messiah leading the revolt against Roman tyranny. When He failed to meet these expectations, Judas turned against Him. Another theory is simple avarice (greed); and in John's version of Mary's anointing of Jesus, Judas is the one singled out as the biggest complainer. Had the perfume been sold for money, there would have been more in the common purse for him to steal (Jn. 12: 4-6). Since he had no interest in the gospel, the lure of money was an additional incentive to betray Jesus. The most significant point is not the motive behind the betrayal but the *fact* of the betrayal by one who had accompanied Jesus for almost three years, observed His flawless life, had been taught by Him, discipleship by Him, and loved by Him. Judas is a case study in the doctrine of total depravity, an exhibit of what we would all be apart from saving grace.

***R. Jesus' Last Passover with the Apostles and His Institution of the Lord's Supper—Matt. 26: 17-25; Mk. 14: 12-31; Lk. 22: 7-38; Jn. 13—17***

***1. Preparation for the Passover—Matt. 26: 17-19; Mk. 14: 12-16; Lk. 22: 7-13***

Preparations for the Jewish Passover were much more involved than those for the typical Lord's Supper practiced in churches today. Carson gives some of the details.

Toward midafternoon of Thursday, 14 Nisan, the lambs (one per "household"—a convenient group of perhaps ten or twelve people) would be brought to the temple court where the priests sacrificed them. The priests took the blood and passed it in basins along a line till it was poured out at the foot of the altar. They also burned the lamb's fat on the altar of burnt offerings. The singing of the *Hallel* (Pss 113-18) accompanied these steps.

After sunset (i.e. now 15 Nisan), the "household" would gather in a home to eat the Passover lamb, which by this time would have been roasted with bitter herbs. The head of the household began the meal with the thanksgiving for that feast day (the Passover *Kiddush*) and for the wine, praying over the first of four cups. A preliminary course of greens and bitter herbs was, apparently, followed by the Passover *haggadah*—in which a boy would ask the meaning of all this, and the head of the household would explain the symbols in terms of the Exodus...—and the singing of the first part of the *Hallel* (Ps 113 or Pss 113-14). Though the precise order is disputed, apparently a second cup of wine introduced the main course, which was followed by a third cup, known as the "cup of blessing," accompanied by another prayer of thanksgiving. The participants then sang the rest of the *Hallel* (Pss 114-18 or 115-18) and probably drank a fourth cup of wine. Thus the preparations about which the disciples were asking were extensive (p. 533)

For Jews living in Palestine, the Passover had to be eaten within the city of Jerusalem (Carson, p. 534); therefore, Jesus sends two of the disciples “into the city” to procure a room suitable for this purpose (v. 13, Mk.). Since some of the Jews were allied with the Pharisees and chief priests and were serving as “outposts” facilitating Jesus’ arrest, utmost secrecy was required. To achieve this secrecy, no audible communication would be used in the streets to find the room. Instead, after entering the city they would find a man carrying a pitcher or jar of water. Customarily, only women carried water in jars; men would use wineskins (Lane, p. 499). Thus, with this prearranged signal—or perhaps through Jesus’ omniscience of this unlikely scene—not a word would be necessary to identify the man or find a room. After seeing him, the two disciples would simply follow him wherever he went until entering a house. The owner of the house would also be a follower of Christ who would be expecting them to show up and would understand the statement, “The Teacher says, ‘Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” (v. 14) He would have a room already “furnished and ready” (v. 15, Mk.).

## **2. The model of servant-leadership—Lk. 22: 24-30**

The incident reported in Lk. 22: 24-30 is not the same as that of Lk. 9: 46-48 which takes place much earlier. Furthermore, on that particular occasion Jesus uses a little child close at hand to illustrate the importance of receiving the kingdom as little children (cf. Matt. 18: 1-6), but there is no child in this context. However, there is *one important similarity*. In *Luke* both of these separate disputes occur within the context of Jesus’ explicit announcement of betrayal into the hands of men (cf. Lk. 9: 44; 22: 21-23). In the earlier incident, Luke makes it clear that the disciples did not understand this disclosure although He introduces it with, “Let these words sink into your ears”. Their slowness to understand what He was saying is not excused by the fact that God concealed the matter from them (Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 517; once again, divine sovereignty and human responsibility). The very next verse reports the disciples disputing with one another about which of them was the greatest—not a very intelligent use of time considering Jesus’ previous announcement of betrayal.

The Lk. 22 context includes *Peter’s betrayal*, thus doubling the intensity of Luke’s theme of treachery within the ranks—Christ is betrayed not by one disciple, but two! In this context, the disciples arguing about *which one* of them was the *greatest* were the same disciples who would seriously discuss *which one* of them would *betray* Christ (v. 23). But how did they logically put these two concepts together—the potential for personal greatness and the potential for personal treachery? *None* of them would demonstrate greatness on the evening before Jesus’ crucifixion, least of all Peter who denies Him three times. In fact were it not for Jesus’ intercessory prayer for Peter (v. 32)—and by implication, for all the disciples (Jn. 17: 15)—Satan would have been able to destroy him (and them) just as he destroyed Judas (v. 31); but *because Christ intercedes for him*, Peter will truly become great among the disciples, the first among equals who is able to “strengthen” the other disciples by being a true servant (v. 32). It is Peter to whom Jesus later says, “Tend my lambs”, “Shepherd my sheep”, and “Tend my sheep” (Jn. 21: 15-17) and Peter who preaches the great Pentecostal sermon in which 3000 are added to the kingdom (Acts 2: 41). It is also Peter who would later write to elders scattered over Asia Minor, “shepherd the flock of God among you” not “lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5: 2-3).

Greatness in the kingdom, then, has nothing to do with status or privilege; it's all about about service (vv. 25-26). Furthermore, no one would be *fit to serve* apart from Christ's intercessory grace, for without it we would *all* go the way of Judas betraying Christ for money and self-centered agendas. Luke seems to go out of his way in portraying the weakness and obtuseness (slowness of understanding) of the men to whom Jesus would very soon entrust His church; and this would be a subtle—or not so subtle—warning to his Gentile readers not to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. If the disciples could be so obtuse, then so could they—and so could Luke's 21<sup>st</sup> century readers. But at the same time, the story is an encouragement to every disciple who recognizes his weaknesses. Jesus is patient toward obtuse and ambitious disciples and will continue to teach them and use them for His kingdom.

However fitting for Luke's thematic interests, the dispute about greatness is out of *chronological* order—*not* one of Luke's primary interests. It seems more in chronological context with the washing of the disciples' feet *before* the Passover meal began. For example, there is the reference to those who recline at the table and those who serve and the fact that Jesus was the one who serves (v. 27). To illustrate His point, Jesus then gets up from the table and washes the disciples' feet. Thus, the disciples' discussion about greatness and Jesus' response to it occur before Jn. 13: 4.

In His rebuttal, Jesus explains that *the way of the kingdom and the way of men are two different things*. The kings of men assert their authority over their subjects, lording it over them and using them selfishly to fulfill their personal dreams of power, success, and, yes, *greatness*. The common people were the first defense of infantry troops whom an ancient king willingly sacrificed to weaken the opposing army for the onslaught of his cavalry. Even today the common man is often used by governments as “canon fodder” (ammunition) “shot” at enemy lines to further the “big man's” ambition for power, land, and resources. (Joseph Kony, like many rebel leaders in Africa, uses children.) During World War I, a war for which no one seems to know the reason, American troops living for months at a time in putrid dug-out trenches would often sing: “We're here, because we're here, because we're here, because we're here!” (I apologize for not being able to give the tune.) The common soldier often does not know why he is shedding his blood upon orders from someone who would not be willing to shed his own. They are simply pawns on a chessboard who are readily sacrificed to protect and advance the more important players in the game, particularly the president without which the game is lost. The degradation of humanity (lowering of worth) has been, and still often is, the “stuff” of politics. The uninformed and often ignorant masses are simply used by the elite who give them empty promises they cannot deliver to get elected and to stay elected.

In Jesus' day, in spite of their oppression of the masses, the kings were called “benefactors” (*euergetēs*)—those who went around doing good to the people and for the people. The Roman emperors gave themselves the title of “god” (Augustus Caesar) and “one who deserved to be adored” (Tiberius Caesar) and flattered themselves as being the essence of goodness and generosity to the common people who looked to them for salvation and deliverance (Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 971). The title, “benefactor”, was understandably offensive to the Son of Man who was the true benefactor (Walter L. Liefeld, *Luke*, p. 1028) that healed the sick, fed the hungry, and treated all men with dignity and respect regardless of socio-economic status (cf. Acts 10: 28; where “doing good” is *euergetéō*; noted in Liefeld). Peter refers to the emperors' claims as

“savior” when he proclaims concerning Jesus, “And there is salvation in ***no one else***; for there is ***no other name*** under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12). Here, Jesus clearly challenges their false claim as benefactors when He says, “But ***it is not this way*** with you” (v. 26a). The disciples must be ***true*** servants of the people who are willing to accept a lower rank (“the youngest”) and fulfill a lower function (“the servant”) for the genuine benefit of the body of Christ and the kingdom of God. While the “greater” person—from the world’s point of view—is the one who reclines at the table and lets others wait upon him, Christ is the one who takes the lower place and serves (v. 27). And as it is with Him, so it should be with the disciples who must at all costs ***rid themselves of worldly thinking*** and maneuvering for power and prestige. The main question is not: “What do ***others*** think of me? Do they think I am an important person?” but “What does ***God*** think of me?” and “Is ***He*** pleased with me?”

What a relevant lesson for every disciple of Christ, especially those who presume to lead God’s church! Do we lead from the position of strength or the position of weakness? (cf. J. Knox Chamblin, *Paul and the Self: Apostolic Teaching for Personal Wholeness*, “Power in Weakness”, pp. 181-198). Do we assert our authority or do we model the authority of Christ in servant-hood? Everyone who has ever attempted to shepherd a church knows that he has often failed and continues to fail in following Christ’s motif of power expressed in weakness. The kings of the earth in full armor rode white war horses into battle chopping off heads and creating confusion as they went, but Christ rides into Jerusalem meek and lowly saddled on a donkey, saving the world by being crucified. It doesn’t make much sense to the human mind, but this is the way Christ is conquering the world. But lessons learned are often forgotten, and this lesson must be relearned daily in the life of the church by those wish to do it man’s way rather than God’s—through political maneuvering and intimidation in presbytery and session meetings rather than prayer, self-examination, repentance, and humility; through denominational hierarchies, general assemblies, and theological conferences rather than the slow, unappreciated plodding of pastoral care which many of God’s people never get. If the truth be known, most of us in the ministry have secret desires of being the “big man” whom others look up to and whose gifts stand out from the mainstream. We want others to acknowledge these gifts publicly so we can feel important and useful in the kingdom of God. But all Christ wants is a servant heart and the willingness to be the least if being least is more useful to His purposes.

But it is not as though Christ will allow the disciples’ loyalty to go thankless. While many of the multitudes who first attended His teaching have melted away (Jn. 6: 66), the disciples (excluding Judas) have continued to stand by Him throughout His difficult ministry (v. 28). Because of His active obedience—and soon His passive obedience—the Father has granted Christ a kingdom which will have no end (v. 29; cf. Phil 2: 8-9)—a kingdom which He has earned through ***inherent*** righteousness. And since the eleven apostles have stood by Him in his ***humiliation***, they will also stand by Him in His ***exaltation*** when He comes to consummate His kingdom (cf. Rom. 8: 17)—a reward of grace through ***imputed*** righteousness. Jesus’ praise seems ironic considering the disciples are about to be scattered like sheep (Matt. 26: 31), but He is looking beyond the weakness of the present hour—including the present dispute about who is the greatest—to the future ministry of the apostles in which they will follow Him faithfully in laying down their lives for the brethren and for the truth of the gospel. According to ancient church tradition all but one, John, will die a martyr’s death, and John himself will die in exile on the

island of Patmos. They would all die—as we probably will—before seeing Christ return in power and glory; but when He comes they will share Christ’s table with Him at the Messianic feast. This particular honor will be shared with all believers, from the greatest to the least (Lk. 14: 12-24), but to the Apostles the special honor of sitting on thrones adjacent to Christ’s throne and judging the twelve tribes of Israel will be given (v. 30; cf. Matt. 19: 28). The most natural interpretation of v. 30 is identical to that of Matt. 19: 28; namely, that the apostles, no doubt including Paul, will sit with Christ in judgment of the ethnic nation of the Jews for rejection of their Messiah (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 426). I see no reason to accept Hendriksen’s interpretation that this must be the “restored new Israel” of those who have been regenerated (*Luke*, p. 972). Although it is true that in the new heavens and earth, no unbeliever will enter, Christ may be talking about the Day of Judgment itself rather than the eternal privilege of judging the twelve tribes. In a sinless world, what would the twelve Apostles be judging?

### ***3. Jesus washes the disciples’ feet—Jn. 13: 1-17***

Since this text is not part of the Synoptic gospels, I will give it only a brief treatment. Having corrected the disciples’ misunderstanding of what true greatness is and what true leadership is, Jesus illustrates His point with a demonstration the disciples would not likely forget. Only the lowliest bond-slave was required to wash guests’ feet upon entering a person’s house. Since it was a courtesy provided soon after arrival, the incident probably occurred as soon as Jesus and the disciples reclined at table. Perhaps the scene was as follows: As they walked to the upper room and entered, the disciples were still disputing who among them was regarded as the greatest. After they were seated around the table, there may have been an awkward moment of silence for there was no bond-slave to perform the menial service of washing feet. Jesus then corrects their thinking (Lk. 22: 24-30), and then gets up and washes their feet. Apparently, none of the disciples were humble enough to stoop this low, for how could they claim to be the greatest if they washed feet? But Christ, the Son of God, God in the flesh, didn’t mind at all. He knew who He was, “that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God” (Jn. 13: 3). Thus, His dignity and worth were not threatened by menial labor. Only disciples who are insecure about themselves will be threatened by the common, mundane tasks which must be done on a day to day basis. I am reminded of the story of a CEO of a large billion-dollar corporation who enjoyed washing dishes at the men’s prayer breakfast. He understood the message of foot-washing. Those who wish to make a sacrament of this practice miss the point.

### ***4. Jesus Announces His Betrayal—Matt. 26: 21-25; Mk. 14: 17-21; Lk. 22: 21-23 Jn. 13: 18-26***

The Passover meal began with *all twelve* disciples reclining with Him around the table. Although Jews sat through their normal meals, at special meals like the Passover, the custom was to recline on the floor with the elbows leaning on the table and the legs stretched out backwards from the table (cf. Carson, *John*, p. 473). As the disciples enter the room they are debating about who among them would be regarded as the greatest, followed by Jesus’ correction. Just before eating, Jesus gets up from the table and washes the disciples’ feet (Jn. 13: 1-17) as an illustration of his

teaching (Lk. 22: 24-30). From this point, the chronological order is provided by Matthew and Mark with other details supplied by John and Luke. Luke's narrative of the Supper does not follow exact chronological order. As best I can determine it, the order of events is as follows:

- (1) The disciples' dispute about who was regarded as the greatest, followed by Jesus' correction (Lk. 22: 24-30)
- (2) Jesus washes the disciples' feet and reclines at the table with the apostles to eat the Passover (Jn. vv. 1-17; Lk. v. 14). While washing Peter's feet, He gives Judas a subtle warning, "and you are clean, but not all *of you*" (Jn. vv. 10-11).
- (3) While they were eating the Passover meal Jesus announces that one of *them* will betray Him (Matt. v. 21; Mk. v. 18; Lk. v. 21; Jn. vv. 18-21). This constitutes a second warning to Judas.
- (4) This is followed by honest confusion and discussion among eleven disciples, "Lord, is it I?" (Matt. v. 22; Mk. v. 19; Lk. v. 23).
- (5) Jesus' answer to this question, "He who dipped his hand with me in the bowl" (Matt. v. 23; Mk. v. 20). This is a third warning to Judas.
- (6) Jesus' final and most severe warning to Judas (Matt. v. 24; Mk. v. 21; Lk. v. 21).
- (7) Judas' hypocritical question, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" (Matt. v. 25a)
- (8) Jesus' reply to Judas, "You have said it yourself" (Matt. v. 25b).
- (9) Peter motions to John to ask Jesus to identify the traitor (Jn. vv. 23-24).
- (10) John asks Jesus, "Who is it?" (Jn. v. 25).
- (11) Jesus answers John's question more specifically than He did the previous questions of the disciples, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and *give it to him*" (Jn. v. 26a).
- (12) Jesus then gives Judas the morsel of bread (v. 26b).
- (13) After Judas receives the morsel from Jesus, Satan enters his heart (Jn. v. 27a).
- (14) Knowing Satan had entered Judas' heart, Jesus tells him, "What you do, do quickly" (Jn. v. 27b).
- (15) After receiving the morsel, Judas leaves the room to betray Jesus (Jn. vv. 30).
- (16) The institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt. vv. 26-30; Mk. vv. 22-26; Lk. vv. 15-20).
- (17) Jesus' "farewell discourse" to the disciples which includes the announcement of Peter's denial at the very beginning (Jn. 13: 31—16: 33; esp. Jn. 13: 36-38; cf. Matt. 26: 31-35; Mk. 14: 27-31; see justification below under "*f*").
- (18) Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" (Jn. 17: 1-26).
- (19) Jesus and the remaining eleven disciples sing a hymn and go to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. v. 30; Mk. v. 26; Jn. 18: 1).

As indicated above, the first, subtle, warning given to Judas was while Jesus was washing Peter's feet and conversing with him—"and you are clean, but *not all of you*." After the announcement of betrayal—which constitutes a *second* warning to Judas—all of the disciples except Judas respond in genuine self-mistrust, "Surely, not I, Lord?" This honest questioning from "each one" occurs simultaneously with discussions among themselves about which one of them it would be. John indicates that *none* of them had even a clue who Jesus was talking about (v. 22). These questions were followed by Jesus' answer, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me." But this was a *veiled* answer because there were *several* disciples who were sharing the same bowl with Jesus (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 244). As such, the statement is not intended to identify the traitor but rather to highlight the heinousness

(outrageously wicked) of the crime and its fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus is being betrayed by a person who, from all outward appearances, is His friend and confidant (one in whom He puts confidence). Psalm 41: 9 is thus fulfilled, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, *Who ate my bread*, Has lifted up his heel against me.” This constituted a not-so-subtle warning to Judas. Jesus was reaching out to him even in this final hour making him realize what a terrible and unspeakable thing he was doing. After every warning, Judas had the opportunity to repent, but failing to do so, the successive warnings become more severe.

After Jesus says this, He follows with the final, most severe warning, “The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but *woe to that man* by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man *if he had not been born*.” Such a warning should have chilled Judas to the bone; but after three years of sitting at Jesus’ feet, watching Him perform miracles, and receiving His kindness and love without true repentance and faith, the opportunity of repentance was past. His heart had become stone. Then why the warnings? Why would Jesus warn someone whom He knew beforehand would not heed the warning, for He said concerning Judas, “One of you *will* betray Me”, not “One of you *might* betray Me.” The betrayal was certain, but He nevertheless reaches out to Judas one more time with a stern, blood-chilling warning (cf. Hendriksen, *John*, p. 244). Nevertheless, the Bible is full of such warnings. Isaiah the prophet is sent to the rebellious Israelites with these instructions, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed’” (Isa. 6: 9-10). God knew they would not repent, and He had further hardened the hearts that were already hardened against Him (Rom. 11: 7). Nevertheless, God sends Isaiah to warn them, anyway; and Isaiah does not say, “Lord, if they are not going to repent, why go?” God sent Moses to persuade Pharaoh to liberate Israel from slavery knowing that He would harden his heart so he would not let them go. What’s more, Moses knew this would happen before he left for Egypt (Ex. 4: 21), but he never says, “Lord, why don’t you just skip the other eight plagues and get to the last one?”

The text proves that God is *sovereign* and that men are *responsible*. If men were *not* responsible even in light of reprobation and divine hardening, we could accuse Jesus of folly (a foolish act) for warning Judas against doing something he could not help doing. We could also accuse Him of folly for condemning Judas for his act of treason, for if God foreordained the betrayal of Jesus as well as the man who would betray him, then Judas had no choice in the matter (Acts 1: 16-20; 2: 23). We may not fully understand this antinomy (apparent contradiction between two truths), but we come face to face with it time and again in the Scriptures.

The final warning to Judas is loaded with theological content in other respects. Some evangelical theologians, including the late Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (*The True Image*, 1988) and John Stott (*Essentials*, 1988) have promoted the doctrine of “annihilationism” or “extinction” which denies the eternal punishment of unbelievers, claiming instead that they become extinct or cease to exist at the moment of death, at the final judgment, or after a period in hell (another variety of purgatory?) (*The J.I. Packer Collection*, selected and introduced by Alister McGrath, pp. 222-223). This passage alone (even without any help from the analogy of faith) utterly refutes this theory. While Judas was living, he enjoyed many common graces given to men: he

ate good food and drank wine which gladdens a man's heart (Ps. 104: 15); he walked in the sunshine and beheld the brilliant colors of the sunset; he enjoyed the company of friends. In addition to these he received a privilege reserved for only 12 men in the history of the world—walking and living with the incarnate Son of God, God in the flesh, for three years. Of all the billions of human beings who have lived on this earth, he enjoyed far more blessings than most. If his *worst* fate was becoming extinct or ceasing to exist, how then can Jesus say it would have been *better for him if he had never been born*? Before someone's theology implicates Christ in a senseless statement, he should be more careful in exploring its full ramifications, however accredited he may be in the evangelical community.

While the disciples respond to the announcement with honest self-mistrust, Judas answers with hypocrisy, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" to which Jesus responds, "You have said it yourself." In other words, "Your own words condemn you." From this we may assume that Judas is sitting fairly near Jesus (perhaps on His left in a place of honor reserved for the treasurer) and that Jesus whispers these words to him. When Judas finally left, the disciples (perhaps with the exception of John; see below) still don't know who the traitor is (Jn. vv. 28-29).

While the confusion and discussion continues among the other eleven disciples, Peter is motioning to the disciple "whom Jesus loved", namely, John (v. 23; cf. Jn. 20: 2; 21: 7, 20, John's designation for himself). John is sitting at Jesus' right hand with his left elbow leaning on the table and his head and upper body leaning upon Jesus' chest ("on Jesus' bosom"; cf. Carson, p. 474; while such nearness would be unacceptable, perhaps repulsive, in Western culture, it was perfectly acceptable in ancient Palestine equivalent to African men holding hands in public). Taking the cue from Peter, he quietly asks Jesus, "Lord, who is it?" In the privacy of this conversation, Jesus whispers to John that the traitor "is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him" (v. 26a). This provides John with more specific information than previously disclosed to the whole group. *No one else* heard Jesus' statement to John, and we find nothing in the text indicating that the answer is relayed to Peter (who, judging from his behavior in the garden later, may have become violent toward Judas; cf. Jn. 18: 10).

After saying this to John, Jesus then gives the morsel (piece of food) to Judas at which time Satan takes complete control of him (full possession, distinguished from 13: 2; Hendriksen, p. 247). Realizing that Satan has taken complete control of Judas (note the "therefore"), Jesus says to him, "What you do, do quickly" (Jn. v. 27). More accurately, He says, "What you do, do *more* quickly" or "do *faster*" (Hendriksen, p. 247; the word is *tachiov*, also used in Jn. 20: 4). In modern lingo, "Get on with it!" Fully in control of the situation, Jesus determines to be crucified on Friday, the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (Hendriksen, p. 247). Judas then leaves the company of the disciples to do his dirty work.

The confusing part is Jn. v. 28, "Now *no one* of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose He had said this to him." Thus, *everyone* there heard this particular statement from Jesus to Judas (v. 27b), but none knew what it meant. The question is: Not even John, who had just received the previous communication from Christ? This is the opinion of Morris, who says, "But His words are general and the real import of them remains hidden from the *eleven*" (Leon Morris, *John*, p. 627, emphasis mine). Hendriksen believes it is possible that John understood and relayed the information back to Peter which means that now two others, besides Christ and



the traitor himself, knew his identity (*John*, p. 248). It is also possible that John, writing the fourth gospel, excludes himself in the “no one” of v. 28 meaning, “no one [but me]”; but this is also speculative. However, John does say in v. 29, “For *some* were supposing...” He does not say, “*all*” which may have been a subtle way of saying that *he* knew the real reason Judas was leaving, but others didn’t.

If he did fully understand Jesus’ act of giving Judas the morsel, why he does not tell the others or why he does not restrain Judas from leaving, the Scriptures do not say. Hendriksen may have the best solution.

The answer is probably to be sought in this general direction: when one is deeply shocked by a piece of thoroughly unexpected news, it takes time for the mind to adjust itself to the new situation. Probably neither John nor Peter, nor any of the others, had ever thought ill of Judas. Hence they could not at the spur of the moment, “put two and two together.” They were not immediately able to connect the words of dismissal (13: 27b) with the symbolic action of identification (13: 26b) (*John*, p. 248).

Whatever the reason, we don’t really know what it is. John explains that “some” (again, he does not say “all”) thought Judas, the treasurer, was sent to buy more food for the feast or that he was sent to give alms for the poor (v. 29). It was customary to give special gifts to the poor at Passover, and the city gates would be left open from Thursday at midnight onward where the poor would gather to receive them (Carson, *John*, p. 475). The other possibility—that they thought Judas was going to buy food for the feast—has contributed to a great deal of debate among commentators. Why would the disciples think he was going to buy food for a feast which was already being eaten and almost completed? It is clear from the text in Jn. 13 that the Passover meal mentioned is the *same* as that in the Synoptic texts of Matt. 26, Mk. 14, and Lk. 22. As for Jn. 13: 29, there is ample evidence that John was simply referring to the *ongoing celebration* of the Passover which was spread out over a seven day period. More meals would follow the actual Passover meal, and Judas was merely going for further supplies. Luke 22: 1 does not refer specifically to the Passover meal, but to the *entire Passover festival*, and this broader usage is even more evident in Jn. 2: 23, “Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, *during the feast*, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing.” As Hendriksen observes, “Surely Jesus did not perform these signs during the *eating of the Passover Supper*? The feast here is evidently the entire seven-day celebration” (*John*, p. 226; emphasis mine; cf. 11: 56, also cited in Hendriksen).

The text of Jn. 18: 28 is much more problematic which says, “Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the *Passover*.” This appears to be in contradiction to the Synoptic gospels and makes the reader wonder whether the meal of Jn. 13 was, indeed, the Passover meal. One theory is that Jesus did not eat the Passover meal, but *another meal* before Passover. Yet, the Synoptic gospels specifically report Jesus eating the *Passover* before His arrest (Matt. 26: 17-19; Mk. 14: 12, 14, 16; Lk. 22: 8, 11, 13, 15).

Many liters of ink have been spilled to solve this *apparent (but not real) contradiction between the Synoptics and John’s gospel*, and I will only summarize the three best options which *do not* include inconsistencies between the Synoptics and *John*, an assumption I cannot accept and have good reason not to accept.

(1) Jesus and the disciples were following the same calendar (a Galilean calendar; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 529) as the Pharisees who—along with the common people—celebrated the Passover on **Thursday** evening. The Sadducees (the dominate group making up the Sanhedrin of Jn. 18: 28) followed the Judean calendar and celebrated Passover on **Friday** evening. Thus, the Passover of Jn. 13: 2 is the one mentioned in the Synoptics while the Passover of Jn. 18: 28 is the Passover on Friday celebrated by the Sadducees (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 223). Leon Morris holds this view (*John*, p. 785). The problem with this theory is that the temple priests would have refused to sacrifice any paschal lambs on any other day than that following the “‘official’ (lunar calendar) day” (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 529). Further, if the paschal lambs were slaughtered on Thursday, the Sanhedrin (Jn. 18: 28) would not have been able to wait until Friday to eat it since the Passover lamb, once slaughtered, must be eaten before morning (Ex. 12: 10; 34: 25).

(2) The same argument made for Jn. 13: 29 can be made for 18: 28. The term “Passover” in 18: 28 can refer to the *entire seven-day feast* rather than to the Passover meal specifically (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 402; citing also 2 Chron. 30: 22). The feast held the day after Passover was called the Chagigah (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 402; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 531). This is Carson’s position, who says that the Jewish authorities—conscious of their official public status among the people—were avoiding any kind of defilement which might disqualify them from “full participation” in the entire seven-day celebration (*John*, p. 589). The problem with this theory is that the phrase, “to eat the Passover” always refers to the Passover Supper elsewhere in the gospels (Matt. 26: 17; Mk. 14: 12, 14; Lk. 22: 8, 11, 15; cited in Hendriksen); and unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary, we should adopt the same meaning in Jn. 18: 28. Besides, we have little information concerning the Chagigah (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 403). In this respect the Jn. 13: 29 text is different from Jn. 18: 28. The first passage mentions “the feast” which could refer to the ongoing seven-day festival, but 18: 28 says, “eat the **Passover**” not, “eat the *feast*”.

(3) Since the Sanhedrin had been so preoccupied with Jesus’ arrest and trial, they had not had the time to prepare for their own Passover meal. They not only had to wait for Judas to arrive, but they took part in Jesus’ arrest (Lk. 22: 52-53). Getting rid of Jesus was the main priority; thus, **the Passover had to wait until He was hanging on a cross** (Hendriksen, p. 403). In answer to this theory, it may be asked whether “these legalists” would risk incurring God’s wrath by missing the only authorized day to eat the Passover (see 3 above). Besides, they could have eaten the Passover in haste at the same time the disciples were eating it just before Judas arrives (Hendriksen, p. 404). In spite of this problem, Hendriksen implies that it is the simplest and best solution (p. 403).

Every theory has its problems, but I am inclined toward **Carson’s position** that eating the Passover in Jn. 18: 28 has reference to the *subsequent feasts associated with the full seven-day celebration and not the actual Passover meal itself*, its normal usage elsewhere in the gospels notwithstanding. Even Hendriksen admits that “The term Passover elsewhere in John refers to the entire seven-day feast” (p. 402). He also cites Geldenhuys (*Luke*, pp. 649-670) and Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. 2, pp. 565-568) who support this view (pp. 402-403).

### 5. *The institution of the Lord's Supper* —Matt. 26: 26-30; Mk. 14: 22-26; Lk. 22: 14-20

Writing the last of the gospel accounts, John omits the institution of the Lord's Supper which is already included in the Synoptics. The chronological order of the bread first and then the wine is preserved in *Matthew* and *Mark* with *Luke* departing from this order.

#### a. *The elements of the Lord's Supper*

The continuity and discontinuity between the Old Covenant Passover and the New Covenant Lord's Supper is contained in this passage. Jesus had given a preview of continuity after feeding the five thousand in His "I am the bread of life" discourse in Jn. 6: 32-58, and John the Baptist had seen Christ as the "lamb of God" from the outset (Jn. 1: 29, 36). In essence, Jn. 6: 32-58 is the divine commentary on the institution of the Lord's Supper. In that discourse He says,

I am the *living bread* that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the *bread* also which I will give for the life of the world is *My flesh*... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and *drink His blood*, you have no life in yourselves. He who *eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life*, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. 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 he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever (vv. 51, 53-58).

It is interesting that in the institution of the Lord's Supper Christ does not take a piece of roasted lamb's flesh and call it His flesh but rather takes a piece of *bread* and calls it His flesh. In this way He connects His body with the *manna* which came down out of heaven and sustained the life of weary Israelites on their wilderness journey. It was not Moses who actually supplied this bread, but His Father who has given "the true bread out of heaven" (Jn. 6: 32). In the same way, God has given Christ as the bread of life to give spiritual life and sustenance to the Christian pilgrim who travels through this life on his way to heaven, the Promised Land. The Apostle Paul says that it is "Christ who is our life" (Col. 3: 4), and Christ says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14: 6). In contrast to the manna which could only sustain physical life, the "bread of life" imparts eternal life to those who "eat" it. There is nothing sacerdotal about this passage as if by partaking of the Lord's Supper from a "duly authorized priest" the participant obtains, or maintains, eternal life. So interpreted, we could easily dispense with teaching, preaching, evangelism, and earnest prayer for the lost. Instead, we could merely distribute the bread and wine to the masses and "save" them without all the fuss and trouble—like the Roman Catholic pope who partakes of "mass" with hundreds of thousands of people. Rather, when we eat the bread at the Lord's Supper, we *symbolize* the act of taking Christ *internally* through repentance and faith. He is no longer *external* to us, but becomes *part* of us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Food which is left externally on one's plate has no benefit. It must be eaten so that the food actually becomes part of the tissues and organs of the body. Likewise, when we "eat" the bread of the Lord's Supper, we confess that we have partaken of Christ through faith, and that He is now part of us and nourishes us through His Spirit. Eating the bread is a tangible sign of a spiritual reality, but without the reality of regeneration and faith, the tangible sign has no benefit, and actually incurs God's judgment (1 Cor. 11: 27).

It is also very clear from the text that there is no evidence of “transubstantiation”, the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church maintaining that the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper actually change into the body and blood of the Lord Jesus when eaten and drunk by the participant. Jesus was standing there in front of the disciples when He says, “Take, eat, *this* is My body.” When He says, “This”, He clearly indicated the piece of bread in His hand, and the disciples would not have had any reason to believe that the reference was anything other than symbolic. The same can be said of the wine.

Since the Israelites were not permitted to eat blood (Lev. 3: 17), the red wine of the Passover (four cups of it) was symbolic of the blood of the Passover lamb. By taking a cup of this wine and referring to His blood, Christ identifies His blood with the blood of sacrifice. It was not the flesh, as flesh, which constituted the atoning sacrifice, otherwise animals which had already died by other means (e.g. by predators) could have been used for OT sacrifices. Rather, the animal had to be slain by men and its blood poured out to show that the life of the animal had been substituted for the life of the individual. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement” (Lev. 17: 11).

Although in the Passover everyone had his own cup of wine, Christ takes a single cup and passes it around so that each disciple could drink from the one cup, thus signifying the community of the body of Christ in the Spirit. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to *drink* of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12: 13).

### ***b. Continuity and discontinuity with the OT covenants***

#### ***(1) Exodus 24***

Christ also says, “for this is *My blood of the covenant*” (Matt. v. 28; Mk. v. 24), which the disciples would immediately recognize as a reference to **Ex. 24: 8**, “So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold *the blood of the covenant*, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’” Exodus 24 comprises a ratification ceremony following the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (cf. Ex. 19: 1—23: 33 for context). On this occasion, Moses received the Ten Commandments from Yahweh, also called “the words of the covenant”, or simply, “the covenant” (Ex. 24: 3; Ex. 34: 28; Deut. 4: 13; 2 Kings 23: 3). Young bulls were also sacrificed as peace offerings (v. 5); half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar and the other half collected in basins for use later (v. 6). Then the “book of the covenant” (or the words of the Law) was read to the people of Israel after which the people said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” (v. 7) Then the remaining half of the blood from the bull sacrifices was sprinkled on the people themselves whereby Moses says, “Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (v. 8).

To understand the significance of this ritual, we must understand something of the ancient *suzerainty treaty* forms used at the time this was taking place. If a superior king conquered a people or nation, he would place the defeated king (the vassal) under a covenant or treaty which

had stipulations or terms which the defeated king and his people were obligated to keep. In that sense it was a unilateral (one-sided) treaty with the conquering king setting all the terms; thus the conquered nation had no bargaining power to negotiate the terms. Thus, God is acting here as the conquering king who is establishing a unilateral covenant with Israel. Israel, for its part, is in no position to negotiate or bargain with God concerning the terms, obligations, or stipulations of the covenant—the Ten Commandments (including all the case laws illustrating the Ten Commandments). Thus, when the book of the covenant is read to the people, they agree to the terms as a matter of *formality*, not because they had the choice to do otherwise.

When the blood was sprinkled upon the people, this symbolized the fact that the people of Israel were taking upon themselves the self-maledictory oath of the covenant calling down a curse upon anyone failing to comply with its terms. In other words, if Israel failed to keep the covenant by violating God's Law, they would thus call down a curse (a self-curse or self-malediction) upon themselves for their failure. On the other hand, if they kept the terms of the covenant, they would be blessed. The divine commentary upon this self-malediction is found in Deut. 27 and 28, the curses and blessings of the covenant pronounced from Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim. Commenting on the text of Ex. 24, Meredith G. Kline remarks,

Now since in certain notable instances, it pleased the Lord of Israel to describe his covenant relationship to his people according to the pattern of these vassal treaties (suzerainty treaties), no other conclusion is warranted than that "covenant" in these instances denoted at the formal level the same kind of relationship as did the vassal covenants on which they were modeled. That is, "covenant" in these divine-human transactions denoted a *law covenant* and hence was expressive of a lordship that could satisfy the terms of the covenant by stretching forth its scepter in either blessing or curse (*By Oath Consigned*, pp. 21-22; underlined emphasis his, bold emphasis mine).

## (2) *Genesis 15*

This same suzerainty-treaty form is also employed by Yahweh in answer to Abram's question of *Gen. 15: 8*, "O Lord GOD, how may I know that I will possess it [the land of Canaan]?" This was not a question of unbelief, but rather one requesting additional information. When God had promised him descendents which would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens, Abram, although yet childless, "believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15: 6). At this point he was only requesting some tangible confirmation to the promise of land (v. 7) which Abram "believed" would surely come to pass according to the word of the Lord. God does not chide (criticize) him for the question, but confirms His promise through the elaborate use of a suzerainty treaty similar to the one in Ex. 20-24. More details of this treaty form are provided in Gen. 15. The three large animals were cut into two halves and laid opposite one another forming a blood-soaked path between the pieces. The birds were also killed but were too small to cut in pieces. The procedure which followed required the vassal to walk between the pieces of animals pronouncing upon himself the self-maledictory oath—"If I fail to keep the terms of this treaty, may I be as these dead animals." Symbolically the mutilated animals had received the curse of the covenant, and this is highlighted by the fact that Abram drove the birds of prey away from the carcasses (v. 11). One sign of being cursed was being killed in the open field and having your dead body consumed by the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky before it could be buried (Deut. 28: 26; 1 Sam. 17: 44-46; 2 Sam. 21: 9-10; Prov. 30: 17).

However in this particular case, Abram is *not* the one walking between the pieces of animals, for he is now in a deep sleep (v. 12). Instead, in his dream Abram observes a “*smoking oven* and a *flaming torch*” passing between the pieces of dead animals (v. 17). This description is followed by the words, “On that day the LORD made [literally “*cut*”] a covenant with Abram” (v. 18). So who was walking between the pieces? Who was accepting the self-maledictory oath, the curse of the covenant? The answer is: Yahweh. The Lord is walking between the pieces of dead animals, symbolically calling down a curse upon Himself if His promises to Abram—*both a land and a people*—are not kept. That the smoking oven and the flaming torch are symbols of Yahweh is confirmed in Exodus by the fact that Yahweh appears to the people of Israel as a pillar of *cloud* by day (like the appearance of smoke) and a pillar of *fire* by night (the flaming torch) (Ex. 13: 21). By Yahweh’s pledge to death, Abram knows that His promises could never fail. And what are those promises? The Apostle Paul declares that all the promises of God are “yes” and “amen” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 1: 20). Through Christ Jesus, God gives Abram (“exalted father”)—whose name is changed to Abraham (“father of a multitude”)—both a people who number as the stars of heaven and a land. The people are believers in Christ both from the Jews and the Gentiles (Gen. 12: 3; 18: 18) who are sons of Abraham, not by physical birth but by the new birth, by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3: 7). The land is not limited to a relatively small tract of land in Palestine, but consisted of the new heaven and new earth, a city whose “builder and maker is God”, the city Abraham was *really* looking for (Heb. 11: 9-10; Rev. 21: 2; Rom. 8: 18-25; Matt. 5: 5).

### (3) *Exodus 24 and Genesis 15 compared and contrasted*

The *similarities* between the ratification ceremonies of the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic Covenant should be noted. In both ceremonies there was the symbolic pledge to death—the self-maledictory oath. In the Abrahamic covenant the one pledging himself to death for failure to keep the covenant walked between the pieces of dead animals. In the Mosaic covenant ceremony, it was physically impossible for the whole nation of Israel to walk between the pieces, but another act was substituted for this one. The reader will note that after the people pledge themselves to keep the covenant, the blood of the slain animals was sprinkled upon the *people*. When the disobedient Israelites in Jeremiah’s day refused to obey the Mosaic Law regarding the release of Israelite slaves (Ex. 21: 2; Lev. 25), Jeremiah says,

Therefore thus says the LORD, “You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,” declares the LORD, “to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, *when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts*—the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be *food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth* (Jer. 34: 17-20).

It is clear from this text that the sprinkling of blood upon the people in Ex. 24 was equivalent (equal) to passing between the pieces in Gen. 15. What’s more, the people of Israel were fully aware of this equivalence (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 132-133. Robertson gives a thorough treatment of the connection between the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New Covenant inauguration in this book in the chapter, “*Abraham: The Covenant of Promise*, from which much of my discussion above, and below, has been derived.) For failure to keep the

Law (the covenant stipulations), the people will die at the hands of their enemies, and their dead bodies will be eaten by the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth—the distinctive sign of the curse (Jer. 34: 20; cf. Deut. 28: 26).

On the other hand, the glaring *differences* between Gen. 15 and Ex. 24 must also be noted. While in Gen. 15 a visible manifestation of God (a theophany) passes between the pieces of dead animals signifying the curse of the covenant falling upon God Himself if the terms are not met, in Ex. 24 the *people of Israel* are sprinkled with the blood of the covenant. It is therefore, Israel, not God, who walks between the pieces in the inauguration (or ratification) of the Mosaic covenant through the sprinkling of blood. And while in Gen. 15 the blood of the slain animals represents *God's blood*, the blood sprinkled in Ex. 24 represents *Israel's* blood should they disobey the covenant. The faithfulness of God to the Ten Commandments is not in question in the Ex. 24 context; the faithfulness of *Israel* to this Law *is*. However, in Gen. 15 God is confirming His own faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant. This difference is the basis for significant disagreement concerning the *degree of continuity and discontinuity* which exists between the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New covenants. For example, Kline—taking a less traditional approach than many reformed scholars—has this to say about Paul's treatment of the Mosaic covenant in *Galatians*,

Paul found the difference between two of the Old Testament covenants [namely, the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants] to be so radical that he felt obliged to defend the thesis that the one did not annul the other (Gal. 3: 15ff.). The promise of God to Abraham and his seed (Gen. 13: 15; 17: 8) was not annulled by the law which came later (Gal. 3: 17). The chronological details show that Paul was contrasting the promise covenant not to some general law principle *but to the particular historical administration of law mediated through Moses at Sinai* after Israel's 430 years in Egypt...

The Sinaitic administration, called "covenant" in the Old Testament, Paul interpreted as *in itself* a dispensation of the kingdom inheritance *quite opposite in principle to inheritance by guaranteed promise*: "For if the inheritance is by law, it is no longer by promise" and "the law is not of faith; but, He that doeth them shall live in them." (Gal. 3: 18a...cf. Lev. 18: 5).

...as noted above, according to Paul's statements the concept of inheritance by law as over against promise did not find expression merely as a *theoretical* principle existing problematically within a formal covenant arrangement that was itself promissory [based on promise], but rather as the *governing* principle of a particular covenant. Instead of distinguishing between "the whole law" and "the mere nature of the law," therefore, we must distinguish between *the entire Mosaic economy, or the total revelation mediated through Moses* [that is, the total revelation of the Pentateuch], and the *Sinaitic Covenant as a specific legal whole* [that is, the Ten Commandments and case laws]. And we must recognize that, according to Paul, it was this specific covenantal entity, the Sinaitic Covenant as such, that made inheritance to be *by law, not by promise—not by faith, but by works*...[cf. Lev. 18: 5; 25: 18; Deut. 4: 26, 40; 5: 33; 8:1; Neh. 9: 29]

How did the apostle arrive at so radical an assessment of the nature of the Sinaitic Covenant as something opposite to promise and faith, an assessment that might seem to jeopardize his great theme of justification by faith alone? He obviously knew that the demands made by God's covenant upon the individual could be construed in a way consistent with the promise principle. For in the theology of Paul the demands of covenant law both as stipulations and sanctions are *met and satisfied for men in their faith-identification with the Christ of promise*. Indeed, that was the burden of Paul's teaching concerning the law, and he presented it in opposition to those who would construe the law's demands in such *isolation from the divine promises* that the *entire old economy would be reduced to a way of works and so of futility and death*. But though Paul as a systematic, or at least biblical, theologian did not view the Sinaitic Covenant in Judaizing isolation from the totality of God's revelation, he was able when it came to *historical exegesis* to view the Sinaitic Covenant as a *separate entity with a character of its own*. He did not allow his systematic interests [his interests in systematizing the teaching of Scripture]...to obscure the radical opposition of the *law covenant of Sinai* to the principle of inheritance by promise...

But what was there about the Sinaitic Covenant that compelled Paul to identify it so exclusively in terms of law? *Elements of redemptive grace were present in and around the transaction*...the historical prologue of the Decalogue-digest [Ten Commandments] of this covenant reminded Israel that the Lord of the covenant was their Redeemer, who had fulfilled ancient promise by leading them forth from bondage; and among the law's sanctions [commandments] was the promise of mercy, a promise enhanced by the location assigned to the covenant tablets under the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, a place redolent [sweet smelling] of atoning grace. Yet Paul identified it as a covenant of law in opposition to promise because there was in his thought, as in that of the Old Testament, *a virtual synonymity* [synonymy or identity] *of covenant and oath*, and because the Sinaitic Covenant had been ratified by human oath *alone*. [That is, the Lord had not sworn an oath against *Himself* as He did in the ratification of the Abrahamic covenant. Rather, the people had sworn an oath against *themselves* if they did not keep the terms of the covenant.] Promise was present as well as law in this covenant but it was *only the law that had been covenantally solemnized*. The elements of the redemptive promise [the sacrificial system] were not as such *formalized by a divine oath of ratification*. There was only *human* oath, giving covenant form to the law which Israel swore to obey.

In contrast to his classification of the Sinaitic Covenant as law, Paul placed God's covenantal dealings with Abraham in the category of *promise* [although circumcision came later as an oath of obedience; Gen. 17]. For in the course of God's covenant making with Abraham there was another ceremony of covenant ratification...involving a *divine* oath (Gen. 15). It was, moreover, by this ritual of the *divine* oath that God's covenant relationship to Abraham was *first formally established*...first formalized as a covenant. The Sinaitic Covenant, on the other hand, was ratified in the original instance and, indeed, *exclusively by the oath of the Israelite vassal*; and it was evidently by *reason of this difference* that Paul identified the Sinaitic Covenant, in radical contrast to the promise given earlier to the patriarchs, as law.

Whatever the explanation, however, the unquestionable fact emerges in Galatians 3 that Paul saw in the Old Testament *alongside the covenant of promise another covenant* which was so far from being an administration of promise as to raise the urgent question whether it did not abrogate the promise...The contrast between these "two covenants" is, if anything, more sharply drawn in [Gal. 4]. The promise covenant is characterized by freedom and the Sinaitic Covenant by bondage...

Paul, of course, taught that the Mosaic revelation of law made its contribution within the history of redemption to the fulfillment of the promises (Gal. 3: 15ff.). *The law covenant did not make the promise covenant of no effect*. Somehow the law was administratively compatible with the promise...But even when this compatibility has been affirmed *the difference between the two covenants is not denied but rather assumed*. The Sinaitic law Covenant was consistent with the earlier promise [Abrahamic promise], but *as a covenant it did not consist in promise* (*By Oath Consigned*, pp. 22-25; underlined emphasis his; bold emphasis and words in brackets mine).

To reiterate two of many important points in Kline's analysis, the Abrahamic covenant is ratified through a *divine* oath while the Mosaic covenant is ratified through *human* oath. Secondly, in Paul's reckoning, the difference between the two historical covenants was significant enough to evoke the question of whether the Mosaic covenant (a later covenant) had annulled the Abrahamic covenant (an earlier covenant), a question which is given a resounding "No" for an answer. Based on Paul's treatment of these "two covenants" (not "one"; Gal. 4: 24) in Gal. 3—4, my own conclusion is that the New covenant promises are the extension and fulfillment, more specifically, of the Abrahamic promises conditioned upon what *God* does rather than what *man* does. The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, is a covenant of law *redemptively designed* to kill Israel's hopes (or anyone's hopes) of being saved by law-keeping (for further discussion, see my *Systematic Theology, "Anthropology"*). Additionally, I would say that if the Mosaic covenant was not a legal covenant based on Israel's performance, we will have trouble reconciling the fact that the nation was deprived of the Abrahamic promises through disobedience, for it is clear from Deut. 27—28 that their maintenance of these promises was conditional. More importantly, if the Mosaic covenant was not a legal covenant, we will also have trouble explaining why Christ had to die in the first place. Christ died as a result of the curse of the Mosaic covenant. He "redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a



curse for us” (Gal. 3: 13a). Furthermore, the perfect obedience to the Law of God throughout His life is not incidental to His saving ministry but essential to it. Through His perfect obedience, He kept the Law and thus *earned* the blessings and life promised in it both for Himself and for those who are united to Him by faith (Deut. 28; Lev. 18; 5). This is precisely why the New covenant is “better” than the Mosaic covenant—because the imputed righteousness of Christ *guarantees* the faith that keeps on believing and keeps on fulfilling the covenant stipulations. The entire book of *Hebrews* is based upon a contrast, *not* between the New covenant and the Abrahamic covenant, but between the “Old” covenant (the Mosaic covenant; Heb. 8: 13) and the New covenant, the same contrast found in Gal. 3—4. This is because there is *no essential difference* between the New covenant and the Abrahamic covenant except one of promise and fulfillment (cf. Rom. 4).

Two more things must be said lest I be misunderstood. *First*, salvation in the Mosaic covenant, or any covenant, was based on faith. There could be no salvation otherwise. Although the *nation* failed to keep the covenant and was judged, *individual* Israelites who believed the Abrahamic promises were saved by faith—as was Abraham—even though they suffered temporally for the sins of the nation. In essence, the history of Israel is *Exhibit A* demonstrating to the whole world the impossibility of being saved by works (cf. Gal. 2: 15-16; notice the “we” statements, namely, “we, the Jews”; cf. my commentary on *Galatians*). *Second*, the elements of saving grace were depicted in the Mosaic economy through the sacrificial system. However, as Kline has proposed above, the sacrificial elements themselves were not technically the covenant. The covenant was the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34: 28; Deut. 4: 13); and as we see from Isa. 1: 12-17, Israel was not judged for failing to keep the sacrificial laws, but for failing to keep the moral laws.

I have taken this excursion into the OT to provide the broader redemptive context of Christ’s words of covenant inauguration in the Synoptic gospels. Notice that Christ says, “this is *My* blood of the covenant” (Matt. v. 28); He does not say, “this is *your* blood of the covenant” (as per Ex. 24 when the *Israelites* pledged their own blood in ratification of the Mosaic covenant). But the blood of Christ substitutes for *both* the blood of the slain animals in Gen. 15 *as well as* the blood sprinkled upon the people in Ex. 24. It provides both the *promise of blessing* from the divine side and *removes the curse of violation* from the human side.

*First*, God in Christ pledged Himself to death if the promises to Abraham were not fulfilled—the promise of an innumerable seed (people) and a land. These promises were, indeed, fulfilled through the multiplication of the Israelites and the occupation of the land of Canaan as expressed in Josh. 21: 45, “*Not one* of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; *all* came to pass.” Yet, because of Israel’s unfaithfulness under the Mosaic covenant, these promises were essentially *lost* to the ethnic nation. Hundreds of thousands of Abraham’s descendents were killed by Assyrians and Babylonians (the loss of the “seed”), and thousands more were removed from the Promised Land into exile (the loss of land. In fact, even today only one in five Jews lives in modern Palestine, the Land of Promise). Such a loss prompted the Apostle Paul to anticipate the interpretation that the word of the Lord to Abraham had ultimately failed (Rom. 9: 6). But the word of the Lord had not failed because God never intended to limit His promises to Abraham to *a physical nation and the land of Palestine*. “For he is not a Jew who is one *outwardly*, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew

who is one *inwardly*; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God” (Rom. 2: 28-29). Through Abraham, God intended to bless *all* the families, or people groups, of the earth, not just the nation of Israel (Gen. 12: 3); and if they are blessed at all, they must be blessed as Abraham was, through faith.

**Second**, because of His oath to Abraham and because the promises to Abraham would have failed otherwise, God restores the promises to Israel by removing the curses of the Law of Moses through the substitutionary death of Christ. But in so doing, He also accomplishes His eternal purpose of saving both Jew and Gentile by faith. This, in turn, clarifies the true meaning of the promises to Abraham.

Thus, by the blood of Christ both the promises of the Abrahamic covenant are fulfilled (Gen. 15), and the violations of the Law of Moses are paid for and canceled out (Ex. 24; Col. 2: 13-14, “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having *canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us*, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”). Concerning the inauguration of the New covenant at the Lord’s Supper, Robertson says,

In presenting the cup to his disciples, Jesus says: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins” (Matt. 26: 28). The “pouring out” (*ekcheō*) of Christ’s blood reflects the sacrificial language of the Old Testament, and the process by which the curses of the covenant were heaped on a substitutionary victim. Christ explains his death to be “unto remission of sins.” *His death effects deliverance from the covenantal death curse by the removal of old covenant violations*. Jesus offers his blood as the basis for deliverance from the curses of the covenant.

The gospel of Luke adds a further dimension to this procedure by mentioning the “new” covenant being established by Christ: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you” (Luke 22: 20). Not only does Christ’s blood remove the curse of the old covenant; *simultaneously it introduces the blessed condition of the new covenant*.

This dual significance of Christ’s blood echoes the dual role of God’s words to Adam in the original institution of the covenant of redemption. The infliction of the curses of the covenant of creation was coupled immediately with the announcement of the blessings of the covenant of redemption. While both man and woman experienced curse for sin, at the same time they received promise of blessing through redemption.

Now in Christ this *dual role of curse and blessing* finds its consummative significance. As Christ takes to himself the curses of the old covenant, he simultaneously inaugurates the blessed condition of the new (*The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 144-145).

#### (4) *Jeremiah 31: 27-40*

Only in *Luke* do we find the words, “new covenant” (22: 20), and this designation would bring to mind the promise of the new covenant in Jer. 31. This is possibly the best-known section in the whole book of *Jeremiah* and also the most debated among Paedobaptists (those who believe in infant baptism) and Baptists (those who believe that baptism should be administered only to professing believers).

At the beginning of his ministry, Jeremiah was commissioned to “To pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (1: 10). Even the casual reader can determine that most of his time has been spent breaking down and destroying. Chapter 30 has been a pleasant prophecy for Jeremiah, and the present chapter has proven no less comforting.

As God has watched over his people to “pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster, so [he] will watch over them to build and to plant” (v. 28).

In the days of the building and planting, the proverb that God has unjustly punished Israel and Judah will no longer be spoken (vv. 29-30), but everyone will perceive that God has been fully justified in his judgments (Keil, Vol. 2, p. 35). This honest perception of God’s justice and righteousness fully agrees with the idea presented in v. 34 that all will know the Lord from the least to the greatest of his people—i.e. they will “know” that his ways with them have been just. Beginning with v. 31 is the explanation of the new covenant made “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”. Thus, this “*new covenant*” is made with the *Old Covenant people*. However, in Heb. 8: 1-13 (and throughout *Hebrews*) it is clear that this “new covenant” is made not only with Israel and Judah but with all who are joined to Christ, the church. Therefore, to whom is this covenant made, to the Jews, to Christians, or to both? We must remember that Chapter 31 is written for the benefit of those who will be returning from exile—the *remnant* of Israel and Judah who *typify* those who will enjoy the covenant blessings of God. This does not imply that all who returned from the exile after 536 BC were true believers (see *Haggai* and *Zechariah*), but that *in comparison* with the whole nation of idolaters before the exile, the remnant was qualitatively different. They had learned a few lessons about obedience and keeping the covenant, and were, by comparison, enlightened in the ways of the Lord (v. 34). For this reason the prophet says hyperbolically (in *exaggerated* style), that it will be unnecessary for each man to teach his neighbor, “ ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.”

Let us examine some of the points of comparison and contrast between this new covenant and the old covenant.

(1) It is made with Israel (v. 31) and with the NT church consisting of Jew and Gentile (Heb. 8). Therefore, the remnant of Israel returning from exile must be a type of believers in the NT. Nevertheless, we would not wish to swallow up the type with the antitype. The Apostle Paul wishes for us to know that God is not through with his OT people, but will one day restore the physical nation to the *faith* of their fathers and for the *sake* of their fathers (Rom. 11: 28-29). It is in this sense that we may apply the *partial* fulfillment of this prophecy to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” as a nation when so many of the Jewish people will be converted to Christ.

(2) It is “not like” the covenant made with Israel when the nation came out of Egypt. How was it “not like” this covenant?

(a) The old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, was *broken*. The new covenant; therefore, will not be broken; otherwise, the new covenant would be “*like*” the old covenant. The reason that it will not be broken is the *implanting of the law into the heart by the Holy Spirit* which will *ensure the keeping of the covenant through faith*, a genuine faith which will yield a consistent, though not perfect, submission to the precepts of the law (v. 33). And to the extent that our obedience is deficient, we have a better mediator of the covenant whose perfect obedience to the law is a substitute for our imperfect obedience. If the new covenant were not “better” in the sense of

being “unbreakable”, it would not be an improvement over the old covenant and would be so much “like” it as to be indistinguishable.

(b) The new covenant is a “better covenant” based on “better promises” (Heb. 8: 6). It is better because it has a better priesthood, the priesthood of Christ who ever lives to make intercession for his people (Heb. 7); and it is based on a better sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and not that of bulls and goats (Heb. 9). Secondly, it is better because the law of God will not be written on stones but will be written on the hearts of believers (Jer. 31: 33; cf. 2 Cor. 3: 6-8). God will then be their God and they will be his people. This relationship between God and His people was the design of the old covenant, but this design could not be accomplished through the old covenant because of human weakness (Rom. 8: 3). For this reason, the first (old) covenant was not “faultless” (Heb. 8: 7), for had it been faultless, God would not have had the occasion or reason to establish a new covenant which took its place. Notice in Heb. 8: 8 that the writer says, “But finding fault with *them*”, a translation which has caused theologians of the “one-covenant-of-grace” framework to say that it was not in the *covenant* that God found fault, but in the *Israelites*. But while it is certainly true that he found fault with *them*, the whole message of *Hebrews* is the superiority of the new covenant to the old covenant and how the new has replaced the old which is “obsolete” (Heb. 8: 13). The writer of *Hebrews* deals only momentarily with the failures of the Israelites, but spends most of the letter addressing the deficiency of the Old Covenant relative to the New Covenant. Thus, the hermeneutical demands of context have caused some expositors to adopt a variant Greek reading of the text which may be translated as follows: “for he finds fault when he says to them” (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 298; cf. John Brown, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, p. 370).

(c) The new covenant is also not like the old in terms of the effusion (pouring forth) of the Holy Spirit. This has been mentioned in “a” above but has an additional significance here. Through the greater and more substantial operations of the Holy Spirit it will no longer be necessary for believers in the new covenant to be *solely dependent* upon the communication of truth from man to man (v. 34; cf. Brown, p. 373; also Keil, *Jeremiah*, Vol. 2, p. 40). Everyone, from the least and humblest of the saints to the most intelligent and well-known, will “know” the Lord through the operations of the Spirit in his heart. This is not a denial of the Spirit’s work in the OT saints. He must have been working for salvation to have been possible at all. However, Jeremiah is not speaking with respect of *persons*, but with respect to the *economy* or *dispensation* in which they lived. While Abraham’s faith is doubtless set before us as a model, he must be considered a unique specimen of faith in comparison to the multiple generations of faithless Israelites (cf. Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 191).

Baptists use v. 34 as justification of their position that the “church” *by definition* consists of only those who truly “know the Lord” and have no need of *evangelism*. This definition is readily conceded so long as we are talking about the “*invisible* body of believers”, but the normal address to the church in the NT (see the NT epistles) is not made to this elusive “invisible church” whom no one can know but God but to the “visible church” consisting of those who profess faith in Christ *and their children*—Eph. 6: 1-3. Thus, the children of believers who are too young to understand the gospel are excluded from membership in the church until such a time when they make a public profession of their faith and “know the Lord”. The problem with this explanation is that Jeremiah is speaking of the knowledge of the Lord in exaggerated terms.

He is using a literary device called *hyperbole*; he is not saying that every single Israelite **returning from exile** would be a true believer, but that in **comparison** to the rebellious Jews before the exile, there will be a qualitative difference in their spirituality.

If this were not the case, ***we could not apply the passage to the returning exiles at all*** since it is quite evident from the post-exilic prophets that there were many **unbelievers** in their midst (cf. Hag. 1: 4-11; Zech. 1: 4; Mal. 3: 8-9) who needed someone to tell them, “Know the Lord!” Furthermore, what about the infant children of returning Israelites; are we to presume all of them to be regenerate and needing no instruction? It is evident from the context and Israelite history that we are obligated to interpret the passage as partially fulfilled in the return of the exiles. Likewise, when we apply this passage to the church, we must interpret “each man” not absolutely without exception, but by way of comparison. ***In comparison to the OT people*** living in rebellion for hundreds of years with only modest (by comparison to the NT) operations of the Spirit, the church is qualitatively different because the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth (Jn. 16: 13). There will come a time when the absoluteness of this knowledge of the Lord will, indeed, come to pass in the new heaven and earth where every single inhabitant will be a genuine believer.

The unconditional nature of the new covenant, because it is guaranteed by the work of Christ, is expressed in vv. 35-40. If the fixed order of nature can be interrupted, and if the heavens above can be measured and the earth’s foundation searched out below, then the offspring of Israel shall cease from being a nation and will be cast off. Because of such unqualified promises to Israel and Judah, I am inclined to believe that the earth will one day witness the spiritual revival of the Jewish nation (cf. John Murray, *Romans*), but this revival cannot occur under the terms of the Old Covenant which Israel was unable to keep. It must occur under the terms of the New Covenant—repentance of sin and faith in the accomplished work of Christ. Notice that the promise in v. 40 is that Jerusalem would not be “plucked up or overthrown anymore **forever**”. However, the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews continued to reject the Lord and crucified their Messiah for which they suffered the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Thus, the ultimate and final fulfillment of this prophecy is the consummated kingdom of God (consisting of both believing Jew and Gentile) expressed in Rev. 21: 2 as the “new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (cf. Keil, *Jeremiah*, Vol. 2, pp. 46-47).

For an excellent comparison and contrast between the Old and the New Covenants, see Keil, *Jeremiah*, Vol. 2, pp. 36-41.

### ***c. The application of the New covenant***

Christ says, “this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for **many** for forgiveness of sins.” He did not say, “for **all**”. Christ’s blood was shed for the sins of the whole world without distinction of race, nationality, or socio-economic differences, but not for every single individual (see my *Systematic Theology*, “Soteriology”).

### ***d. The consummation of the New covenant***

Luke 22: 16 reads, “for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is *fulfilled* in the kingdom of God.” “Fulfilled” (from *plēroō*) can be translated “completed”. The last cup of wine pointed to the consummation of the kingdom of God when Christ returns and the great Messianic banquet is held (Chamblin, p. 233; Carson, p. 539; cf. Lk. 18, the parable of the great feast). Jesus’ disciples will continue to celebrate the supper throughout history, but they will have to celebrate it without His bodily presence until He comes again.

When they were finished, they sang the final hymn, the last part of the *Hallel* (Ps. 114—118 or 115—118) (Carson, p. 539). Ps. 118: 22-23 reads, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner *stone*. This is the LORD’S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.” They then went to the Mount of Olives.

**6. Jesus predicts the failure of the disciples and Peter’s betrayal—Matt. 26: 31-35;  
Mk. 14: 27-31; Lk. 22: 31-34; Jn. 13: 36-38**

The placement of this story is difficult. Matthew and Mark place it *after* Jesus and the disciples depart from the upper room for the Mount of Olives (cf. vv. 30, 26, respectively). Luke 22: 39 places it *before* their departure, as does Jn. 18: 1. Jesus’ “farewell discourse” and “high priestly prayer” (Jn. 13: 31—17: 26) indicate that Jesus had much more to say to the disciples after the Supper and *after* the announcement of Peter’s betrayal (vv. 36-38), but there is disagreement among scholars about where the discourse and prayer occurred—in the upper room or on the Mount of Olives? (Hopefully, the student is beginning to see how difficult it is to harmonize the gospels.) There is no clear temporal connection between Matt. 26: 30 and 31 or between Mk. 14: 26 and 27. The connecting word “then” (*tote*) is used ninety times in *Matthew* as compared to six times in *Mark* and fourteen times in *Luke* and often has no temporal implications (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 90). It appears to have none in this context, so we are left with a rather loose connection in *Matthew* and *Mark* between going to the Mount of Olives and the announcement of Peter’s betrayal. Luke’s account places it *before* the Mount of Olives but his method of transition is no more helpful than Matthew’s and Mark’s. This leaves us with John’s account which provides us with a clearer picture—although not a conclusive picture—of when the announcement of Peter’s denial actually occurred (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 540). It occurs after Judas leaves (13: 30) but before the party leaves for the Mount of Olives (as in *Luke*)—thus, during the upper room discourse. The text in v. 31 says, “Therefore *when he* [Judas] *had gone out*, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him...’” From this point on in John’s narrative, there is a *smooth transition from Jesus’ statement in v. 33*, “Where I am going, you cannot come” and Peter’s question in v. 36, “Lord, where are You going?” *and the remainder of their conversation from v. 36a-38*. The announcement is evoked (called forth) by Peter’s confident assertion that he is ready to lay down his life for Christ, to which Christ responds, “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.”

When comparing all four accounts of this story—or any other story in the Synoptics and *John*—it is important to keep in mind that the writers were reconstructing the story according to the remembrance of it given to them by the Holy Spirit (or, if you like, following a previous source like *Mark*). Thus, it is not necessary to tie our brains into knots attempting to reconstruct each statement exactly as it occurred and when it occurred in the conversation—as much as our

curiosity would wish to know the exact order. The verbal inspiration and infallibility of Scripture does not demand exact reporting by its writers. Having made this disclaimer—and because I *am* curious—I will nevertheless hazard a guess with the following reconstruction using the NAB, 1995 edition:

***John 13: 31-38***

31 Therefore when he [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; 32 if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 33 “Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘**Where I am going, you cannot come.**’ 34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” 36 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, **where are You going?**” Jesus answered, “**Where I go**, you cannot follow Me now; but you will **follow** later.” 37 Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not **follow** You right now? I will **lay down my life** for You.” 38 Jesus answered, “Will you **lay down your life** for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.”

***Matthew 26: 31-33 (Mk. 14: 27-29)***

31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will **all** fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘**I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.**’ 32 “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.” 33 But Peter said to Him, “**Even** though all may fall away because of You, **I will never fall away.**”

***Luke 22: 31-33***

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 But he said to Him, “Lord, with You **I am ready to go both to prison and to death!**”

***Mark 14: 30-31***

30 And Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, that **this very night**, before a rooster crows **twice**, you **yourself** will deny Me three times.” 31 But *Peter* kept saying **insistently**, “**Even** if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And they all were saying the same thing also.

Well, for what it’s worth, there it is. (I only said this reconstruction is not “necessary”; I didn’t say I didn’t want to try.) But don’t bet your ministry that this exactly the way the conversation played out. You will notice from the highlighted words in *John* that the dialogue there is fairly tight knit and cannot be easily divided, but it is quite possible that Christ mentioned Peter’s denial **twice** in this episode. After the first announcement, Peter may have been reduced to stunned silence and said nothing, giving Christ an opportunity to direct His attention away from Peter to the other ten, saying, “You will **all** fall away because of Me this night, for it is written...” After this statement Peter, regaining his composure, said that although the others

may fall away, he wouldn't. (After all, he probably figured **he** was the greatest.) Turning to Peter gently and lovingly (cf. Lk. 10: 41), Christ explains that Satan has desired to bring about their fall (see below), but because of His intercession for Peter, his faith would not ultimately fail. But Peter then repeats that he is ready to go with Jesus to prison and to death. Jesus, in turn, repeats the announcement with more emphasis and detail, "**this very night**, before a rooster crows **twice**, you **yourself** will deny Me three times." Peter is now insistent, saying **a third time** that he is ready to die with Christ. If this reconstruction is correct, Peter's three-fold pledge of loyalty corresponds to his three-fold denial—an interesting theory, anyway.

The quotation in *Matthew* and *Mark* is from Zech. 13: 7. While Christ applies it to the disciples, Zechariah is predicting the scattering of the whole Jewish nation in which two-thirds will be destroyed and only one-third preserved (v. 8). Zechariah is a post-exilic prophet; therefore, this was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when most of the nation perished from the Roman invasion (Thomas V. Moore, *Zechariah*, pp. 214-215; also C.F. Keil, *Zechariah*, p. 400). Not only will the disciples flee when Christ is arrested, but 40 years later the whole nation will be scattered as a consequence of the rejection and execution of the Messiah, their Shepherd.

Demonstrating once again His complete control of the situation, Christ then tells them that once He is raised, He will meet them in Galilee. If this statement sounds self-confident, it's because it **is self-confident**; His resurrection was as certain as His crucifixion (cf. Matt. 28: 7, 16-17; Jn. 10: 17-18).

Satan had failed to entice Jesus in the wilderness temptations or at any time during His earthly sojourn. He now desires to destroy this little band of weak, but overconfident disciples and be done with it. He has been granted permission to sift Peter—and the rest of the disciples ("you" is **plural; humas**)—like wheat. This may be a subtle reference to the book of *Job* when Satan requests permission to afflict Job thus provoking him to reject God, proving he only loves God for His benefits (Job 1—2). Satan also failed to bring about Job's downfall, and this biblical fact may be a subtle encouragement to Peter and the others. Satan is permitted to try, but He will not succeed—at least not in the long run. The sifting process involves the violent shaking of the wheat to separate the grain from the chaff; thus, Satan would like to turn them upside down and sideways to the point of provoking their denial of Christ thus proving that they are **only chaff** after all—the whole lot of them. Excepting Judas, he failed again; but then he will turn his attention to the church which he will attempt to destroy until he is totally vanquished at Christ's return (cf. Rev. 12: 13-17; Rev. 20: 10).

The only significant thing standing in his way at this point in time is the **intercession** of Christ—"but I have prayed for you." If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8: 31). "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, **nor angels, nor principalities**, nor things present, nor things to come, **nor powers**, nor height, nor depth, **nor any other created thing**, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8: 35, 38-39). Paul's catalog of things which cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ includes fallen "angels", "principalities", "powers" (cf. Eph. 6: 12), or "any other created thing" including the devil himself who was created a good angel but fell from his exalted position.



Not included in Christ's intercession is Judas Iscariot to whom He did *not* say, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail." In His high priestly prayer of Jn. 17, Jesus says, "I ask on *their* behalf [*namely, the eleven remaining disciples and, by extension, the church*]; I *do not* ask on behalf of the *world*, but of *those whom You have given Me*; for they are Yours" (v. 9). Christ's priestly prayer of intercession is *limited* to the ones who had been *given* to Him by the Father. Earlier He had said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will *certainly not cast out*" and also "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of *all* that He has given Me I *lose nothing*, but raise it up on the last day" (Jn. 6: 37, 39). Those who are "given" to Christ by the Father shall most certainly come to Him in faith, and of those coming to Him in faith there will be *no* attrition (loss of people)—not a single one will be lost, but all will be resurrected to life on the last day, the day of Christ's return. Though following Christ for three years, Judas was not "given" to Christ; otherwise, he would not have betrayed Him, and he would not have been lost.

### 7. Jesus Predicts His Execution along with Criminals—Lk. 22: 35-39

This section is found only in *Luke*. The conversation occurs after the announcement of Peter's denial and before the disciples leave the upper room for the Mount of Olives. It is one of the most enigmatic (puzzling) statements of Jesus found in all the gospels, not primarily because it might be misinterpreted and misapplied by the *modern reader* but that it could be, and was, misinterpreted by the disciples as a call to arms (Lk. 22: 49-50). That a call to arms could not be the correct interpretation is obvious from the Sermon on the Mount as well as the whole corpus (collected writings) of His teaching in the gospels. When being interrogated by Pilate He says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (Jn. 18: 36). Furthermore, shortly after this in the Garden of Gethsemane Peter will take his sword and chop off the ear of the high priest's slave upon which Jesus will sharply rebuke him and will undo the damage by healing the ear (cf. Matt. 26: 52; Lk. 22: 51; Jn. 18: 10). Besides, as He explains later, even if He did want to resist arrest, He wouldn't need a sword, for if He wished He could summon twelve legions of angels (roughly 72,000 of them) to deliver Him from the Romans and the Jews (Matt. 26: 53).

One possible solution is to interpret Jesus' suggestion of buying a sword as *irony* (where the intended meaning is the very opposite of the way the words are used). Thus interpreted, the key to its meaning is found in v. 37 (introduced by the explanatory "for"; *gar*) which is a quotation of Isa. 53: 12, "Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was *numbered with the transgressors*; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors." Scripture must be fulfilled, and Jesus knows that He is about to be crucified between two convicted criminals ("transgressors"). In other words, He will be *treated* as a criminal although it will be clear that Jesus, far from being a transgressor, is *the one* predicted who will be "crushed" for the iniquities of actual transgressors (vv. 5-6).

Moreover, far from attempting in any way to fight His way through this ordeal, He would go to His death as a lamb going to the slaughter (v. 7). Yet, *ironically*, in a short while the Jewish officials and Roman soldiers led by Judas will apprehend Him as if He were a common, sword-

toting criminal who would use force and violence to avoid arrest. But had Jesus ever shown any sign of violent behavior, or had He ever used inflammatory speech toward the Roman government as if He were attempting to incite an armed rebellion? Any such accusations were, therefore, ridiculous and *ironic*. Thus, He is giving the disciples a “heads-up” on what is about to happen in the Garden of Gethsemane onward and also commenting on the *irony* of the occasion. He is not really suggesting that they *literally* go out and buy a sword for which they will have no use in spreading the gospel. His kingdom is not of this world, and He has not come as a military king. This much has been patent (obvious) from the very beginning of His ministry as He went about healing the sick and preaching a kingdom founded upon a change of heart rather than political might. The disciples should know this by now and should be able to discern the irony in Jesus’ statement, interpreted: “I, the one who came to *die* for transgressors, will now be *treated* as one. Furthermore, since you are my disciples, you also will be treated as criminals; therefore, sell your coat, buy a sword and learn to defend yourselves. But this is not what I really mean; I’m only using irony to point out how *ridiculous* the accusations are.”

The disciples, who have proven to be obtuse (slow in understanding) on a number of occasions, don’t get the irony and respond, “Look, Lord, we have two swords already!” When He says, “It is enough,” He is obviously not implying that two swords are “enough” to take on the whole Roman army. He was basically saying, “That’s enough of this conversation (or, “I’m through with this conversation”, or “This is the end of this conversation.”). You’re not getting my meaning, anyway” (cf. Gen. 45: 28; 2 Sam. 24: 16; 1 Kings 19: 4; Mk. 14: 41) (cf. Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 977, who does not interpret the passage ironically, but does share this interpretation of “It is enough.”).

The problem with an ironic interpretation is that it leaves some loose ends. Was Jesus also being ironic about *taking along provisions* (v. 36a)? Considering the fact that He was about to be executed as a criminal and that the disciples—guilty by association—would no longer be welcomed with open arms into Hebrew homes during their missionary journeys (Matt. 10: 10-12), this advice makes perfect sense (cf. Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 570). Had He said nothing about buying a sword, we would never have suspected any irony in this statement. Geldenhuys provides the most probable explanation.

During the time when the Savior, because of His miracles of healing and other charitable work among the needy multitudes, did not yet experience much opposition and enmity, His disciples, when He sent them out...were treated with great respect by the people. Although the Lord at that time commanded them to go without purse, script and shoes, they were so hospitably received wherever they went, that they suffered no want. Everything was made easy and prosperous for them, and they returned with joy (10: 17).

But, says the Saviour, the hour has now struck when everything is going to be different. From now on He will no longer be with them in the same way as before and they will no longer be honoured and entertained, as before, because they are the disciples of an honoured and beloved Master. He has already been rejected by the Jewish authorities and ere [before] long He will be killed and looked upon as a hated criminal by practically the whole people. The immediate result will be that they, as the followers of the Crucified One, will likewise be despised, pushed out and persecuted. So they can no longer depend on any generous provision for their needs on the part of the people. Therefore they will henceforth, with all their strength and energy, have to find their own way through a hostile world. They must, the Savior declares in a striking figure [v. 36a], as His followers in the struggle of life, be just as determined and whole-hearted as a fighting man who gives up everything, even his garment, as long as he only possesses a sword to continue the struggle with.

This state of affairs will arise because the predictions (Isa. 53) concerning Him, that He will be reckoned as a transgressor and killed as such, are now going to be fulfilled. And as things are going with Him, their Master,

so it will henceforth go with them, too—therefore it is so necessary that for their spiritual warfare they must be thoroughly equipped and armed at whatever the cost with an unbreakable courage and determination, so they will not relinquish the struggle.

The disciples are still blind to the spiritual nature of the Lord's work and kingdom. They are still hoping that He will establish an earthly Messianic kingdom with physical force. So they take the Savior's words regarding the buying of a sword in a literal sense and do not understand their meaning. In the light of the Saviour's other teachings (e.g. in the sermon on the mount) and of His perfect example, the disciples should never have taken those words literally. He does not rebuke them because they have such a false notion of things that they could expect Him to be commanding armed violence, but ends the discussion sorrowfully (Geldenhuys, *Luke*, pp. 570-571; words in brackets mine).

This still does not resolve why Jesus did not correct their thinking which may have led to Peter's armed resistance in the garden as well as the common misperception by the other disciples (Lk. 22: 49).

As an illustration of how Jesus has been misinterpreted in the past, Calvin explains,

It was truly shameful and stupid ignorance, that the disciples, after having been so often informed about bearing the cross, imagine that they must fight with *swords* of iron. When they say that they have *two swords*, it is uncertain whether they mean that they are well prepared against their enemies, or complain that they are ill provided with arms. It is evident, at least, that they were so stupid as not to think of a spiritual enemy. As to the inference which the Doctors of Canon Law [the Roman Catholic theologians] draw from these words—that their mitred bishops have a double jurisdiction [namely, the ministry of the word but also the execution of heretics]—it is not only an offensive allegory, but a detestable mockery, by which they ridicule the word of God (*Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 3, p. 224; emphasis his; words in brackets mine).

### ***S. Jesus' Severe Trial of Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane—Matt. 26: 36-44***

***Mk. 14: 32-40; Lk. 22: 39-46***

As we contemplate the struggles of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, we are confronted with emotional and spiritual agony for which there is no human analogy. His grief to the point of death is simply not fully explainable with human language. The prospect of physical torture must itself have weighed heavily on His heart—and torture it was, something we will examine latter during the crucifixion—but the physical suffering which lay ahead did not compare to the prospect of vicariously becoming sin on our behalf (2 Cor. 5: 21) and, for this reason, suffering separation and temporary abandonment from the Father (Matt. 27: 46). Strictly from the perspective of His genuine humanity, He would have chosen to forego (omit) the ordeal, and He prays for this accordingly. Yet, it is precisely because the human Christ loathed the prospect of suffering on the cross which makes His self-sacrifice more wonderful. Fully cognizant (aware) of what lay ahead of Him, He submits His will to the will of His Father.

“My Father, *if it is possible*, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matt. 26: 39).

“Abba! Father! *All things are possible for You*; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will” (Mk. 14: 36).

“Father, *if You are willing*, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done” (Lk. 22: 42).

The question of whether Christ had only one *will* or two was fiercely debated by theologians during the early centuries of the Christian church, the resolution not coming until the Third Council of Constantinople in 680 AD. The *monothelites* contended that the will of Christ was *one* since He could will nothing contrary to that of the Father. Yet, it seems clear from the present text that there is a distinction between the two—the will of the Father and the will of the Son. Jesus' prayer must be interpreted from the perspective of His true, yet perfect, humanity shrinking from the thought of interrupted fellowship with the Father.

Jesus had ordinary human desires, longings, preferences, and aspirations. Just as truly, he had human aversions [intense dislikes]. Under these influences he made decisions and pursued options in the same way as we do ourselves.

This is clearly indicated in the Scriptures, not least in the way they distinguish between the will of Jesus and the will of God. This appears in, for example, John 6: 38, 'I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.' Such language presupposes [assumes] not only a metaphysical [essentially real] distinction between the will of Jesus and the will of the Father, but also the logical possibility that Jesus' natural preferences (based on personal self-interest) might not always coincide with the wishes of the Father. Indeed, it is this fact which creates the whole possibility of *kenosis* or self-emptying [cf. Phil. 2: 5-8]. The Servant consults not his own interests but the interests of others (Phil. 2: 4). This climaxes in Gethsemane, where the dilemma becomes almost unbearably acute. At a very basic level, Jesus does not want this 'cup'. His whole nature shrinks from it, and as he speaks to his Father he becomes acutely aware that there are two wills (and two ways): there is 'my will' and there is 'thy will'. Nor did Jesus find it easy to be reconciled to the Father's will. It literally terrified him, because here was the concentrated essence of the *mysterium tremendum* [tremendous mystery (?)]. It was eerie. It was overwhelming. It was uncanny. Jesus' victory consisted not in merging his will with that of the Father or even in wanting specifically what the Father wanted. It came from choosing the Father's will rather than, and even over against, his own. He willed what he did not want, embarking on an astonishing course of altruism [considering others more important than oneself] (Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, pp. 179-180; emphases his, words in brackets mine).

Thus, *if it was possible* for the Father to relieve Him of this cup of suffering, He would gladly let it pass. From one point of view it was, indeed, *possible* for the Father to omit it, for He was fully justified in condemning the world of men; but to do so His eternal commitment to save all mankind would have to be set aside, and His resolve to damn all men to hell would necessarily have been a decision made in *eternity past*. It was *impossible* for a perfect God with an infallible plan of redemption to reverse this plan, thus rendering His decision to redeem man an imperfect decree. Immutable (unchangeable) in wisdom and knowledge, God cannot reverse Himself. God "changing His mind" about destroying the nation of Israel upon the intercession of Moses (Ex. 32: 1-14) is not proof to the contrary since all of Moses' arguments for sparing Israel were based on the previous, immutable promises of God to the patriarchs (Gen. 15; cf. my *Systematic Theology*, "The Doctrine of God"). Therefore, though *all things are possible with God* (Mk. 14: 36) in one sense, it is nevertheless impossible for God to lie, to be unfaithful to His previous covenant commitment, or to contradict His own nature or His decreed will. This is not a limitation upon God, for immutable, perfect consistency is not a limitation. On the basis of God's attributes, He was, thus, not "willing" (Lk. 22: 42) to remove the cup of suffering from His Son. Having attempted this explanation, I am nevertheless eager to admit that I can't really understand the mystery of Christ's request.

His humanity is also evident from His desire for fellowship from the inner circle during His agony. The two sons of Zebedee (*Matthew*), or James and John (*Mark*), as well as Peter were close at hand on this occasion. To these three He exposes His intense sorrow and His desire that

they remain watchful with Him in prayer. Christ not only *desired* their fellowship in His suffering, but *needed* it, even as He needed rest, food, shelter, and material support for His ministry (Lk. 8: 1-3). God, who needs *nothing* from us, who is all-sufficient (Ps. 50: 12), nevertheless in the person of Christ needed the prayerful watchfulness of the inner circle, a watchfulness He did not receive. In the same way we suffer the deprivation of friendship and emotional support, Christ also suffered. Lane, I believe, is incorrect in assuming that since the disciples were incapable of providing emotional support, it follows that Jesus did not seek it (*Mark*, p. 518). He had also sought understanding and faith from them on a number of occasions but had not received it (Matt. 17: 17; 16: 6-11).

Only Luke tells us that the disciples were “sleeping from sorrow” (v. 45), most likely from the disclosure of betrayal made only a short time ago, a disclosure even His most intimate disciples still did not fully understand. That Christ would now seek support from this confused, sorrowful threesome is a further *manifestation of His state of humiliation*. It is appropriate that Jesus would single out these three—Peter, James and John (Mk. 14: 33). Not only are they the inner circle, but also the most self-confident of their favored positions in the coming kingdom.

A sufficient reason for his action here may be found in the peculiar responsibility assumed by each of these to share Jesus’ destiny. In the case of Peter, his boisterous [bragging] avowal in Ch. 14: 29, 31 was a matter of immediate past record. Earlier the sons of Zebedee had affirmed their ability to drink Jesus’ cup (Ch. 10: 38-40), and this confidence is called to mind by the reference to the cup in verse 36. The failure to understand what it means to share Jesus’ destiny and to be identified with his sufferings, rather than privileged status, appears to be the occasion for the isolation of the three from the others. Their glib self-confidence exposes them to grave peril of failure in the struggle they confront, and for that reason they are commanded to be vigilant....

Mark faithfully preserved the tradition that only the three were told to watch and that only the three slept. His intention in doing so, however, was to strengthen Christians under persecution in Rome and elsewhere by providing a sober warning that the admonition to watch and pray applies ultimately to all believers who stand equally exposed to the failure which marked the three disciples (cf. Ch. 13: 37) (Lane, *Mark*, pp. 515-516, 521).

In spite of their failure, Jesus is not completely alone but continues to be strengthened by communion with His Father. An angel is also dispatched from heaven to strengthen Christ as He continues to pray so strenuously that “His sweat became like drops of blood”. It is not likely that Luke, a physician given to careful observation, would mention blood if only the size of the droplets were in view. Hendriksen notes the condition of *hematidrosis* in which a person can be suffering such intense emotional and physical strain that the subcutaneous capillaries of blood close to the surface of the skin can dilate (get bigger in diameter) and rupture. When the capillaries close to the sweat glands rupture (burst), blood and sweat come out together and are exuded from the skin (*Luke*, p. 983).

In the Synoptics, (1) The extremity of Jesus’ testing and temptation (*peirosmos*) described by Luke, (2) the presence of the angel (Luke), (3) the petition to remove the “cup” three times (Matthew and Mark), and (4) the warning to His disciples to keep watching and praying that they may not enter into temptation (Matt. and Mk.; cf. Matt. 6: 13 and commentary concerning “the evil one”), all *combine* to present this particular event as *similar to the extremity of His temptation by Satan in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry* (cf. Matt. 4: 1; “tempted” [*peirazō*]; Matt. 4: 11; “angels”; see also Joel B. Green, *Luke*, pp. 779-780). Thus, the

**great temptation** to avoid the suffering of the cross presented **early** in His ministry and at the **end** (see also Matt. 16: 23) serves as a bracket around the entire ministry of Christ.

Temptation in the wilderness to worship Satan, thus avoiding the cross (Matt. 4: 9)

[The Ministry of Christ]

Temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane to avoid the cross—the “cup” of suffering

From the beginning to the very end, the human choice of going to the cross or establishing His kingdom **some other way** is hanging over Him as the greatest temptation He would ever face.

The disciples would know soon enough what He meant by entering into temptation, for in a very few minutes they would all “fall away” (Matt. 26: 31) and Peter would later deny Him three times. The three most intimate disciples, the inner circle, had not persevered with Him in prayer; and thus, they would not be prepared for the severe, soul-threatening trial facing them that night. Yet Christ **had prayed for them** (Lk. 22: 32; cf. Jn. 17; especially v. 12), and because He had prayed for them, none would be lost except Judas Iscariot for whom He had **not** prayed (Jn. 17: 9; compare Jn. 6: 39; 10: 28-29). In spite of all appearances to the contrary—namely, scattering sheep—Christ would lose **none** of those who had been **given** Him by the Father.

***T. Jesus Betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane—Matt. 26: 45-56; Mk. 14: 43-52; Lk. 22: 47-54; Jn. 18: 2-11***

Jesus’ arrest occurs in the presence of a large crowd (**ochlos**; mentioned in all three Synoptics). The crowds (or “multitudes”) are generally presented in the Synoptics as those who were interested in the ministry of Jesus in healing and casting out demons, but when “push came to shove”—that is, when the implications of His teaching came to their understanding (e.g. John 6: 65-66)—they made their retreat. Furthermore, they are presented as generally unreliable, shouting “Hosanna’s” upon Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and “Crucify Him” a few days later. Now the “crowd” is here to witness Jesus’ arrest, yet another **negative impression** the Synoptic writers give of the fickle multitudes who accompanied Jesus throughout His ministry. Jesus Himself had never entrusted Himself to the multitudes even during His “year of popularity” when they enthusiastically observed the signs He was performing. He knew full well what they were like (Jn. 2: 23-25).

John’s gospel doesn’t mention crowds but the presence of the Roman cohort—a detachment of roughly 600 soldiers—sent by the chief priests along with Judas. Considering the mission of arresting only one man with a handful of disciples, it is doubtful that a whole cohort was present, but with someone as well-known as Jesus, the possibility of mob violence was a distinct possibility. One important consideration is that the chief priests must have received permission from Pilate to have a military escort to arrest Jesus; thus, when Jesus appeared before him, it was an appearance Pilate was expecting (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 377). Another consideration is that by mentioning the Roman cohort, John’s gospel is from the very start of Jesus’ execution implicating (connecting someone to a crime) not only Jews but also the Gentiles—**everyone** is guilty of Jesus’ death (Carson, *John*, p. 577).

John is also the only Synoptist who informs us that Gethsemane was a familiar meeting place for Jesus and His disciples, one that Judas would have known well (v. 2). Therefore, far from attempting to escape from Judas whom Jesus knew was this very moment betraying Him, He actually makes his betrayal less difficult. The garden would be a secluded place far from public view, and it was now dark (Jn. 18: 3b). There would, therefore, be little danger of any resistance to Jesus' arrest by a sympathetic mob; and it seems clear from the events which follow that mob revolt to rescue Jesus should have been the least of their worries. At any rate, John wishes to show that **no one** was taking Jesus' life from Him against His will, but He was laying it down on His own volition (Jn. 10: 18-17). This voluntary, sacrificial act is emphasized more than once in John's selection of material describing Jesus' arrest: (1) Jesus' choice of the place of His arrest; (2) His rebuke of Peter's attempt to prevent His arrest and the statement about His intent to drink the cup given Him (vv. 10-11); (3) the power unleashed upon His arresters at the very mention of the divine name, "I am" (Yahweh, "I am that I am"—vv. 5-6); and (4) His foreknowledge of events (v. 4). Matthew contributes to this subject by Jesus' comment to Peter (whose name is mentioned only in *John*) that He could appeal to the Father who would dispatch twelve legions of angels (72,000) for His protection. Christ maintains control of every contingency (possible event) leading up to His arrest and throughout His passion ordeal. He is not the helpless victim of circumstances beyond His control; He is and continues to be the mighty, sovereign Lord.

Each Synoptist provides the reader with different details of Jesus' arrest. The following is possible harmony of the scene.

Having previously notified the authorities of the identifying sign, Judas betrays Christ with a kiss (Matt. vv. 48-49; Mk. v. 44). We should not be too surprised that Jesus must be identified. It was dark. Furthermore, in the days before photography, television, and the mass media, even "celebrities" like Jesus would not be well-known by sight alone (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 546). The irony was in the **method** of identification. A kiss was the customary sign of respect for honored guests, friends, or family relationships (Gen. 29: 13; 45: 15; Ex. 18: 7; Lk. 7: 45), but Judas turned it into a sign of betrayal, thus fulfilling prophecy (Ps. 41: 9; so also Chamblin, p. 239). Two statements from Jesus immediately follow Judas' kiss, one in *Luke* and the other in *Matthew*. First, He says, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" followed by a tinge of cutting sarcasm, "**Friend**, do what you have come for" (v. 50). In other words, "Get on with it! Go ahead and do what you have come to do without further insults of false friendship." It should be evident from the events which follow that the kiss of betrayal and Jesus' comments occur at the first Jesus' encounter with His arresters.

Having given the sign and heard Jesus' response, Judas now takes his place standing alongside the temple police (the authorities sent by the chief priest, scribes, and elders—Jn. 18: 3). The next thing which occurs is reported only by John whose gospel is concerned Christologically with the identification of Jesus as God. Having spoken directly to Judas for the last time, Jesus now turns to the crowd, saying, "Whom do you seek?" upon which someone answers, "Jesus the Nazarene" (Jn. 18: 4, 5a). What follows (I believe) is a dramatic, yet mitigated (lessened) and momentary manifestation of divine power in the very mention of the **Name**, the name of God, "I am" (v. 6). There is no pronoun, "he", in the Greek text of *John*, nor in the Greek translation of the OT, the LXX, in Deut. 32: 39; Isa. 51: 12; 41: 4; 43: 10; and Isa. 48: 12. Jesus simply says,

“I am.” At the mention of the name, those at the front closest to Jesus (?), along with Judas who was standing with them, “drew back and fell to the ground” (v. 6b). Their stumbling *cannot* be explained simply as a momentary surprise at Jesus’ advance (Jn. v. 4; “went forth”) and self-composed confidence in spite of the threatening situation. As Carson observes, He had used this expression previously, provoking an entirely *different* response—the Jews picking up stones to kill Him (Jn. 8: 56-59). As He uses it now, the expression, “I am”, has much more ambiguity (less clarity) and is not as clearly referenced to His deity than in Jn. 8: 58. Yet, instead of provoking an active response (picking up stones), it forcefully produces the passive response of falling to the ground. There is, thus, the *power of God* manifested in Jesus’ words (so also Hendriksen, *John*, p. 379).

Hereby he showed plainly, (1.) What he could have done with them. When he struck them down, he could have struck them dead; when he spoke them to the *ground*, he could have spoken them to hell, and have sent them, like Korah’s company, the next day thither; but he would not do so, [1.] Because the hour of his suffering was come, and he would not put it by; he would only show that his life was not forced from him, but *he laid it down of himself*, as he had said. [2.] Because he would give an instance of his patience and forbearance with the worst of men, and his compassionate love to his very enemies. In striking them down, and no more, he gave them both a call to repent and space to repent; but their hearts were hardened, and all was in vain.

(2.) What he will do at last with all his implacable enemies, *that will not repent to give him glory; they shall flee, they shall fall, before him*.... And it will be accomplished more and more; *with the breath of his mouth he will slay the wicked*, 2 The. 2: 8; Rev. 19: 21....

*“What will he do when he shall come to judge, seeing he did this when he came to be judged?”*—Augustine (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, *John*, p. 1172, editor’s emphasis).

Calvin sizes up the scene similarly,

We may infer from his how dreadful and alarming to the wicked the voice of Christ will be, when he shall ascend his throne to judge the world. At that time he stood as a lamb ready to be sacrificed; his majesty, so far as outward appearance was concerned, was utterly gone; and yet when he utters but a single word, his armed and courageous enemies fall down. And what was the word? He thunders no fearful excommunication against them, but only replies, *It is I*. What then will be the result, when he shall come not to be judged by a man, but to be the Judge of the living and the dead; not in that mean and despicable appearance, but shining in heavenly glory, and accompanied by his angels? He intended, at that time, to give a proof of that efficacy which Isaiah ascribes to his voice. Among other glorious attributes of Christ, the Prophet relates that *he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and will slay the wicked by the breath of his lips*, (Isa. 11: 4) True, the fulfillment of this prophecy is declared by Paul to be delayed till the end of the world, (2 Thess. 2: 8.) Yet we daily see the wicked, with all their rage and pride, struck down by the voice of Christ; and when those men fell down who had come to bind Christ, there was exhibited a visible token of that alarm which wicked men feel within themselves, whether they will or not, when Christ speaks by his ministers. Besides, as this was in some measure accidental to the voice of Christ, to whom it peculiarly belongs to raise up men who were lying in a state of death, he will undoubtedly display toward us such power as to raise us even to heaven (*John*, p. 192, editor’s emphasis).

We may wonder, then, whether Jesus is giving Judas and company another moment of grace to reevaluate their actions. Are they sure they know what they are doing? Is Judas so certain that Jesus is only a “Rabbi” rather than “the Lord” (cf. Matt. 26: 49; Mk. 14: 45. Compare Judas’ question in Matt. 26: 25, “Surely, it is not I, *Rabbi*?” with the response of the other disciples in Matt. 26: 22, “Surely not I, *Lord*?” This observation is taken from Chamblin, p. 239).

Possibly giving them time to compose themselves, Jesus then asks the same question eliciting the same answer, “Jesus the Nazarene.” Using the same expression, “I am”, in an even more veiled



(concealed) manner, He again identifies Himself and requests them to allow the disciples to leave unharmed, thus fulfilling the word of Jn. 17: 12 in a different sense from its spiritual meaning (Jn. 18: 7-9), yet necessary to accomplish the spiritual salvation ultimately intended. To the very end, Christ guarded His sheep from the wolves.

Luke extends the narrative at this point. The intensity of the scene has now provoked a response from the disciples, albeit (although) not a very intelligent one, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” (Lk. 24: 49)—as if with two swords (Lk. 22: 38) they would be able to defend Christ against trained Roman soldiers! Before Jesus can respond to this insane suggestion, and while at the same time the crowd begins to seize Jesus (Matt. and Mk.), one of the disciples starts wacking off ears. Only John identifies the man as impetuous Peter—who else? It just happens to be the ear of the high priest’s slave, Malchus by name (Jn. 18: 10), and all four gospels record the amputation. (At the risk of exposing my warped sense of humor, is there some irony in the fact that Jesus now has the “ear” of the high priest—albeit vicariously?) But it is quite obvious from Jesus’ reaction to this carnage that the pathway of His kingdom—unlike all other kingdoms—would not be littered with the corpses of His opponents. The only dead bodies necessary to achieve His goal of subduing the world would be His own and those of His followers (Lk. 21: 16). The grain of wheat sown into the ground to die will bear much fruit (Jn. 12: 24). Peter’s zeal was misplaced and misspent, but when the Spirit came at Pentecost, it would be channeled into more productive pursuits.

Peter’s military solution to their situation evokes three responses from Jesus. The *first*, I believe, is recorded in *Luke*, “Stop! No more of this”, after which He immediately relieves the slave’s suffering by restoring his ear, thus graciously giving his captors yet another manifestation of His power and another reason to reconsider who He really is. But although they have seen both signs this very night, they persist in unbelief. If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if Jesus makes ears grow back (Lk. 16: 31). The *second* response is a command to Peter to sheath his sword (Matt. and John) after which comes (*third*) an object lesson about the use of violence to achieve spiritual goals: “for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matt.). This is not a proof-text for pacifism per se, but the prohibition of using physical means for empowering a spiritual kingdom. Pondering this statement later at a more relaxed moment, Peter would have recognized what He meant. There had been many would-be (false) “saviors” during the Maccabean Period who brought physical deliverance from the atrocities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes; yet, the aggressive, militaristic Hasmonean Dynasty had not accomplished the spiritual restoration of the nation and had even united the priesthood with the office of king in violation of Mosaic Law. Rank corruption of the priesthood had set in and the Hasmonean “subduers” were eventually subdued by the more powerful sword of the Roman Empire (see “Intertestamentary Period” and timeline). In essence, nothing substantial had been accomplished, and much harm had been done. The kingdom will come by an entirely different method. But in spite of this clear object lesson, the Medieval church attempted to accomplish spiritual goals with carnal weapons—the “Holy” Crusades—with lasting hindrance to the evangelism of Muslims.

Had Jesus wanted military solutions, a human army would not have been necessary at any rate. He could just as easily appeal to His Father who would place twelve legions of angels (72,000) at His disposal (Matt. v. 53). This statement presents us with another theological question similar

to the one concerning the willingness of the Father to remove the cup of suffering. If the cross was the eternal, infallible plan of God for the salvation of sinners (and it was), then how can Jesus claim that the Father would respond to His appeal for deliverance from the cross? It is clear from His statement that there was no doubt in His mind that such an appeal could be made and would be answered in the affirmative (a yes answer). God the Father would, therefore, not withhold any necessary help if summoned; and Jesus would not be delivered to death. Once again, we may quibble about the theological implications, but the declaration is plainly another indication of Christ's *voluntary* submission to His Father's will (see also Calvin, *Harmony*, Vol. 3, p. 246-247). We need not doubt that the Father would have acted just as Jesus said He would; otherwise, what are we to make of the statement? But in the same way that Christ restrains His own power with respect to the arresting crowd (see discussion above), He also restrains His access to the Father's power to dispatch a literal army of angels, one legion for each of the twelve, including Himself.

Having struggled with the Father in prayer only moments before, the human will of Christ had made peace concerning the cup of suffering. It was a cup which would not be removed, but one which the Father willed for Him to drink. Such being the case, Jesus was now ready to drink the cup the Father had given Him (Jn. v. 11). Apart from this cup, the Scriptures would not be fulfilled (Matt. v. 54).

Only Luke specifically names the chief priests, officers of the temple, and elders as part of the crowd while Matthew and Mark speak of those who were "from" (*apo*) the chief priests and elders. All three Synoptists mark the irony of Jesus' arrest. Why is He arrested now and why in this manner as a robber (Lk. 22: 52-53; Mk. 14: 48-49; Matt. 26: 55-56)? The religious authorities had numerous opportunities to seize Christ in the temple on any given day and during daylight hours, but they wait and take Him by stealth under the cover of darkness. Pragmatically, by using the darkness, the religious officials effectively avoid the possibility of revolt by sympathetic followers. Symbolically, they play into the hands of providence through a display of evil which is appropriate to the demonic depths from which it originates. They seize Christ at night because they loved darkness rather than light (Jn. 3: 19). It is therefore fitting that they would do their dirty work under its cover—an appropriateness that Jesus recognizes, "but this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Lk. 22: 53b). As to the manner of His arrest as a robber, the OT Scriptures are thus fulfilled, particularly prophecies like Isa. 53: 9b, 12 "He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth", yet He "was numbered with the transgressors." Prophecy is further fulfilled in the scattering of the disciples who now flee for their lives (Zech. 13: 7; Matt. 26: 31).

Only Mark inserts the story of a young man accompanying Jesus who is not one of the eleven. He also flees having narrowly escaped by leaving his linen garment in the hands of his would-be captors (vv. 52-53). Some of the church fathers later identified him as Mark (Lane, p. 527). If so, this would explain this addition in Mark's gospel.

#### ***U. Christ on Trial before Annas—Jn. 18: 12-14; 19-24***

After His arrest, Jesus was first brought to Annas, who had been high priest before Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Only John's gospel records this meeting. Annas had served as high priest from 6

AD to 15 AD when he was deposed by Pilate's predecessor in Judea, Valerius Gratus (see Timeline). Notwithstanding (in spite of this fact), **Annas remained the power behind the high priest** for many years to come, having five sons and one grandson, and one son-in-law serve as high priest after him. Even after he was deposed, he was still considered by many to be the rightful priest since, under Mosaic Law, the high priest should have remained in office until his death (Num. 35: 25-28). The Jews resented Roman deposition (deposing) and appointment of their high priests (Carson, *John*, pp. 580-581). As noted in the text, Caiaphas was the **ruling** high priest at this time, the man who prophesied unconsciously that "it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people" (Jn. 11: 50). By mentioning this fact, John prepares the reader for the inevitable conclusion of such an interrogation (line of questioning). We cannot expect much justice from someone who was already convinced that Jesus needed to be eliminated.

Here [Annas] was no idealist ready to see that justice was done, but a cynical politician who had already spoken in favor of Jesus' death (Leon Morris, *John*, p. 750, words in brackets mine).

At this point in John's narrative (vv. 15-18), Peter denies Christ for the first time. While the Synoptists (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) present the three denials together, John separates them by Jesus' **preliminary questioning** before Annas, an interrogation which the Synoptists **do not report**. While Christ was being interrogated by Annas, it is possible that Peter made his first denial. The question of **location** arises from this additional information reported by John (namely, Jesus before Annas). The Synoptists indicate that after Jesus' arrest, Peter flees along with the rest; otherwise, he also would have been arrested. But Peter follows at a distance to the **house** of the high priest (Lk., or to the **courtyard** of the high priest, Mk.). It is quite possible that Annas and Caiaphas, being related by the marriage of Annas' daughter to Caiaphas, were actually living in the same house—a very large one—consisting of separate living quarters separated by a common courtyard (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 391; Morris, *John*, p. 758; Carson, pp. 552-553). Another possibility is that on this momentous night of Jesus' arrest—their common enemy—both Annas and Caiaphas were at the same place, the house of Caiaphas. Thus, there is no necessity in requiring Peter to have denied Christ in two different locations or for Christ being interrogated in two locations, once at the house of Annas and then at the house of Caiaphas. The interrogation, as well as Peter's three denials, took place at **one location**, probably the house of Caiaphas where Annas was either living or where he had decided to reside on the night of Jesus' arrest.

What is reasonably certain is that Christ is first subjected to an informal interrogation by Annas **before** appearing before the ruling high priest, Caiaphas, for a formal hearing. This first, informal hearing is recorded only in John, vv. 19-23, to which we will now turn.

The "high priest" in v. 19 is Annas, not Caiaphas. This seems to be clear from v. 24, "So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest." This verse would make little sense if Jesus had already been standing before Caiaphas in vv. 19-23. At the same time, being "sent" to Caiaphas may have required nothing more than being escorted across the courtyard between the two separate living quarters of the palace.

Annas first questions him about his disciples, perhaps to determine the number or the extent of Jesus' following. Hendriksen quips (remarks with humor),

That is exactly what one can expect from Annas! He was far more interested in the “*success*” of Jesus—how large was his following?—than in the *truthfulness or untruthfulness* of that which he had been teaching. That is ever the way of the world (*John*, p. 397; emphasis mine).

(And regrettably, “ever the way” of the evangelical church who judges one’s preaching not by what is said but by the number of people in the audience listening. One is a “successful” preacher if he has a huge church. Some good preachers do have big churches, but some very poor preachers have even bigger churches. The best preacher I’ve ever heard—whose name is *not* a household word in evangelical America—pastors a Presbyterian church of about 400 members.)

Doubtless, however, Annas was concerned that if Jesus’ following was large, there could be trouble both now and in the future. Little did he know just how big this “conspiracy” would become—and just how troublesome to the religious elite! Jesus, for His part, refuses to answer any questions about the disciples. “He is clearly determined to protect them to the end” (Morris, p. 755).

Anna also inquires concerning Jesus’ *teaching*, but the substance of Jesus’ teaching should have been no mystery to Annas. It was public information to all who had taken the time to hear it, thus Jesus responds, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.” There is nothing sarcastic or caustic in this answer, just plain truth. Nothing which He had taught the twelve in private had been withheld, in substance, from the multitudes in the synagogues, the temple, and in the open fields and market places. Had He wanted to conceal His teaching, He could very easily have done so. Up until now the religious authorities had made little effort if any to determine just what He was saying. No meetings or conferences had been arranged to clarify His position on certain issues—at least until now after the decision had been made to put Him to death. There had been nothing but rumor and unfounded accusation (e.g. “He has a demon”—Matt. 12: 24). Thus, any questioning about His teaching was purely *hypocritical* and a matter of formality.

Hendriksen has pointed out the departures from proper legal protocol (procedure) committed by the Jewish authorities: (1) No trial for a capital crime could proceed at night, yet Christ was tried from 1-3 AM on Friday morning; (2) Jesus was arrested through means of a bribe; (3) no one accused of a crime could be asked to testify against himself, yet Jesus was being requested to do so, a request He refuses on legal grounds; (4) for cases requiring capital punishment (the death penalty), Jewish law did not allow a pronouncement of the sentence until the day *after* conviction, yet the sentence of death is both pronounced and executed the very day of His trial (*John*, pp. 395-396). Morris adds to this list the requirement that witnesses for the *defense* must be brought first before any witnesses testifying *against* the accused; but in Jesus’ case, no witnesses in His favor were ever called. Knowing His legal rights, Jesus simply asks for a fair trial by reminding Annas that if he wished to call witnesses to testify concerning His teaching, there were many from which to choose—thousands, in fact (Morris, *John*, p. 756).

Apart from all the legal violations, the real issue was that Jesus' guilt was already a foregone conclusion before the trial (that is, already decided) (Jn. 11: 49-50; Lk. 22: 2; Matt. 12: 14; Mk. 11: 18). Apart from the issue of raw political power and envy (Matt. 27: 18), Annas had substantial financial interests to protect. In all likelihood, Jesus' accusation in the cleansing of the temple—"You have made My Father's house a den of robbers" (paraphrase of Mk. 11: 17)—had hit a raw nerve. Annas was fabulously wealthy, and a substantial portion of his vast fortune had been obtained by receiving "kick-backs" (a percentage) from the sale of all sacrificial animals made in the temple court (the court of the Gentiles). In theory, each worshipper was permitted to bring his own unblemished animal for sacrifice. This was impractical for those coming from a distance, but for those who could conveniently bring their own animals, they had the temple vendors (sellers) and examiners to contend with—vendors and examiners who were in the "back pocket" of Annas. Getting one's privately owned animal approved for sacrifice by the examiners (who checked the animals for blemishes) was next to impossible, so it was not worth the trouble of trying. Rather, the worshipper would simply pay the exorbitant (excessively high) price of animals offered for sale in the temple, a large portion of the price going directly into the greedy hands of Annas. The vendors and examiners of course, enjoyed their privileged position of being the exclusive brokers of sacrificial animals (only they were allowed to sell them). The other "insiders" in this "system" were the money changers. All the money used in the temple had to be Jewish currency requiring all foreigners to pay excessive exchange rates (much like the excessive rates in modern airports, except much worse!). Everyone was happy except the thousands of commoners being "robbed" daily by a monopoly of thieves (Hendriksen, *John*, pp. 122, 396). Religious plunder, therefore, is nothing new. The difference today is that it is much more profitable than before with the use of television, convincing actors (TV preachers like Jimmy Swaggart, Jimmy and Tammy Faye Baker, among others), and mass mailing campaigns.

Adding all this up, Jesus had no possibility of acquittal, and the "trial" was simply a plot (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 396). I am reminded of a movie about John Huss in which he is standing before his accusers, hierarchical leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, who had just condemned his writings as heretical. Huss then asks them, "Have you read my writings?" The question is met with stone-cold silence. They had condemned his writings but had not bothered to read them. Huss was subsequently burned at the stake. As Christ before him, Huss was condemned to die without convicting evidence. They, too, had power and money to protect.

Not appreciating His response, someone standing near Jesus gives him a flat-handed blow to the cheek for what he perceived as disrespect toward Annas. But Jesus had called no names (as Paul did—Acts 23: 3-5), nor did He have any need to apologize (as Paul did—although the incident in Acts can be interpreted differently). As always, there was no one who could convict Jesus of sin (v. 23; cf. Jn. 8: 46). Having gotten nowhere in his investigation, Annas sends Him to Caiaphas across the courtyard.

***V. Peter's Denial of Christ—Matt. 26: 69-75; Mk. 14: 66-72; Lk. 23: 55-62  
Jn. 18: 15-18; 25-27***

While Matthew and Mark report the trial by the Sanhedrin before Peter's denial, Luke reports the

trial afterwards (see below). John, on the other hand, reports the denials before and after the examination by Annas but does not report Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. In John's account, while Jesus is suffering false accusations and physical abuse before Annas, He is also suffering betrayal from Peter, one of His inner circle of disciples, in the adjoining courtyard; and this is most likely John's reason for the arrangement of the events (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 395). In Mark's account, Peter's denial is anticipated in v. 54 and resumed in vv. 66-72. By the separation of v. 54 from vv. 66-72, Mark has purposely presented Peter's denials and the meeting of the Sanhedrin as happening simultaneously (at the same time) rather than consecutively (happening one after the other) (Lane, p. 532). In fact, Matthew and Luke use the same literary arrangement, thus giving the same impression as Mark that Peter's denials and the trial before the Sanhedrin are occurring simultaneously (compare Matt. 26: 57-58; Mk. 14: 53-55; and Lk. 22: 54-65).

John's account (18: 15-18) is the only one which reports "*another disciple*" who accompanies Peter to the courtyard of Annas, a disciple who is known by the high priest. Hendriksen and Carson believe this man was John, although it is difficult to explain how John, the son of a fisherman, would have such close connections to Caiaphas, the high priest mentioned in vv. 15-16. Carson explains that social stratification was not as rigid in ancient Palestine as in modern society, and that John's father was not simply a fisherman but a wealthy businessman who had employees. Whoever it was, this disciple had "more than nodding acquaintance" with the high priest. Without being dogmatic, Carson opts in favor of John, the son of Zebedee (Carson, *John*, pp. 581-582). But given this close relationship, I find it difficult to believe that one of the twelve would have this kind of intimacy and access to the high priest—especially one who was plotting against Jesus. It simply makes no sense. It is even more unbelievable that the servant girl would have recognized John as one of Jesus' disciples (as Carson suggests, p. 583) and not report his presence to the proper authorities.

Although Peter is the only one who had assaulted someone in the garden, all of the disciples would be viewed with suspicion. The word, "disciple", does not have to refer to one of the eleven; thus, other possibilities include Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea (Jn. 19: 38-39), both of whom could be expected to have close connections with the high priest without the attendant suspicions (cf. Morris, p. 752). Furthermore, assuming the other disciple is John, and that John is recognized by the servant girl as one of Jesus' disciples (note the word "also" in v. 17—a strong argument in Carson's and Hendriksen's favor), it is also difficult to explain why Peter is so intimidated and ready to deny Christ when John has *already* been identified by her as Christ's disciple but has been readily admitted into the courtyard. The fact that Peter alone had assaulted someone in the Garden of Gethsemane is not sufficient explanation for his fear. It was dark in the garden, and probably no one could have positively identified him as the assailant, although the relative of Malthus attempted to do so (Jn. v. 26) (see also Calvin, who also argues for someone else than John; *John*, p. 198).

While Peter was standing outside the courtyard door, the other disciple goes to get him. The same servant girl who allowed this disciple to enter now questions Peter about being a disciple of Jesus. Why, we are not told, unless she had seen Peter on other occasions accompanying Jesus, or because of his accent (Matt. v. 73; Mk. v. 70; Lk. v. 59), or because I am mistaken about John being the other disciple who was recognized by her as Jesus' disciple. We could speculate about

what caused Peter to lose his nerve, but after all the ink is spilled (or toner fused) the reason would not be important anyway. The point is: he lost his nerve and denied Christ—this person who boasted a short time ago that even if everyone else withered in the face of danger, he would most certainly not do so but would follow Christ to death (Matt. 26: 33). But let none of us cast the first stone.

Such is a demonstration of the power of man. Certainly, all the strength that appears to be in men is smoke, which a breath immediately drives away. When we are out of the battle, we are too courageous; but experience shows that our lofty talk is foolish and groundless; and even when Satan make no attacks, we contrive for ourselves idle alarms which disturb us before the time. The voice of a feeble woman terrified Peter: and what is the case with us? Do we not continually tremble at the rustling of a falling leaf?...In short, our courage is of such a nature, that, of its own accord, it gives way where there is no enemy; and thus does God revenge the arrogance of men by reducing fierce minds to a state of weakness. A man, filled not with fortitude but with wind, promises that he will obtain an easy victory over the whole world; and yet, no sooner does he see the shadow of a thistle, than he immediately trembles. Let us therefore learn not to be brave in any other than the Lord (Calvin, *John*, p. 200).

When the matter was concluded, Peter had denied Christ three times. The differences in the four accounts are not substantial. Besides, exact reporting was not their aim, but merely *the fact of Peter's denial as the background for his restoration shortly afterwards*—possibly in contrast to Judas. (For a detailed harmony, see Hendriksen—*Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*, and Carson, *Matthew and John*). Matthew and Mark make note of Peter's cursing and swearing (Mk. v. 71; Matt. vv. 72, 74; remember that Peter was a rugged fisherman), and Luke alone records the Lord's eye contact with Peter after the third denial (v. 61)—a look that he would never forget. Peter was down, but not out. He would make a quick comeback and would become the first among equals among the eleven disciples. Christ had declared Peter as the rock upon which He would build His church (Matt. 16). Doubtless this had reference to Peter's confession (see "Peter's Confession, p. 177), but as I have pointed out in that section, Peter becomes the predominant disciple and leader of the twelve for the first years of the Christian church—the predominant figure of Acts 1—12 until the emphasis of the Pauline mission to the Gentiles. It is Peter whom Christ addresses when He says, "Feed my sheep" *three* times corresponding to the *three* denials. Clearly, Peter's failure is a lesson writ large upon the pages of sacred history, one which must be indelibly pressed into our consciousness. If Christ is interceding for us, no failure is too heinous and too devastating that it cannot be forgiven, and no Christian is so marked and damaged by failure that he cannot be restored to maximum service to Jesus Christ and His church. The Church of Christ is built (Christ excepted) upon failures.

***W. Christ at the First Trial before the Sanhedrin—Matt. 26: 57-68; Mk. 14: 53-65  
Lk. 22: 54, 63-65***

This segment of *Matthew, Mark, and Luke* picks up the narrative from Jn. 18: 24 and reports Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, a trial not reported in *John*.

The Sanhedrin consisted of seventy men plus the high priest, although it is unlikely all were present on this occasion (a quorum consisted of only 23—Carson, p. 553). The "chief priests" were members of the priestly aristocracy (elevated upper class of priests). Since the high priest was now appointed by the Roman procurator and could be deposed before his death, the former high priests who were still living (like Annas) were also members of this priestly aristocracy.

The “elders” were not priests, but lay people who were the heads of some of the wealthiest, most politically influential families in Judea. Together the chief priests and elders were the “old ruling class in Jerusalem” (Lane) whose theological position—if they had one at all—was Sadducean and who enjoyed the majority of seats in the Sanhedrin. The “scribes” were experts in the Law who were generally middle class and Pharisaical in theology, believing in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23: 6-8) (cf. Lane, p. 532; Carson, *Matthew*, p. 447). Therefore, the council before whom Jesus now stood was the seat of wealth and power in Judea, so much power that even the Roman procurator, Pilate, could be intimidated by them.

The attempt to obtain suitable witnesses seemed unnecessary for a group of men who had already decided to destroy Jesus; but it was necessary to justify their position to the Roman magistrate and to the crowds. We are given few details about the false witnesses except that their testimonies were inconsistent with each other (Mk. v. 56); but consistency was an essential ingredient in the Sanhedrin’s attempt to justify the condemnation of death since no one could be put to death on the basis of just one witness (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 930; citing Deut. 17: 6; 19: 15). Yet, finding two witnesses who did not contradict one another was difficult. Finally, two witnesses came forward who quoted what Jesus had said at the first cleansing of the temple in His early Judean ministry, “I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days” (Matt. v. 61). This was a significant variation from what Christ actually said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2: 19)—made in response to the Jews’ demand for a visible confirmation of His authority, a sign (Jn. 2: 18). “I am able to destroy the temple of God” sounds like the threat of someone who was *planning* to desecrate the temple, an offense punishable by death (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 554). Mark’s quotation of the witnesses is even more incriminating (condemning), “*I* will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands” leading Mark to say, “Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent” (v. 59).

Jesus could have pointed out to the Sanhedrin that the quotation was not exact and was taken out of context. He was speaking only metaphorically of His body which was the ultimate antitype of the “Immanuel” principle typified in the temple, “God with us” (Jn. 2: 21). But how would this have helped? Such an explanation would have failed in two ways: First, it would have sounded like a defense, but Jesus needed no defense and had no desire to make one. Secondly, the explanation itself would have played into the hands of the Sanhedrin who would then have accused Him of blasphemy right then and there. True to prophecy, Jesus remained quiet (Isa. 53: 7) and waited for a better opportunity to respond.

The opportunity was not long in coming. Caiaphas asked Him plainly whether He was the Christ, the Son of God—that is, the long awaited Messiah. Throughout His ministry, Christ had attempted to avoid questions of this sort, even ordering those healed from diseases to keep quiet (Matt. 8: 4; 9: 30; Matt. 12: 16) and by silencing demons (Mk. 1: 34; Lk. 4: 41). After Peter’s confession, He had specifically warned the disciples against disclosing His identity as the Christ for fear of any attempt by the multitudes to mold Him into the image of a political king (Matt. 16: 20). While the kingdom of Christ presented in the OT prophets had unmistakable political implications (cf. Isa. 9, 11, and elsewhere), the realization of those implications was reserved for another time. The righteous King must first atone for the sins of His people as the righteous Priest and sacrifice. For this sacrifice Jesus was now ready; thus, there was no more need to



conceal His true identity from anyone. Jesus replied, “You have said it *yourself*,” that is, “You have answered correctly that I am the Christ.” But adding force to this admission, He combines two texts from Daniel 7: 13 and Ps. 110: 1, “nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” These two texts were already recognized by Jewish scholars as Messianic; therefore, there was no escaping Jesus’ explicit identification of Himself as the Messiah. Also implicit in this bold declaration is the fact that even unbelievers like Caiaphas would one day witness the coming of Christ in the clouds to judge the living and the dead (1 Thes. 4: 17; Jn. 5: 28-29).

But how could anyone in Jesus’ predicament (difficult situation) be the Messiah—abandoned by His followers and held in custody against His will? The real Messiah had to prove his identity, but his present humiliation was sufficient proof that Jesus had blasphemed the name of God (Lane, p. 536). Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin now had what they were looking for, an explicit blasphemy by which they could condemn Christ to death. What they did not know was that Christ also had what *He* wanted, the condemnation of death to fulfill the predetermined plan of God in providing the atoning sacrifice for sinners (Acts 2: 23). To dramatize their victory, Caiaphas hypocritically tears his robes as a visible protest to Jesus’ blasphemy (culturally a sign of grief) while inwardly rejoicing that they had achieved their heinous goals (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 933). The way was now clear to condemn Jesus before Pilate and to justify His public execution before the multitudes. Satan was also rejoicing, little knowing he had just arranged his ultimate defeat upon an open battlefield, and that hereafter he would be fighting as a defeated foe and, by comparison, reduced to guerilla warfare.

Receiving the consensus (agreement) of the rest of the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas now permits the abuse of a condemned heretic (Matt. v. 68; Mk. v. 65). The mockery has direct relation to the description of the Messiah found in Isa. 11: 2-3, “And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear.” Jewish rabbinical interpretation of this text had deduced that since the Messiah would not judge by what his eyes saw or by what his ears heard, he must judge by some other means, even smell (Lane, pp. 539-540, and footnote). Thus, some members of the Sanhedrin were sadistically testing this theory by blindfolding Christ and pummeling him with their fists. (Those hitting Christ were not lower-ranking officials. Mark makes a distinction between “some” and the “officers” in v. 65—cf. Wessel, *Mark*, p. 770). If he were truly the Messiah, he would be able to identify who was hitting him without seeing them. By doing so they were once again playing into the hands of providence by fulfilling Scripture, “I gave My back to those who strike *Me*, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting” (Isa. 50: 6). They will one day be among those with highly inflated egos (pride) begging for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them thus hiding them from the wrath of the lamb (Rev. 6: 15-16) who will come, not again as a lamb to be slaughtered, but as the conquering King riding upon the clouds (Rev. 1: 7; cf. Hendriksen, p. 934). To this we say, “Hallelujah! Come, Lord Jesus!”

***X. Christ at the Second Trial before the Sanhedrin—Matt. 27: 1; Mk. 15: 1a***

***Lk. 22: 66-71***

Luke's account of the trial differs from that of Matthew and Mark, and this has influenced some interpreters to consider it as a possible conflation (combining) of two separate parts of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin—one *before* daylight immediately after the arrest and one *after* daylight (Carson, p. 553). (Note: Hendriksen considers it to be one trial with three different stages—(1) before Annas, (2) before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin *before* daybreak, (3) before the Sanhedrin *after* daybreak. Cf. *Matthew*, p. 927). Matthew's account indicates two separate meetings of the Sanhedrin, the latter of which may have been a more formal meeting taking place within the *temple precincts* and not at Caiaphas' house (compare Lk. 22: 66 with Matt. 27: 1-2; note: the word "chamber" in the NASB and NAB does not occur in the Greek text). It appears to me that Luke's account of the first trial (or second stage) before the Sanhedrin is briefly *summarized* in vv. 54a and vv. 63-65 which is clearly separated from the second trial (or third stage) before the Sanhedrin after daybreak by v. 66a, "When it was day" (compared to Matt. 27: 1a, "Now when morning came"). This does not explain why Luke's account of the second trial before the Sanhedrin is *almost the same as that of Matthew's and Mark's account of the first trial*, leading to the conclusion that Luke combines the two trials (examine Lk. 22: 66-71). One possible solution is that many of the members of the Sanhedrin had not been present at the first trial. After all, it took place in the very early morning hours, and many of the members may have decided to wait until daylight. Besides, they already knew what the verdict would be, anyway, so why miss any sleep over it?

However, the quorum of twenty-three members may not have been met in the early meeting, requiring a second trial after daylight. (A quorum of twenty-three members was necessary for a decision to be made.) Thus, when other members of the Sanhedrin (the council) showed up after daybreak, they asked Jesus the *same questions* to confirm what Caiaphas and those present at the first meeting had already told them. This may also explain a different response from Jesus when they ask Him whether He was the Christ, "If I tell you, you will not believe [after all, the others had not believed Him at the pre-dawn trial]; and if I ask a question, you will not answer" (vv. 67b-68). Jesus then gives a summary version of what He had said earlier, "But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the power OF GOD" (v. 69). Avoiding all conjecture (guesswork), they then ask, "Are You the Son of God, then?" to which He then responds, "Yes, I am" (v. 70). At this point, the members of the council who had not been present at the earlier trial come to the same conclusion as Caiaphas and the others earlier—to no one's surprise. Jesus has incriminated Himself and there was, indeed, no need of any more witnesses (v. 71).

An additional reason for a second trial before the Sanhedrin is that the first trial in the early morning hours was known by the council to be *illegal* since it occurred at night (see notes on p. 190. The official day began at 6 AM, not 12 AM.). Thus, to correct this procedural error, the council was forced to hold a second meeting after daylight concluding with the same verdict (so also Morris, *John*, p. 762).

***Y. Christ Delivered over to Pilate by the Sanhedrin—Matt. 27: 2; 11-14; Mk. 15: 1b-5  
Lk. 23: 1-6; Jn. 18: 28-40***

After the second trial, the Sanhedrin turns Jesus over to Pilate for a civil trial. Since John gives

more detail, we will be following his account. The problems associated with Jn. 18: 28b have been treated above (pp. 365-366). The Sanhedrin had already eaten the actual Passover meal but did not wish to be ceremonially disqualified from the other festivities associated with the Passover. Had they entered any building strictly associated with Gentiles, they would have been rendered ceremonially unclean according to the current rabbinical interpretation of the Law found in the Mishnah (cf. Lk. 7: 6 and commentary, pp. 91-92; also Morris, *John*, p. 762, who says that the Praetorium was the official residence of the Roman governor). The uncleanness associated with entering a Gentile home was the same as that associated with coming in contact with a dead body, lasting seven days (Num. 19: 14; 9: 6-11; 31: 19), thus precluding (making impossible) any further participation in the Passover festival. The reason for this association with dead bodies was that Jews believed the Romans disposed of their aborted babies through the drainage systems of their houses (Morris, *John*, p. 763, footnote; also Carson, *John*, p. 588-589).

There is **amazing irony** in John's comment about their fastidiousness (careful in every detail) concerning ceremonial defilement. While remaining "clean" to continue their celebration of the Passover—the very celebration of God's wrath "passing over" the Jews in His judgment of the Egyptians—the Sanhedrin now incurs the greatest severity of God's wrath by demanding the crucifixion of His Son. Rightly did Christ say of them that they were clean on the outside, but full of dead men's bones on the inside.

Since they would not come in to Pilate, Pilate goes out to them (v. 29). It is here where the Jewish intimidation of Pilate begins. Since Pilate had taken part in Jesus' arrest by sending a detachment of soldiers (see commentary above), He had been expecting their visit. For the same reason, having won Pilate's cooperation in the arrest of Jesus, the Jews expected His full cooperation in ordering the death sentence. When he instead ***demand******ed that they file formal charges by stating their accusation***, he was in essence opening up a ***new trial*** which they had not expected (Carson, p. 590). Their reply (v. 30) was harsh, disrespectful of his authority, and designed to intimidate him with the power and influence standing behind the Sanhedrin, an influence which he knew by experience could be more than a simple annoyance. What they were saying to Pilate basically amounted to this: "Trust us, Pilate. If he were not an evil man, we wouldn't be here" (Morris, p. 764).

I believe that it is at this point in the dialogue that Pilate tells them ***to judge Jesus according to their law*** (Jn. v. 31). Permission to do so would not be an unusual concession from the Roman government, for the Romans afforded conquered nations a significant amount of self-autonomy in the government of their own affairs (Morris, p. 765). At this point, however, Pilate may have underestimated the extent of the punishment desired; but he was quickly educated, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death" (v. 31). It is here that the urgent question arises about the ***ability of the Jews to administer the penalty of capital punishment, death***.

***Excursus: Were the Jews in Palestine permitted to execute criminals by stoning?***

The classic test case is that of Stephen in 33-35 AD, roughly three to five years later (Acts 7). If, indeed, the Jews were able to stone Stephen to death without Roman interference, how can they now claim that the execution of Jesus is out of their hands? For that matter, how was it

that Saul before his conversion was able to cooperate with Jewish authorities in executing the death sentence upon Christians (Acts 26: 10)?

The answer lies in the political instability of Palestine during the time of Stephen's martyrdom, a period which includes the participation of Saul recounted in Acts 26. Although Pilate was not deposed as the Roman procurator until 36 AD, he had committed political blunders (mistakes) prior to his removal which seriously weakened his authority in Palestine—among them, using money in the temple treasury to pay for an aqueduct bringing water into the city. When a crowd of Jews complained, he had them beaten. He had also allowed his soldiers to bring ensigns (banners) into Jerusalem which had images of the emperor on them, a sacrilegious act for the Jews and something other procurators had not done in deference to them. His last blunder was the massacre of many Samaritans who had climbed Mount Gerizim to find the sacred vessels allegedly hidden there by Moses (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 404). By the time of Stephen's death, therefore, Caesar had had just about enough of Pilate's stupidity. Due to his weakened position with Caesar, the Jews were convinced Pilate would turn a blind eye to Stephen's execution, and they were correct. Thus, Stephen was stoned to death as the result of ***mob violence ignored by Pilate rather than judicial action*** (Carson, *John*, p. 591). The same argument applies to the execution of other Christians shortly after Stephen's death (Acts 8:1). Kistemaker concurs,

In this political climate, the Jews would not fear repercussions for killing Stephen. To be sure, in his last year of office [35 AD] Pilate had lost influence and authority in Judea....

We conclude, therefore, that the Sanhedrin executed Stephen because in those days they had ***nothing to fear from a weak Roman governor***. Moreover, Pilate resided in Caesarea [except during Jewish festival days], which was located a distance of two day's travel from Jerusalem (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, pp. 280-281, words in brackets and emphasis mine).

When Herod Archelaus was deposed in 6 AD, Judea was placed directly under Roman rule. Thereafter, the Jews lost their jurisdiction in offenses requiring capital punishment, a power transferred to the Roman governor and carefully guarded (Carson, *John*, p. 591). The important consideration here in John's gospel is that Jesus' fate is guided by the eternal purpose of God. It has been speculated that the Jews wished Jesus to be executed by crucifixion as a sign of His being cursed by God (Deut. 21: 23). This may be true, but had they been able to execute Jesus themselves by stoning without risking retaliation from Pilate or without risking an unfavorable verdict (with relation to them) from him at the present moment, they would surely have done so. John makes a point in reporting Jesus' escape from stoning twice (Jn. 8: 59; 10: 31). It is clear in *John* that Jesus would not have His life ***taken away*** through mob violence. Rather, He would ***lay His life down*** by having it ***"lifted up"*** on a cross (Jn. 3: 14; 12: 32; cf. Morris, p. 765).

Further, the participation of the Roman government—the imperial power throughout the western world at that time—was important to demonstrate the guilt, not only of the Jews, but also the Gentiles, in putting Christ to death. Through Rome, the whole world symbolically takes part in His execution. (I am here reminded of a painting by Rembrandt van Rijn entitled [if memory serves] "The Raising of Christ on the Cross" in which Rembrandt shows a man at the base of the cross of Christ who actively takes part in raising it. The man in the

picture is Rembrandt himself, one of his many self-portraits. He understood the truth—*he* had taken part in the execution of Christ, as we all have.

Lastly, for the prophetic word to be fulfilled, Christ *must* be crucified—as any examination of Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 will abundantly demonstrate. Christ knew the exact sequence of events by which He would be condemned and put to death. He would first be condemned by the chief priests and scribes who would then deliver Him into the hands of the Gentiles which could only mean death by crucifixion (Jn. 18: 32; compared with Matt. 20: 18-19). The word “fulfill” in v. 32 is *plēroō*. Twenty-five times (if I counted correctly) a variation of *plēroō* is used in the four gospels to indicate some prophecy in the OT coming to completion. Every detail of Jesus’ life, ministry—and now His death—was being *fulfilled according to plan*. Nothing was left to chance; nothing was left to the autonomous discretion of man—the Sanhedrin, Judas, or Pilate—apart from the guiding hand of God orchestrating every event according to His redemptive purposes decreed from eternity. This was the plan, and there was no other. Everything would be accomplished.

(For further reading on this question, see Leon Morris, *John*, pp. 786-788).

Getting back to the narrative of John, after Pilate tells them to try Jesus according to their law, the Sanhedrin levels specific accusations: “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, *a King*” (Lk. 23: 2). The accusation of being a king *shifted the emphasis* from religious matters (not interesting to Pilate) to civil matters (very interesting to him). This prevented Pilate from ignoring their request for the death penalty—which comes next in the dialogue (Jn. v. 31)—and prompting his *first question to Jesus spoken in the presence of the Sanhedrin*, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (Mk. v. 2; Matt. v. 11; Lk. v. 3) Jesus then gives him a simple answer recorded in all three Synoptics, “It is as you say.” Upon hearing Jesus’ answer the Sanhedrin continues hurling accusations against Him to which Jesus remains silent, prompting Pilate’s *second question*, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?” (Matt. v. 13; Mk. v. 4) Jesus’ calm *silence* in the face of what Pilate suspected all along were trumped-up charges earns Pilate’s respect and amazement (Matt. vv. 12-13; Mk. vv. 3-4). He suspected that Jesus’ arrest had been motivated by pure envy (Matt. v. 18), and he also knew that the Sanhedrin had no well-concealed affection for Caesar or a desire to protect the Roman government from political insurrection (Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 592).

John’s account harmonizes easily with Luke’s condensed version, but not so easily with the other two Synoptics. The scenario above, and continued below, is only a *proposed* attempt to harmonize John’s account with *Matthew* and *Mark*. What comes next, I believe, is a *private* conversation between Jesus and Pilate *inside* the Praetorium *away* from the presence of the Sanhedrin still standing *outside* the Praetorium (Jn. v. 33). Notice that Pilate enters *again* into the Praetorium and summons Jesus to him, but nothing is said about Pilate summoning the Sanhedrin which would not have entered for religious reasons (v. 33 compared to v. 29, “went out”). At this point Pilate asks Jesus a *second* time perhaps more emphatically, “*Are* You the king of the Jews?” (his third question to Jesus).

Having already answered affirmatively to this question outside the Praetorium, Jesus takes the liberty in private to probe Pilate by asking His own question, “Are you saying this on your own

initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” Although Jesus has already answered Pilate’s initial question in the presence of the Sanhedrin, (“It is as you say”), a simple yes or no answer is insufficient. The question itself, “Are you a king?” needs clarification (cf. Carson, *John*, p. 593; Morris, *John*, pp. 768-769). What does Pilate mean by “king” and what had Pilate heard about him from others which would provoke another question about his kingship? Contemptuously, Pilate retorts, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?” paraphrased, “Why should I have any interest in your religion? I’m not a Jew! You must have done something to arouse their hatred” Knowing Pilate’s sole (only) interest in the political question of His kingship, Jesus then answers Pilate’s original question with *more clarification* of the nature of His kingdom, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” Therefore, if Pilate is interested in any possible threat to Rome’s political authority in Palestine, Jesus makes it clear that, although a king, His kingdom is unlike any other kingdom with which Pilate is familiar and is, thus, no threat to Rome or to Pilate—at least, not in any sense that Pilate would understand. His kingdom has no *immediate* interest in physical territory or worldly dominions which must be conquered with sword and spear. “Immediate” must be emphasized lest we forget that the whole purpose of Jesus coming into the world was to regain what had been lost in the fall—the physical universe and a people for God’s own possession. Thus, Jesus does not imply that His kingdom has no goal of conquering this present world, but that the method of dominion is entirely different, a difference which is very evident in the fact that His disciples are not presently fighting to keep Him from being handed over to the Jews.

Had Jesus explained the *eschatological goal* of His kingdom, Pilate would not have had the spiritual sense to understand Him and would have been convinced that He was a political threat, after all. As it was, Jesus gave him just the information he needed, and no more, to convince him that He had no intention of leading a political insurrection against Rome. (Ironically, roughly 400 years later, Emperor Constantine of Rome would declare Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.) The stone cut out of the mountain without hands is now striking—right under Pilate’s nose—the statue of all man-made empires, crushing all worldly dominions and man’s hopes of being his own god. This kingdom which will have no end will continue to expand without violence and carnal weapons, but by the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Dan. 2: 34-35; 2 Cor. 10: 3-5; Eph. 6: 12-18).

Probing a bit further Pilate now remarks, “So you are a king.” Most translations supply the question mark, but I believe Carson is correct by translating the remark as a declarative sentence, “You are a king, then!” (p. 594). Jesus answers affirmatively, “You say *correctly* that I am a king” (v. 37). The NASB, NAB, and NKJV add “correctly” (not in the Greek), but this addition captures the intent of Jesus’ statement. He is not simply repeating Pilate’s words but agreeing with them and confirming the fact that He is a king. This becomes clear in the next statement, “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Morris notes that there is something mysterious about Jesus’ declaration of His birth and purpose, as if to hint that His entrance into the world was most unusual, implicitly claiming pre-existence (p. 771). Having explained what His kingdom is *not*, Jesus now explains what it *is*—*a kingdom of truth*—namely, the truth that He is the Son of God, God in the flesh, who has come to set man free from the bondage of sin. Thus,

the followers of His kingdom are committed to truth, not violent take-over of worldly kingdoms (Carson, p. 595). Pilate now has an invitation to learn more about the truth (Carson, p. 595) but instead, succumbs to the current philosophical pessimism of the educated class which had long since given up on the idea of absolute truth. Brushing Jesus off with a rhetorical question, “What is truth?” Pilate then leaves Jesus without waiting for an answer—an answer which, in his estimation, does not exist, yet one which is standing right in front of him.

After this private interrogation of Jesus, away from the heckling of the Sanhedrin, Pilate is now convinced that, whatever accusations have been made, Jesus has no political ambitions and poses no threat to Rome or to him personally. He then leaves Jesus in the Praetorium while he goes out to the Jews (v. 38). Appealing primarily to the crowds, Pilate says, “I find no fault in him” (v. 38; cf. Lk. 23: 4). At this point the Sanhedrin insists that Jesus “stirs up the people teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place” (Lk. 23: 5), a statement with inherent political overtones—that is, “He stirs up the people to insurrection against Rome” (cf. Lk. 23: 14).

### ***Z. Christ Delivered over to Herod by Pilate—Lk. 23: 7-12***

The narrative is now extended in Luke’s gospel. Matthew, Mark, and John omit the story of Jesus’ interrogation by Herod. While Mark and John continue their narrative uninterrupted until Christ is handed over by Pilate to be crucified, Matthew interrupts the narrative with the story of Judas’ suicide (see commentary below). Luke makes it clear that Pilate seeks yet another means of acquitting Jesus and thinks that he has discovered it in the mention of Galilee (Lk. 23: 5). If Jesus *started* His ministry in Galilee, maybe he is from that region in which case Pilate can send him to Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, for judgment (so also Geldenhuys, p. 593).

Conveniently for Pilate, Herod was visiting Jerusalem during the Passover, possibly as a means of keeping up appearances with the Jews, who hated him nevertheless. His father, Herod the Great, had courted their favor by building them an elaborate temple (Timeline F), and unlike his reckless brother, Archelaus, Antipas had learned to imitate the political shrewdness of his father (apart from his father’s murder of the two year old males in Bethlehem).

As ruler of Galilee, Herod had doubtless heard of this man, Jesus, who went about teaching and performing miracles. In fact, we are informed by all three Synoptics that Herod feared that this miracle-worker was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Matt. 14: 2; Mk. 6: 14-16; Lk. 9: 7). Herod had imprisoned John for daring to condemn his marriage to Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife (Mk. 6: 18); but for some time before executing him had enjoyed listening to John on a number of occasions (Mk. 6: 20). Although wishing to kill John, Herod feared the crowds who regarded John as a prophet (Matt. 14: 5). Further, his hesitancy may have been compelled by his recognition that John was indeed a righteous man who had earned his standing as a prophet (Mk. 6: 20); thus, perhaps he feared God’s wrath if he executed John. This history makes the present confrontation with Christ all the more gripping. We are not told when Herod’s fear of the Baptist’s “ghost” subsided (ended), but apparently his continued political prosperity the last two years since John’s beheading had assured him that there was no divine retribution (pay back) coming for his misdeed. He would take this convenient opportunity to see Jesus perform a few tricks for him (v. 8). Perhaps afraid that Jesus would appeal to Herod and weaken their cause, the chief priests and scribes had accompanied Him there with the same accusations (v. 10). They

need not have been worried, for during a lengthy period of questioning, Jesus said nothing. *This was nothing less than divine preterition—passing over by God of all who are not elect.* Perhaps a sensational miracle coupled with Scriptural evidence of Christ's identity from the OT (Isaiah perhaps?) would have done the "trick" to convince Herod, but Christ remains silent, sealing Herod's doom.

Nevertheless, God had been gracious to Herod, more than most. *Herod had already been given an opportunity with John the Baptist, and in many conversations with him had been called upon to repent.* Rather than repenting of his adulterous marriage with Herodias, he had instead crumbled under her vindictive scheme to put John to death, thus *silencing forever the only voice from God he would ever hear. Jesus would not give him another opportunity for repentance.* The same can be said of Pilate who walks out the door with "What is truth?". Jesus does not say to Pilate, "I am the truth" nor does he attempt to bring to Pilate's attention the many witnesses to His healing miracles occurring both in Galilee and Judea. His resurrection from the dead a few days later would prove conclusively that people who are not Christ's sheep will not believe even if someone rises from the dead (Lk. 16: 31). Earlier in his ministry, Christ had already praised His Father for revealing the truth to babes (those who were humble and lowly) and hiding it from the wise and intelligent (Matt. 11: 25). On this occasion the truth of God is concealed from Herod, a haughty ruler who is wise and intelligent in his own eyes.

Jesus is different from so many evangelical preachers and "soul winners" who would clamor for an opportunity such as this. Just think of it! What would be the reaction to a *Jerusalem Times* headline, "Herod Antipas Becomes a Follower of Jesus!"? This would be far bigger news than the conversion of a famous football star or movie icon (idol). People would be lining up for miles at the stadium to hear Herod's testimony at the next open-air evangelistic crusade. But Jesus is concerned for the conversion of celebrities no more—and no less, either—than the average Joe and Mary. He doesn't need the conversion of celebrities—which often turn out to be phony—to advance the kingdom or give His teaching credibility. The Father's good pleasure is, and will continue to be, revealing His Son to those whose hearts have been prepared to receive Him—those who are broken by their sins, those whose life circumstances have brought them to the edge of despair, those who have exhausted their personal resources and are now ready to admit that they have nothing to offer this holy God who must accept them by grace or not at all (the very reason it is hard—but not impossible—for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven).

Not getting what he wanted, Herod allows his soldiers to have some fun mistreating Jesus, afterwards dressing Him in an expensive robe to mock His claim as king of the Jews. The quiet dignity and regality (kingliness) of Jesus on this occasion is highlighted against the indignity and crudeness of Herod who actually participates with his underlings in mistreating and mocking Him (v. 11, "with his soldiers"). Herod is, after all, only a thug in royal robes. Herod and Pilate, once enemies, are now fellow comrades in their complicity (agreement) to turn Jesus over to His enemies. Herod, for his part, is flattered that the Roman procurator would send Jesus to him for evaluation. Pilate is likewise flattered that Herod would send Him back to do with as He pleased without his interference. They are, thus, pleased with one another but loathsome and despicable in the eyes of God who will render to them according to their deeds (Matt. 16: 27).

#### **AA. Judas' Suicide—Matt. 27: 3-10**



As a literary device (a method of story-telling), Matthew interrupts the narrative leading up to the crucifixion with the story of Judas' suicide. By placing it next in the narrative, Matthew wishes his Jewish audience to know that at the same time Jesus is being condemned by false witnesses, the man who betrays him stands *self-condemned* by his betrayal of an innocent man. Those who do not believe in Christ by implication condemn Him as an imposter, a liar; and those who condemn Him as such stand self-condemned, for the weight of the evidence is that He *is* who He *claims* to be, the Son of God. Furthermore, Judas' suicide is also theologically significant, for unbelief is self-destructive. Jesus said that He came to give life abundantly, but by refusing life, men choose death instead.

The exact timing of Judas' appearance before the Sanhedrin is difficult to determine introduced as it is by an indefinite temporal indicator, "then" (*tote*). The other indicator is found in the phrase, "saw that He had been condemned". At this point in Matthew's narrative, it seems that Pilate had not played his last "wildcard" to deliver Jesus, namely, persuading the multitude to request His release as a customary gesture during the Passover. Yet, Matthew knows the end of the matter, and Judas probably did as well. After all, he had dealt with the Sanhedrin first-hand and knew they would leave no stone unturned until Jesus was dead. For all intents and purposes, Jesus was a condemned man as far as Judas was concerned.

But what was this "remorse" which Judas experienced? The word in the text is from *metamelomai* and is translated "repented" by the KJV, ASV, and YLT (Young's Literal Translation). The word is also used in Matt. 21: 29; Heb. 7: 21; and **2 Cor. 7: 8**. It is different from the usual word for "repent" (*metanoëō*) found ubiquitously (everywhere) in the NT (Acts 2: 38; 3: 19; 5: 31; 8: 22; 11: 18; 13: 24; 17: 30; 19: 4; 20: 21; 26: 20; Matt. 3: 2, 811; 4: 17; Mk. 1: 4, 15; 6: 12; Lk. 3: 3; 5, 8: 32; 13: 3, 5; 15: 7, 10; 16: 30; 17: 3, 4; 24: 47; Rev. 2: 5, 16, 21, 22; 3: 3, 19; 2 Cor. 12: 21; Rom. 2: 4; **2 Cor. 7: 9-10**; 2 Tim. 2: 25; Heb. 6: 1, 6; 12: 17; 2 Pet. 3: 9). Careful examination of the texts above will demonstrate that the Biblical writers use some form of *metanoëō* when speaking of a change of mind and heart which results in a changed life.

I have emphasized 2 Cor. 7: 8-10 which may be helpful in discovering the difference between Judas' "remorse" and true, evangelical repentance. The text reads as follows:

For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret [*metamelomai*] it; though I did regret [*metamelomai*] it—*for* I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful *to the point of* repentance [*metanoian*; from *metanoëō*]; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance [*metanoian*] without regret [*ametamelētos*], *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

The sorrow according to God's will is the sorrow produced by a realization that God's will (His perceptive will in the law) has been violated. It is recognition of sin which produces godly sorrow, the sorrow Peter experienced when he realized he had denied his Savior, weeping bitterly as a result. (It is very interesting to note that there is no explicit mention of repentance with relation to Peter's denial of Christ—only that he wept. Yet, his life and service afterwards proves that he repented.) Furthermore, true repentance is focused upon God, not self, and eventually produces joy in the Holy Spirit, not remorse and misery. The "without regret" of v.

10 is *ametamelētos* and is the negation (the negative form) of *metamelomai* (note the *a* of negation before *metamelētos*). The regret (“remorse”) which Judas experienced after his betrayal was a regret which was focused upon himself—possibly the repercussions (consequences) from others he would face for having betrayed an innocent man. He would henceforth be known as the disciple who betrayed his master, and there would be many in Galilee and Judea who would loathe him for this disloyal and dastardly (cowardly) act. The ultimate consequence of this self-centered remorse was the deepening of his despair to the point of suicide. In his darkened mind there was no hope of remedy; he had never understood, even after three years, that Christ was a man of abundant mercy. Commenting on the text in *Second Corinthians*, Calvin observes,

In the first place, in order to understand what is meant by this clause—*according to God*, we must observe the contrast, for the *sorrow that is according to God* he contrasts with the *sorrow of the world*. Let us now take also, the contrast between two kinds of joy. The *joy of the world* is, when men foolishly, and without the fear of the Lord, exult in vanity, that is, in the world, and intoxicated with a transient felicity [another word for joy], look no higher than the earth. The *joy that is according to God* is, when men place all their happiness in God, and take satisfaction in His grace, and show this by contempt of the world, using earthly prosperity as if they used it not, and joyful in the midst of adversity. Accordingly, the *sorrow of the world* is, when men despond in consequence of earthly afflictions, and are overwhelmed with grief; while *sorrow according to God* is that which has an eye to God while they reckon it the *one* misery—to have lost the favor of God; when, impressed with fear of His judgment, they mourn over their sins. This sorrow Paul makes the cause and origin of repentance. This is carefully to be observed, for unless the sinner be dissatisfied with himself, detest his manner of life, and be thoroughly grieved from an apprehension of sin, he will never betake himself to the Lord. On the other hand, it is impossible for a man to experience a sorrow of this kind, without its giving birth to a new heart. Hence repentance takes its rise in grief, for the reason that I have mentioned—because no one can return to the right way, but the man who hates sin; but where hatred of sin is, there is self-dissatisfaction and grief.

There is, however, a beautiful allusion here to the term *repentance*, when he says—*not to be repented of*; for however unpleasant the thing is at first taste, it renders itself desirable by its usefulness....”We are taught by the result itself, that grief ought not to be painful to us, or distressing. In like manner although repentance contains in it some degree of bitterness, it is spoken of as not to be repented of, on account of the precious and pleasant fruit which it produces.” (Calvin, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 273-274; bold emphasis editor’s, underlined emphasis mine).

Following Calvin’s analysis, Judas’ “remorse” could *not* have been evangelical repentance because it gave birth to despair and suicide rather than a new heart. His sorrow produced death rather than “pleasant fruit”. We are further convinced of his final doom by Jesus’ comment spoken only hours before, “The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26: 24). Judas’ death upon a tree is the appropriate end to a man who accepted a bribe to betray an innocent victim. “Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.” And all the people shall say, “Amen” (Deut. 21: 23; 27: 25).

It is clear from v. 4 that the chief priests and elders—who were never interested in achieving justice for Jesus—were now equally disinterested. It was simply not their concern that Jesus was innocent. The important thing is that they had achieved their nefarious (wicked) scheme to have Jesus condemned to death. Judas then throws the blood money into the temple sanctuary and commits suicide. Although the chief priests and elders have condemned Christ on false charges, an act of cold-blooded murder, they once again demonstrate their fastidious (very sensitive) concern for ceremonial purity. The thirty pieces of silver could not be deposited in the temple treasury because it was “the price of blood” (v. 6; cf. Deut. 23: 18; Carson, p. 561; Jn. 18: 1 and

commentary above). With a twinge of sarcasm, Matthew reports how the money is now “compassionately” (tongue in cheek) used for the proper burial of Jewish strangers—perhaps those who had died while visiting Jerusalem who had no means of purchasing a burial plot (v. 7; Hendriksen, p. 945). How kind of the Sanhedrin to think of the strangers—to the very end true to the Law of Moses in every small letter and stroke—“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22: 21)! Having now been kind to strangers, they make haste to crucify their one and only Messiah.

The “Potter’s Field” was probably a field containing choice clay used by potters for ceramics of various sorts. This particular field had most likely been used up and was worthless for any other purpose than a graveyard (Hendriksen, p. 945). With further irony, Matthew—writing his account in the late 50’s or early 60’s AD—reports that the field became known as the “Field of Blood” and was so called at the time of his writing. The Sanhedrin could not hide their murderous deed behind one hypocritical act of compassion.

Verses 5, 7, and 9 present the interpreter with difficulties. First, Matthew reports that Judas hanged himself while Luke reports that he fell and was disemboweled. Further, Matthew reports that the Sanhedrin purchased Potter’s Field while Luke tells us that Judas purchased it. “Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out” (Acts 1: 18). Verses 5 and 7 can be easily reconciled. Since Judas’ blood money was used to purchase the field, then, for all intents and purposes, Judas was the buyer. Second, according to early church tradition, Judas could have hanged himself at the edge of a steep cliff from a tree limb not strong enough to hold his weight for an extended period of time. After the limb broke, Judas (already dead or still alive) fell a considerable distance to the bottom of the ravine, his body suffering severe trauma upon impact. Another possibility is that since no one during Passover would have wished to defile himself through contact with a dead body (especially one hanging from a tree, a sign of being cursed) his body may have hung a long time in the hot sun, allowing for rapid decomposition. After the limb broke, the bloated (swollen) corpse could have burst open (cf. Carson, p. 562). The truth may lie in both these explanations.

The more complicated difficulty lies in the quotation from *Jeremiah* (vv. 9-10) which is more readily identified as a quotation from *Zechariah* 11: 12-13. Carson and Hendriksen have sorted out the problem in detail, the most salient (prominent) points of their arguments being the following:

(1) Matthew refers primarily not to Jer. 18: 2-6 or Jer. 32: 6-15 (to which there are allusions from Matt. 27: 9-10) but to Jer. 19: 1-13. In that text, Jeremiah is told to purchase a potter’s jar. He is then to take with him some elders and priests to the Valley of Ben Hinnom where he warns them of the destruction of Jerusalem—symbolized by smashing the potter’s jar. The Valley of Ben Hinnom had been used for illegitimate sacrifices during the tainted history of Israel, even the sacrifice of infant children (v. 5) thus filling the valley with “the blood of the innocent” (v. 4). For this reason the valley would be renamed “The Valley of Slaughter”. When Jerusalem is overtaken by the Babylonians, there would be so many dead bodies through violence, disease, and famine, that they would be forced to use this valley as the only available burial plot (v. 11). The allusions, therefore, are prominent. Although a potter’s field is not mentioned, a potter’s jar

is. The Valley of Hinnom was a place where “the blood of the innocent” (a type of Christ) had been slain. Now, the valley becomes a burial place for the wicked, the “Valley of Slaughter” roughly corresponding to the “Field of Blood”, possibly the field in which Judas hanged himself (cf. Carson, p. 563).

(2) Second, the prophecy of Zechariah more clearly parallels the text of Matthew. In that text, the prophet Zechariah—a post-exilic prophet—is despised by the Jewish nation which pays him a mere 30 pieces of silver as his wages—the same price as slave labor (Ex. 21: 32). Zechariah is then told to take the money and throw it to the potter in the house of the Lord. As the antitype, the prophetic ministry of Christ among His people is despised in the same way as the prophetic ministry of Zechariah who stands symbolically as a representative of all the prophets of Israel (Hendriksen, pp. 946-947). We need not be concerned that while the prophet Zechariah is paid the 30 pieces of silver, in *Matthew* Judas is paid this sum. Old Testament prophecies are not fulfilled “by a simple one-on-one pattern” (Carson, p. 565). The essence of the prophecy is that the Lord’s servant, Jesus Christ, is valued at the same paltry sum—a sum which Yahweh ridicules sarcastically as a “magnificent price”. While a potter’s field is mentioned by Matthew, Zechariah’s wages end up in the hands of a potter—one of the many potters who supplied the necessary vessels for the temple service (Carson, p. 564). Furthermore, Zechariah’s resignation as a prophet will expose the nation to destruction by foreign powers (vv. 6-10), a prophecy fulfilled during the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Thus, Zechariah’s pasturing the flock of Israel and his rejection is typical of Christ pasturing Israel during His earthly ministry and His ultimate rejection which, in turn, exposes the nation to violent overthrow by the Romans (cf. Thomas V. Moore, *Zechariah*, pp. 169-187).

Thus far I have not explained why Matthew would cite the prophecy of Jeremiah rather than the prophecy of Zechariah which, on the surface, bears more resemblance to the Matthean text. The conflating (combining) of prophecies from two different sources is not uncommon. *Mark* 1: 2-3 is a prime example where Mark quotes both from Mal. 3: 1 and Isa. 40 but cites the *major* prophet as the source. So also here in *Matthew* in which he makes an allusion to Jer. 19, quotes Zechariah as the most explicit reference, yet Jeremiah as the source.

***BB. Christ Condemned To Be Crucified Rather than Barabbas—Matt. 27: 15-26;  
Mk. 15: 6-15; Lk. 23: 13-25***

Luke provides us with the chronological sequence. In Lk. 23: 1-6, the Sanhedrin delivers Jesus over to Pilate. When Pilate hears that Jesus started His ministry in Galilee, he sends Him to Herod, after which Herod sends Christ back to Pilate dressed in a royal robe to mock Him (23: 7-12). At this point in the narrative, Pilate summons the *chief priests and the rulers and the people* (v. 13). It was necessary to summon them again since *the sequence leading to the crucifixion had been interrupted by Herod’s interrogation*. Further, the chief priests and scribes had been present when Jesus had been interrogated by Herod (Lk. 23: 10). Pilate insists once again that he finds no fault in Jesus (v. 14) and can now buttress (strengthen) this claim by the fact that Herod had also found no evidence of seditious activity (v. 15). Once again, Luke’s abbreviated account of Jesus’ trial before Pilate (23: 1-6) must be supplemented by John’s more thorough account, one which is not reported in detail by any of the Synoptics (Jn. 18: 33-38).

After his more thorough investigation of Jesus in private, and after Herod's investigation, Pilate is now more convinced than ever that Jesus has ***no recognizable political agenda*** and that the real motive is the Sanhedrin's envy of His influence (Matt. v. 18; Mk. v. 10). Jesus had challenged the ***Jews*** to find any fault in Him saying, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (Jn. 8: 46a). He now confounds the ***Gentiles*** (Pilate and Herod) who can find nothing in Him to condemn.

Matthew and Mark report that the chief priests and the elders "***persuaded the crowds***" or "***stirred up the crowd***" to ask for Barabbas' release and to put Jesus to death" (Matt. v. 20; Mk. v. 11). There is irony here. The Sanhedrin had accused Christ of "stirring up" the people to violent insurrection (Lk. 23: 5), but it is clear that the chief priests and elders are the ones stirring up the people to commit a violent act—to kill an innocent man. This does not imply that Matthew and Mark exonerate (excuse from guilt) the crowds and vilify (accuse) the Sanhedrin. This much is clear from Matthew's comment (v. 25) and from his and Mark's report of the ***crowd's insistence*** to crucify Jesus. Luke exhibits the culpability (blame) of the crowds by ***lumping them together with the Sanhedrin without any mention of being persuaded by them*** (vv. 13-25). All the third person plural pronouns ("them", "they") refer collectively to "the chief priests and the rulers ***and*** the people" (v. 13). While it is true that they were negatively influenced by the chief priests and elders, they share the blame in putting Jesus to death—albeit less blame than the leaders. Carson suggests that "their momentary faltering [over the question of what to do with Jesus] is resolved by their leaders" (p. 570; words in brackets mine); and Lane believes it probable that the crowds had mostly made up their minds to release Barabbas apart from Sanhedric intervention (*Mark*, p. 557).

Hoping that a scourging would satisfy the crowd's thirst for blood, Pilate offers to have Jesus flogged instead (v. 16), a suggestion which is completely unsatisfactory to them. At this point in the story Matthew and Mark make note of the custom at the time of the Passover for Pilate to pardon any prisoner of their choosing (Matt. v. 15; Mk. v. 6. Notice from marginal notes in your study bibles that Lk. 23: 17 is not included in early Greek manuscripts). There were apparently only two choices—either they could release Jesus or a man named Barabbas who was a known criminal. Mark says Barabbas was imprisoned with a group of insurrectionists who had committed murder. The pronoun, "who" (v. 7) is plural referring to the insurrectionists and not specifically Barabbas. Matthew simply calls him a "notorious [well-known] prisoner" (v. 16), and Luke says that he was imprisoned for insurrection and murder (vv. 19, 25). Later in Matt. 27: 38, Matthew calls him a "robber" (cf. Jn. v. 40). The word employed, ***lēstēs***, can also mean "insurrectionist". Carson notes that Josephus used the word in reference to the Zealots, those who were committed to throwing off Roman rule by any means necessary, including murder. Neither armed robbery nor theft was punishable by death, but insurrection against the Roman government ***was***. Thus, Barabbas had been arrested with two others in connection with insurrection against the Roman government. All three were to be crucified, but Barabbas was released according to the crowd's demands. In light of the extreme unpopularity of the Roman occupation in Palestine, it is not surprising that someone known for nationalistic zeal against Roman occupation would be a possible candidate for release (Carson, p. 569). After all, the popular expectation was that the Messiah would be a political conqueror, a Davidic king; but when Jesus was arrested and accused, all hopes of Him fulfilling such expectations were disappointed.

We don't know how much time elapsed between Pilate's question (Matt. v. 17; Mk. v. 9; Jn. v. 39) and their answer—probably only moments. In the meantime Pilate receives a message from his wife to have nothing to do with Jesus. The previous night, while Jesus was being arrested, she had suffered from a disturbing dream about Him (Matt. v. 19). If we assume that this was no ordinary dream, perhaps God was offering Pilate yet another opportunity to reconsider Jesus' claims. By now Pilate at least understood that Jesus was no ordinary man—and, according to his wife's dream, a *righteous* man—and that if he turned Him over to be executed, there could be severe consequences for his administration. He was “between a rock and a hard place” and from John's account (see below) we can see that Pilate was becoming increasingly nervous about a “no win” situation. He would later take the path he considered less risky, yet losing everything as a result. Although Pilate wishes to release Jesus, he lacks the moral courage to do what he knows should be done and *could* be done. He is, after all, the Roman procurator who was given the responsibility of judging cases of capital crime. He doesn't need the majority approval of the crowd to throw Jesus' case out of court. Therefore, by repeatedly appealing to the crowds and the Sanhedrin, he reveals in progressive stages the weakling he really is. His cowardice has been imitated many times throughout the history of the church. In the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Bohemian king, Wenceslas, failed to protect John Huss from execution by his brother, Sigismund, the Holy Roman emperor (N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power—Part Two: The Middle Ages*, p. 292). The choice was either to defend Huss or suffer excommunication from the church.

Asking the crowd a *second* time (cf. Matt. vv. 17, 21) whether they would wish to have Jesus or Barabbas released, they come back with the verdict, “Barabbas” (v. 21). Still reaching for a more satisfactory response, Pilate then asks, “*Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?*” to which “*all*” of them shout, “Crucify Him!” (v. 22; cf. Mk. vv. 12-13). Reaching still further, Pilate says, “Why, what evil has He done?” Repeatedly, the Synoptists emphasize the innocence of Jesus by Pilate's insistence that there is nothing about Him deserving punishment. On the other hand is Barabbas whose guilt is well-established (cf. Joel B. Green, *Luke*, p. 807). Nonetheless, Pilate's efforts were useless, and the crowd was quickly becoming a violent mob (Matt. v. 24). It is not unlikely that some of the same people who had shouted only days before, “Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!” were now shouting, “Crucify Him!” Small wonder Jesus never entrusted Himself to men (Jn. 2: 24).

The ancient question, “*Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?*” is still the *ultimate question* in this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and it will remain the ultimate question in the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and remaining centuries until the return of Christ. When He appears in His glory, this question will have already been answered by every individual and will no longer need answering. But when Christ returns, the question will no longer be, “What will you do with Christ?” but “*What will He do with you?*”

In a symbolic, but rather futile, gesture to relieve himself of the responsibility of putting an innocent man to death, Pilate washes his hands in front of the crowds, saying, “I am innocent of this Man's blood; see *to that* yourselves” (Matt. v. 24). The ceremonial washing of hands as a representation of innocence was not a Roman practice, but a Jewish one; but Pilate uses it out of contempt for the Jews (Carson, p. 570; Deut. 21: 6; cited in Carson). Matthew, writing for a

**Jewish** audience, now records a prophetic self-maledictory oath designed to show them that the nation had committed a terrible mistake by executing their Savior. The crowd cries out, “His blood shall be on us and on our children” (v. 25). Matthew’s Jewish readers some 20 years later would recognize this allusion (reference) to the inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant in *Exodus*.

Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!” So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Ex. 24: 6-8).

According to the standard form of a Suzerainty treaty, those responsible for keeping a covenant would walk between the pieces of slain animals. As they did so, they would pronounce upon themselves a self-maledictory oath (an oath against themselves) if they failed to keep the terms of the covenant. In Genesis 15 Abraham, in a dream, sees **God** walking between the pieces of animals in the form of a smoking pot and a flaming torch. This is a type of God taking the oath of malediction (the oath of death) upon Himself—depicting the self-sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. However, in the Sinaitic Covenant inauguration, Moses sprinkled the blood of the Covenant (the Law) upon the **people** as a representation of the people walking between the pieces of animals. Thus, in the Mosaic Covenant—in distinction from the Abrahamic Covenant—the people of Israel, not God, called down upon themselves the self-maledictory oath, the curse of the covenant, if they failed to keep the Law (cf. Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, pp. 13-25).

Failing as a nation to keep the covenant—**with the minority exception of the remnant**—Israel brought down God’s curse and is swept into exile and judgment. As one who kept the Law perfectly, Jesus vicariously (as a substitute) **earned** the blessings of the covenant (salvation) for the people if only they will believe in Him as their Messiah. But having rejected God’s offer of blessing in Christ, the Jews once again call down God’s curse upon themselves—the curse of the Law. As the near fulfillment of their own prophetic self-malediction, Jerusalem would be destroyed by Roman armies in 70 AD and, by some estimates, one and a half million Jews killed or starved to death. But this would be only the beginning of hardships the Jewish nation would face throughout the world and down to this very day from anti-Semitism, genocide, and forced relocation from their homes and countries. Truly, the blood of Christ has fallen on their heads and the heads of their children from generation to generation—as they wished. To those Jewish Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century in danger of forsaking Christ and returning to the Mosaic Covenant consisting of shadows and types, the author of *Hebrews* warns, “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. **How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?**” (Heb. 10: 28-29). Apart from receiving the Messiah, there is no hope for Jew or Gentile.

The analysis above in **no sense** justifies anti-Semitism (racism against Jews). In the same way God used the Assyrians and Babylonians to execute the covenant curse against Israel and Judah, He has used various other means (e.g. the Nazi holocaust in WWII) to discipline the unbelief of His covenant nation and provoke them to repentance and faith. Yet, God will judge any people

for their unrestrained mistreatment of His elect nation—the unmistakable message of the OT prophets (e.g. Zech. 1: 14-15).

After washing his hands, Pilate orders the release of Barabbas and the scourging of Jesus, thus emphasizing the tendency of the world to call evil “good” and good “evil”, “Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa. 5: 20).

***CC. Christ Tortured, Mocked, and Handed Over to be Crucified—Matt. 27: 26-31  
Mk. 15: 15-20; Lk. 23: 25***

Isaiah the prophet, writing some 700 years before Christ, proclaimed of Christ, “Just as many were astonished at you, *My people*, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men” (Isa. 52: 14). The texts before us explain why. Jesus is first scourged and then endures a crown of thorns placed on His head. The thorns dug into the subcutaneous blood vessels causing a steady, but non-fatal, flow of blood. He was then bludgeoned with the fists of hardened, muscular soldiers who considered His torture their amusement for the day, a welcome relief from the tensions of the paschal festival (cf. Lane, *Mark*, p. 559).

***1. The severity of the scourging***

Roman scourging was done by using a leather whip with multiple straps. To the ends of these straps were attached pieces of metal and sharp bone fragments. The victim was generally tied to a post in such a way that his back was stretched over the post, thus tightening the skin. Two men alternated whipping the victim from both sides, and whenever the whip landed upon the back or sides and pulled back, it would tear the flesh away from the body, sometimes exposing the bone and internal organs. While the Jews limited flogging to 40 lashes minus one (39, just in case of miscount [Deut. 25: 3; 2 Cor. 11: 24] and without bones and metal attached to the whip), the Romans obeyed no such restrictions, ***commonly resulting in death for the victim*** (cf. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 571, including verse citations above; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 957; Lane, *Mark*, p. 557). Possibly no visual depiction of this scourging has been as accurately portrayed as that of Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of Christ*, showing Christ covered in blood from the beating.

***2. Two separate scourgings, not one***

The question arises: Why would Pilate subject Jesus to a scourging which ***commonly resulted in death*** if all he wished to accomplish with the scourging was public sympathy for Jesus, thus avoiding the necessity of crucifixion (Carson, p. 597)? In addition to this logical difficulty is the discrepancy between Matthew and Mark, on the one hand, and John on the other. A comparison of Jn. 19: 1, 10, 12, 13, and 16 will prove that Pilate has Jesus scourged ***before*** he passes judicial sentence upon Him. Further, there is nothing in Jn. 19: 1 about Pilate ***releasing Barabbas***; yet, Matthew (v. 26) and Mark (v. 15) mention the scourging, the release of Barabbas, and the handing over of Jesus to be crucified at the same time, implying that the sentence against Christ had ***already*** been made. Luke does not report the scourging but reports the ***sentencing*** of Jesus, the release of Barabbas, and the handing over of Jesus to be crucified as simultaneous events (vv. 24-25). Twice Luke reports Pilate as saying, “I will punish Him and release Him” (vv. 16, 22), a



suggestion which is protested by the crowd (v. 23), but a solution to which Pilate clings in order to accomplish his mission of releasing Jesus.

Carson poses the possibility of a *second* scourging which takes place *after* the sentencing of Jesus (*John*, p. 597; following A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, pp. 27-28). The scourging *after* the sentencing is the *most severe* kind (the *verberatio*; a Latin term) which commonly preceded crucifixion and was often fatal (see above, (a)). However, *before* passing the sentence of crucifixion, Pilate has Jesus scourged *less* severely—the *fustigatio*—the kind of flogging administered for minor offenses—in order to win sympathy from the crowd. (A third kind of flogging, the *flagellatio*, was given for more serious offenses, but was not as brutal as the *verberatio*.) The *fustigatio* is the scourging which Pilate suggests in Lk. vv. 16 and 22; and although the crowd's voice their unwillingness to accept this solution, Pilate *goes ahead with it anyway* hoping they will pity Jesus when they see Him bruised and bloody. Thus, between the events of vv. 23 and 24 of Luke's gospel, we have the account of Jn. 19: 1-15 in which Jesus is abused and mocked by soldiers and in which Pilate engages Him in another conversation (see commentary below). The two separate scourgings would explain why Jesus was too weak to carry the cross-beam of His cross all the way to Golgotha. It would also explain why Jesus died after only three hours on the cross (Lk. 23: 44; Matt. 27: 45; Mk. 15: 33) while many victims commonly survived the ordeal for more than one day (Carson, p. 597).

But this explanation still does not answer all the questions of chronology. For example, if the above analysis is correct, then the beating and mockery of the soldiers occurs *between* the first and second scourgings; but Matthew (vv. 27-31) and Mark (vv. 16-20) *seem* to report the mocking *after* the sentencing. This difficulty can be reconciled by recognizing Matt. v. 26 and Mk. v. 15 as *summary statements* out of chronological sequence. In other words, Matthew and Mark mention only *one* scourging, the severe one (the *verberatio*), occurring after the sentence of death. They add the report of the mockery after the summary statement without consideration of the exact order of events. Mark gives us no temporal connection between v. 15 and v. 16, and Matthew (v. 26) gives us only "then" (*tote*)—used 90 times in *Matthew*, most frequently as a loose connective having no temporal significance (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 90). The lack of any sure temporal connectors inclines us to interpret the chronology of the Matthean and Markan texts rather loosely while looking to John for the actual sequence of events.

### 3. The mockery

While it appears from the text in *Matthew* (v. 26) and *Mark* (v. 15) that Jesus was scourged outside the Praetorium, this is unlikely (Lane, p. 557). As stated above, both texts are summary statements out of chronological sequence. Jesus is mistreated and mocked by soldiers *before* Pilate makes the final decision to hand Him over for crucifixion (according to John's account). It is clear from Matthew and Mark that the mockery takes place inside the Praetorium (that is, in the inner courtyard of the palace) in the presence of many members of the Roman cohort who are responsible for the mistreatment. The robe was purple or scarlet (according to the difference in subjective perception), the color appropriate for men of high status. The robe, the crown of thorns, and reed (the royal scepter) were presented in mockery of Jesus' claim as king. "So! You are king? Well, then, you must look the part!" To intensify the mockery, the scepter (the reed)

signifying his reign is taken from Him and used as a club (Mk. v. 19) forcing the thorns deeper and deeper after repeated blows to the head. John adds that He was slapped (v. 3), and the spitting could have been a sign of contempt borrowed from Jewish custom (cf. Deut. 25: 9; Job 17: 6; Isa. 50: 6). The mockery of kneeling and bowing before Jesus makes the sensitive believer shudder in fear. Man was made for the purpose of worshipping this King, but Pilate's soldiers make amusement of their duty and privilege. One can only imagine their horror as they stand face to face before this same King in the Day of Judgment.

***DD. Jesus Condemned by the People after the First Scourging and Mockery—Jn. 19: 6-8***

While it was customary to scourge someone sentenced to be crucified, it is evident from *John* and Lk. v. 16 that Pilate was using it as a means of winning sympathy for Jesus. Perhaps the people would change their minds after seeing Him in such dreadful condition (see comments above). Pilate knew that He was not guilty of any sedition or any other crime, for that matter; and his wife's dream was probably having an impact on his thinking, thus escalating his efforts to free Christ. John's gospel reiterates a common theme running through all the Synoptics, "I find no guilt in Him" (vv. 4, 6; 18: 38; cf. Matt. v. 23; Mk. v. 14; Lk. vv. 14, 15, 22). After this *first* scourging (the *fustigatio*) he then brings Him out of the Praetorium for all to see (Jn. v. 4), saying, "Behold, the man" (v. 5) as if to say, "Do you see? How could such a man be guilty of sedition?" John sees the irony of Pilate's announcement; for behold, Jesus is indeed **THE** man, the **Son of Man** that He had always claimed to be.

Pilate's plan backfired (failed), for they cried out all the more to crucify Him (v. 6a). His suggestion that the Jews themselves crucify Christ can only be explained as sarcasm (v. 6b). He knew that they could not administer crucifixion, but he says in essence, "You do not accept my decision, so do your own dirty work" (cf. Carson, p. 599).

***EE. Pilate's Fear—Jn. 19: 8***

The next statement by the Jews and Pilate's reaction form a very interesting development in the story. Up to this point sedition against the Roman government had been the ostensible (on the surface) accusation coming from the Sanhedrin, but now the *essential reason* for their hostility is revealed, "He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God" (v. 7). At this, Pilate became "more afraid". This implies that he was *already* afraid, but of what the text does not say. At first glance we might believe that he was already afraid of how the present conflict with the Jews would affect His status with Caesar, one that was already on shaky ground. In this particular historical context, "Son of God", for a Roman governor, could have some competitive implications concerning the common claim of the Caesars to have divine origin. The denarius, the primary coin of the Roman Empire, had on one side the face of Tiberius Caesar, son of Augustus Caesar, and the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the **Divine** Augustus"—a claim to semi-divinity (see commentary on Matt. 22: 20 above). Any similar claim of Christ to be the "Son of God" would be a claim rivaling that of Tiberius Caesar.

On the other hand, Pilate's next question seems to dismiss this possibility, "Where are You from?" (v. 9) Considering his wife's dream, Jesus' quiet, but confident demeanor throughout this whole ordeal (completely unlike other condemned criminals), His remark that His kingdom

was *not of this world*, etc., Pilate may now be entertaining the possibility that Jesus is *a god of some sort—a son* (small “s”) of god (small “g”) rather than *the Son* (capital “S”) of God (capital “G”). This notion would be further encouraged by Roman superstitions that the gods or their offspring could appear in human form (Morris, p. 795). Pilate had just had Jesus flogged, and any further punishment would certainly not go unpunished (Carson, p. 600). *The irony of the situation is that Pilate’s superstitious belief in multiple gods and their earthly representatives fails to result in the fear of the one true God and His only begotten Son.* It has been correctly said that if a man will not believe the truth about God, he will believe in just about anything.

#### ***FF. Pilate’s Admission of Guilt—Jn. 19: 9-10***

Jesus’ unwillingness to answer the question is interpreted by Pilate as contempt for his authority (v. 10). He now admits that the ultimate decision concerning Jesus’ fate rests in his hands *alone*, “Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?” In Pilate’s way of thinking, it’s that simple. So why would Jesus wish to provoke him by not answering his question?

#### ***GG. The Sovereign Activity of God—Jn. 19: 11***

John’s *irony* is increasingly evident as Jesus’ response indicates, “You would have no authority over Me, unless *it* had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin” (v. 11, emphasis mine). Pilate only *imagines* that he is in ultimate control of Jesus’ fate. In actual fact, he is only a minor actor in the whole drama. Jesus, therefore, gives Pilate a simple lesson on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Pilate has authority over Jesus. This much Jesus recognizes, but the reason he has any authority over Him is because God has granted him this authority (?)—or something else (see below)—according to His sovereign plan. Only God’s authority is absolute; Pilate’s authority is secondary or derivative (derived from God). Yet, although God is sovereign, Pilate is still responsible for his actions and will be judged accordingly (cf. Acts 2: 23; Dan. 4, where Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity is predicted in a dream followed by his prideful boast fulfilling the prediction). Jesus does not say that Pilate has “no sin” but that someone else has “greater [*meizona*] sin” (v. 11).

Especially in writing of events that lead up to the cross, New Testament writers are bound to see the hand of God bringing all things to their dramatic purpose (cf. Carson, ‘OT’, esp. pp. 247-248) no matter how vile the secondary causalities may be; for the alternatives are unthinkable. If God merely outwits his enemies, whose evil sets both the agenda [the course or direction of events] and the pace, then the mission of the Son to die for fallen sinners is reduced to a mere after-thought; if God’s sovereignty capsizes [removes] all human responsibility, then it is hard to see why the mission of the son should be undertaken at all, since in that case there are no sins for the Lamb of God to take away (Carson, *John*, pp. 600-601; words in brackets mine).

At this point in the explanation, we must determine exactly *what* it was that had been granted to Pilate. The usual interpretation is that God, “from above”, had granted Pilate the “authority” (*eksousia*) either to release Jesus or to crucify Him (see comments above). However, Carson (p. 601) has pointed out that the word “authority” is feminine while “it were...given” is neuter; thus, the antecedent of “*it*” is not Pilate’s authority, but something else. While not denying that all human authority is derived from God, Carson argues that this is not the point Christ is making.

Instead, what Pilate is given from above is “the entire turn of events, or, more precisely, the event of the betrayal itself.”

It is not God’s sovereign hand behind Pilate’s authority that mitigates his guilt: that would be to disown the compatibilism [harmonizing] of which the biblical writers are so fond, and would imply that God is less than sovereign over the person with the greater guilt. Rather, Pilate’s guilt is mitigated [lessened] because he takes a *relatively* passive role. True, Pilate remains responsible for his spineless, politically-motivated judicial decision; but he did not initiate the trial or engineer the betrayal that brought Jesus into court. Judas, Caiaphas and Pilate all acted under God’s sovereignty. But Pilate would not have had judicial authority over Jesus unless the event of the betrayal itself had been given to him *from above* (and thus God was in some mysterious sense behind the action of the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate). *Therefore* the one who handed Jesus over to Pilate, the one who from the human vantage point took the initiative to bring Jesus down [in Carson’s estimation, Caiaphas; p. 601], is guilty of the greater sin (Carson, *John*, p. 602, bold emphasis his, words in brackets and underlined emphasis mine).

The text does not imply that Pilate fully understood—or even vaguely understood—the implications of Jesus’ statement; but “as a result of this” he persisted in his efforts to release Him. Whatever Pilate understood, he is convinced of Jesus’ innocence. However, the Jews are equally persistent in opposing Pilate’s amnesty and finally produce the most lethal weapon in their arsenal of influence—an appeal to Caesar’s *exclusive* authority as king, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar” (v. 12). *This* statement Pilate *did* understand. He was not at all popular with the Jewish people or their leaders, and his rule in Palestine was already a tarnished record in Rome (see comments above). How then was he to explain to Tiberius Caesar—notorious for his paranoia toward his subordinates (“everyone is against me”)—that he had released someone accused of sedition against the Roman government by a Sanhedrin known itself to be opposed to this government? (Carson, p. 602)

John’s account continues to drip with irony. Only by aligning themselves with Caesar who epitomizing the despised tyranny of Rome were the Jews able to accomplish their purpose of disposing of Jesus. They also present themselves as subjects who are more loyal to Caesar than Caesar’s own governor. Furthermore, they present Jesus as a major threat to Caesar while they themselves are the real threat—as the Jewish rebellion of 66 AD to 70 AD later proves (Carson, p. 603). On another level, Jesus is, indeed, the *biggest* threat to the Roman Empire but not in the sense that the Jews are insinuating. His kingdom is the stone cut out of the mountain without human hands which will crush and put an end to all earthly kingdoms (Dan. 2: 34-35, 44-45). No earthly kingdom will be able to withstand the onslaught of the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed by His church nor will any prevail when the King of kings comes to consummate His kingdom at His return. Pilate has no idea how dangerous to Caesar or himself Jesus really is.

After the insinuation of disloyalty to Caesar, Pilate’s efforts to release Jesus are essentially over. He would not venture so far as to risk his own life to save the life of another. He thus sacrifices eternal life for the sake of a few more years of temporal life. The folly (foolishness) of the exchange is truly staggering. Pilate was deposed by Tiberius Caesar only a few years later in 37 AD. While traveling to Rome to answer the charges against him, Tiberius dies. The ancient historian, Eusebius, says that Pilate was then forced to commit suicide before he gets to Rome (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 404).

Finally giving up, Pilate brings Jesus out before the crowd and sits on the official judgment seat to pronounce the sentence against Him (v. 13). The irony continues in vv. 14-15 with the declaration, “Behold, your King!” Indeed, He *was*; but the King who came unto His own people was despised and rejected by them (Jn. 1: 11; Isa. 53: 3)—“So they cried out, “Away with *Him*, away with *Him*, crucify Him!” In one last feeble effort, Pilate asks, “Shall I crucify your king?” followed by another response laden with irony, “We have no king but Caesar!” Indeed, they *didn’t*, because they had denounced their true king and had chosen instead a human king, a political savior, Tiberius Caesar.

References to the *Passover* and to the *sixth* hour present some problems. If this is the day of the Passover, then Jesus and His disciples did not celebrate the actual Passover together bringing John in conflict with the Synoptics. We have already discussed this problem from Jn. 18: 28 above. Here, as in the previous text, John refers not to the Passover meal itself but to the continuing Passover feasts. Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover meal on Thursday evening. It is now Friday, the day before the Jewish Sabbath on Saturday (Carson, p. 604). Carson also notes that the bodies of crucified victims had to be removed before the Sabbath; thus, the “preparation” referred to may very well mean the preparation for the special Sabbath occurring during the Passover week (cf. v. 31; Carson, p. 604). Mark reports the time as the *third* hour of the day rather than the sixth. This can be explained simply by the lack of exactness in the reporting of time. The biblical writers did not have wrist watches, and their reporting of time was based on approximations of the sun’s position in the sky. Exact reporting of incidentals like time is not necessary to the doctrine of plenary inspiration or infallibility (see my *Systematic Theology*, “*The Doctrine of Scripture*”).

### ***HH. Christ Addresses the Women of Jerusalem—Lk. 23: 26-31***

More than any other Synoptist, Luke emphasizes the significance and presence of women. As He made His way to the place of execution, He encountered a number of women weeping over His imminent death. Their mourning did not necessarily imply that they had embraced Him as their Messiah, but that they recognized His innocence and the fact that He was a good man who had compassion for the poor and sick. The text shows conclusively that not all the population of Jerusalem had been complicit (in agreement) with the Sanhedrin’s condemnation of Jesus, and Luke’s mention of these women anticipates verse 48 which speaks more generally of men and women who mourn Jesus’ death (Joel Green, *Luke*, p. 815). Foreseeing God’s judgment and the future destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Jesus tells them to weep for themselves and their children who may still be alive during the horrible Roman siege in which over a million and a half Jews died of war, disease, or starvation. At that time, being barren will be preferable to seeing your children suffer and die.

Jesus’ remark is reminiscent (a reminder) of a previous lament when He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem a week earlier. Weeping over the city He said, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation” (Lk. 19: 42-44; cited by Green, p. 814). The kingdom of

God had come near, but the nation as a whole had failed to enter. By quoting Hosea 10: 8, Jesus warns them of the inevitable judgment which accompanies unbelief. In that text, Hosea is warning the northern Kingdom of Israel (also called Ephraim) of the impending disaster coming upon them at the hand of Assyria. Likewise, Jerusalem will suffer at the hands of another nation, Rome, but this is only the beginning of a *far worse judgment* which will come at the end of the age if they remain impenitent. The proverb of v. 31 reinforces this thought. Jesus contrasts the green tree (or green wood) which is *not normally burned* and the dry tree (or dry wood) which is *ready* for burning. Jesus is the green wood, the *innocent* Son of God who nevertheless suffers mistreatment and death at the hands of His enemies. But if such a thing can happen to an innocent man, what worse calamity will happen to those *whose sins have rendered them “dry” and ready for punishment?* (Geldenhuys, p. 604)

The warning is not intended to rebuke these women for their genuine sorrow, but as another means of calling them and the whole population of Jerusalem to repentance and faith before it is too late. To the very end Jesus is thinking of the welfare of others and not Himself.

## ***II. The Crucifixion of Christ—Matt. 27: 32-56; Mk. 15: 21-41; Lk. 23: 32-49; Jn. 19: 17-37***

### ***1. Simon of Cyrene***

Even with one near-fatal scourging Jesus would have lost a lot of blood, but if we are correct in maintaining two separate incidents of scourging rather than one, it is surprising that He would have been able to carry His cross at all. Added to the two beatings was the pummeling of the soldiers, the loss of blood from the crown of thorns, and the sheer emotional stress and sorrow which alone would have weakened the strongest of men (cf. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 963). Consequently, when He could carry the cross no longer, Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry it for Him according to Roman law (Matt. 5: 41). There was a sizable Jewish colony in Cyrene which is now the area located in modern day Libya. He was the father of Rufus and Alexander (Mk. v. 21) the first of whom is mentioned by Paul in Rom. 16: 13. Since Simon's service is not voluntary, it appears that he was converted later on, and his wife rendered service to Paul. While carrying the cross, could Simon have noticed something about Christ or heard something from Him not recorded in Scripture that changed his life? We can only speculate, but if so, carrying His cross turned out to be the greatest blessing of his life (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 963-964).

### ***2. The place of crucifixion***

Crucifixion took place outside the city, usually just outside the walls. Christ's crucifixion outside the city was symbolic of being accursed (Lev. 24: 14, 23; Num. 15: 35-36; Heb. 13: 11-13).

### ***3. Crucifixion used as capital punishment***

Roman crucifixion, adopted from the Medes and Persians, was known and dreaded widely as an instrument of torture. In Rome it was reserved for slaves and the worst of criminals; Roman citizens were exempt from such punishment. In fact, the Roman philosopher Cicero is quoted as

saying, “Even the mere word, cross, must remain far not only from the lips of the citizens of Rome, but also from their thoughts, their eyes, their ears”, elsewhere calling crucifixion “the grossest, cruelest, or most hideous manner of execution (Lane, *Mark*, p. 561, footnote; the last quotation a paraphrase of Cicero by Lane). Caesar Augustus (27 BC to 14 AD; see Timeline E and F) had once captured 30,000 fugitive slaves and crucified all of them who had not been claimed by their masters. The slave rebellion led by Spartacus had resulted in the crucifixion of 6,000 rebel slaves at one time along the Appian Way from Rome to Capua. Their bodies were left on the cross to rot—the usual practice which furthered the goal of terrorizing potential subversives (*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, “Crucifixion”, H. L. Drumwright, Jr., p. 1041). The body of Jesus was taken off the cross at death and buried, nor did His body remain in the tomb long enough for decomposition to occur, thus fulfilling Scripture, “For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay” (Ps. 16: 10; cf. Acts 2: 27-31).

Crucifixion was also well-known in Palestine, a hot-bed of political unrest and subversion against Roman domination; and crucified victims had often been publicly exhibited on the roads outside of Jerusalem as a warning to anyone who dared defy the power of Rome. Two thousand followers of Judas had been crucified (Drumwright, p. 1041) for leading a revolt in 6 AD against paying tribute to Caesar, an act attested by them as treason against God. Although crushed, the spirit of this revolt lived on in the Zealot movement (cf. Acts 5: 37; F.F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 125). Scarcely thirty-five years later, Nero would crucify many Christians blamed (by him) for setting fire to Rome—arson which he ordered himself. He would not be the last emperor fond of crucifying Christians, for many emperors used this form of execution against the growing Christian population accused of atheism and treason against the emperor—“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*” (Jn. 15: 18) (cf. Drumwright, p. 1041).

#### ***4. The physical agony of crucifixion***

The gospel writers do not dwell on the physical agony of the cross. There was no need to do so since an explanation would have been unnecessary to the original audience familiar with the practice. The victim was generally stripped of all clothing, but the Romans were possibly considerate of the sensitivities of their Jewish subjects (cf. Lane, p. 566) especially this close to Passover; therefore, Jesus probably was crucified with a loin cloth. The victim was stretched out upon a cross-beam and either nailed or tied to the beam, which he then had to carry to the place of execution. Thus, it is likely that the cross was in the shape of a “T” or “t” with the cross-beam simply attached on the top of a vertical post (or shortly below the top) already in the ground at the scene of execution. From Jn. 20: 25 and Lk. 24: 39-40 it follows that Jesus was nailed to this cross-beam through His hands and His feet. Generally, those who were nailed instead of tied would die more quickly from loss of blood; and since the next day was the Sabbath, Pilate would likely have accommodated the Sanhedrin’s desire for a quick death, not a prolonged execution which often lasted for three days. The nailing of Christ to the cross was also a fulfillment of prophecy, “They pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22: 16b). (For the Jew, the ceremonial washing of “hands” included the wrists. The nails in Jesus’ “hands” were most likely driven through the wrist bones or between the two bones of the forearm attached to the wrists which were more capable of supporting the weight of the body. Otherwise, the weight of the body would have caused the nails to rip through the fragile bones of the hands.)

With the whole weight upon the arms, except when breathing, the victim would suffer the dislocation of the shoulders, fulfilling another description of the crucifixion found in Ps. 22, “All my bones are out of joint” (v. 14a) and “I can count all my bones” (v. 17a). Sometimes, not always, the cross would include a block or pin serving as a seat for the victim to sit on, and mid-way up the post was a block of wood for the feet allowing the victim to push upward with the legs while pulling up with the arms to get a breath of air. With the weight of the body hanging from the arms, it was almost impossible to breathe; and when the victim’s strength gave out, he was no longer able to push himself up with his legs, thus dying by suffocation. Another cause of death was the loss of blood pressure to the upper part of the body resulting in damage to the brain and heart failure vividly described in Ps. 22: 14b, “My heart is like wax; it is melted within me.” Heart failure and death would occur very rapidly without the foot block and/or seat; therefore, they were provided not out of mercy but to prolong the agony. Breathing is an involuntary, automatic reflex; and most victims, although hoping for a quick death, survived the ordeal for two or three days by gulping the next breath of air. Christ was able to utter many statements from the cross indicating that He could raise Himself up to breathe and speak, proving the presence of the foot block. As in the crucifixion story, the legs were often broken below the knee thus hastening suffocation, heart failure, and death. The two criminals beside Jesus had their legs broken, but Jesus had already died (Jn. 19: 31-33); thus scripture was again fulfilled, “He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken” (Ps. 34: 20; Jn. 19: 36).

The modern skeptic often questions the genuineness of Christ as if He is some sort of megalomaniac suffering from delusions of grandeur (greatness)—specifically the delusion of being the Son of God. Thus, knowing about the pains of crucifixion, He departs this world as a martyr-with-a-cause by arranging His own crucifixion. But assuming for the sake of the argument that this insane man, Jesus, purposely arranged His own crucifixion to give the illusion of being the Jewish Messiah (what psychiatrists would call the “Messiah complex”), how can the skeptic account for the fact that He died before they could break His legs, or that the soldiers divided His garments, or that they would *nail* Him to the cross rather than *tie* Him to it? And so on. There were too many unknown factors in the crucifixion that some merely deluded person could not control—but the Son of Man *could* control.

But the whole point of this discussion is not to dispassionately dissect the physiological suffering of Christ upon the cross, but to emphasize the fact that He *suffered*, and suffered *greatly, for you and for me*. The prophet, Isaiah, predicted that Christ would see the results of His suffering, “His offspring”—those who are redeemed, justified, and sanctified by His atoning sacrifice—and He will be “satisfied” (Isa. 53: 10-11). The crucified Savior is no stranger to suffering and death. He is therefore fully justified in calling us, His humble and unworthy servants, to a life of sacrifice, suffering and even death for the continuing triumph of the gospel. “And He was saying to *them* all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me’” (Lk. 9: 23).

### ***5. The symbolism of Christ’s crucifixion***

As mentioned above, crucifixion was reserved for slaves and the worst of criminals. It was therefore fitting that Christ would be executed as the worst of sinners, flanked on both sides by murderers, though Himself spotless and blameless. He had chosen tax-gatherers (Matthew) and



Zealots (Simon; Matt. 10: 4) as disciples; He had eaten with sinners (Matt. 11: 19) and allowed an immoral woman to kiss His feet and wipe them with her hair (Lk. 7). ***As He had lived, so in the same way, He died—surrounded by sinners, one on His right and another on His left*** (Lk. 23: 33). No one, not even the most defiled sinner, is beyond the reach of His redemptive grace. Hallelujah!

He was crucified on a cross, the equivalent of being hanged on a tree, a sign of the covenant curse (Deut. 21: 22-23). The Apostle Paul explicitly declares, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’” (Gal. 3: 13). Paul writes to Gentile Galatians and says, “us”, meaning Jew and Gentile. Though the covenant curse was specifically pronounced upon Israel, Paul says, “*all* [Jew and Gentile] have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3: 23). The curse which Christ endured, therefore, is a curse pronounced generally upon all mankind who are covenant breakers, with Israel serving as the paradigm for disobedience and curse (cf. Dan. 5: 27, spoken to a Babylonian king; see also Isa. 13—23, God’s war with the nations; Jer. 25: 31). All mankind is cursed with a curse, and Christ has vicariously (as a substitute) taken that curse upon Himself through His *passive obedience* upon the cross. Furthermore, through His *active obedience* He kept the law we were supposed to keep, thus earning for us the blessings promised in the covenant.

### ***6. The wine mixed with gall***

The traditional theory is that Jesus was offered an anesthetic (wine mixed with gall or myrrh) to give some relief to the excruciating pain of crucifixion (from which the word, “excruciating” is derived; Lane, p. 561). It was customary for respected women in the city to mix this drink for condemned criminals in literal obedience to Prov. 31: 6-7, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more” (Lane, p. 564). Christ refuses the narcotic in order to remain fully conscious and alert.

However, the theory has problems. If this was a common concoction administered by women, why would Jesus sample it first, knowing that it was an anesthetic? (Matt. v. 34) Further, there is no mention of women in this context either in Matthew or Mark. Rather, the drink is administered by the soldiers and probably as a continuation of their mockery. This can be supported by the fact that myrrh (Mk. v. 23) is bitter to the taste, making the wine undrinkable, but does not deaden the pain. Thus, Jesus’ tasting the bitter wine and refusing it became an additional source of amusement for the soldiers (cf. Lk. 23: 36). While Mark uses “myrrh” to describe the content, Matthew uses “gall” to describe the taste and to link this incident with Ps. 69: 20-21, “Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, And for comforters, but I found none. They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 575).

### ***7. The charge: “The King of the Jews”***

It was customary for the condemned criminal to have a written notice of the charges against him hung around his neck. Upon arriving at the scene of execution, the notice was attached to the cross (Carson, *John*, p. 610). John reports that Pilate wrote this inscription or at least authored it, and had it written in three languages so that none would miss it (19: 19). This trilingual (three languages) notice was customary as a warning to the whole population, but Pilate's motive was not to *warn* but to *taunt* the Jews—his “last act of revenge...mocking their convenient allegiance to Caesar by insisting that Jesus is their king, and snickering at their powerless status before the might of Rome by declaring this wretched victim their king.” Pilate has been humiliated through the intimidation of the Sanhedrin, but he is determined to get some revenge. The declaration of fact—“Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews”—offended the chief priests who wished to edit the title to the assertion of a claim, “I am the king of the Jews” (v. 21), but by caving in to this demand, Pilate would relinquish this last opportunity of avenging himself (Carson, *John*, p. 611).

On a higher level, vengeance belongs to the Lord. The title remained unchanged because it revealed the absolute truth about who Jesus was, the King of the Jews. Pilate unwittingly becomes a missionary by publishing this news to the whole world by writing it the language of Palestinian Jews (Hebrew), Roman soldiers (Latin), and the common language of the Roman Empire (Greek) (Carson, p. 610-611).

#### **8. The dividing of Christ's garments—Matt. 27: 35-36; Mk. 15: 24; Lk. 23: 34b; Jn. 19: 2-24**

It was customary for the Roman executioners to divide the victim's garments (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 576). On one level, being stripped of His clothing depicts the absolute poverty of the Son of God for the sake of sinners. Well did the apostle say, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8: 9). Jesus was born the poor child of a poor carpenter. He lived as a poor man, ministered as a poor man, and died as a poor man. At His death He had even the last vestiges of human possessions taken from Him—a few measly articles of clothing—but through His voluntary poverty He gained a kingdom which will never end and is seated at the right hand of God the Father with a name above every name (Ps. 110: 1; Phil. 2: 9-10). The Scripture was again fulfilled, “They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots” (Ps. 22: 18; Jn. 19: 24).

Culturally, to be stripped of one's clothing was *symbolic of the loss of dignity and personal identity* (Joel B. Green, *Luke*, p. 820). The forfeiture (giving up) of the outer cloak as collateral (pledge) for a loan was no doubt humiliating for the poor who would be forced to beg for its return at evening to keep him warm through the night (Ex. 22: 26-27). While this divestiture (loss) of clothing was obviously a significant part of the humiliation of Christ, it may not be saying too much that the momentary *loss of identity as the beloved Son* was precisely what the gospel writers wished to depict in these short passages. Speaking eloquently of Christ's humiliation almost thirty years later, Paul says, “He made Him who knew no sin to be *sin* on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5: 21). At a point in time on the cross, Christ in a forensic (legal) sense “loses” His identity as the perfect Son of God with whom the Father is “well-pleased” and comprehensively assumes our identity as condemned sinners. Technically, Paul does not say that Christ becomes a “sinner” but that He becomes “sin”; therefore, in no sense does He become anything less than God, nor does He

commit sin. His new *momentary* identity is not in terms of *subtraction* (the loss of deity)—something His immutability makes impossible—but *addition* (the assumption of our sin) (cf. Phil. 2: 5-8 in which Paul describes the emptying of Christ in terms of assuming human nature, not loss of divine attributes.) Ironically, it is only at this moment in time in contrast to the previous 33 years of sinless human existence that Christ takes upon Himself the sin which is ever *the object of God's wrath*.

It is a mystery beyond comprehension, but Christ's cry of dereliction (Matt. 27: 46—the state of being abandoned) clearly indicates a momentary loss of relationship between the Father and the Son. At His *incarnation* God the Son mysteriously becomes something He was not, a human being, without sacrificing what He always was, the second person of the Trinity. In the same mysterious way at His *crucifixion*, He became something else He was not—sin, upon which God unleashes His unmitigated hatred (see further comments below).

**9. The sneering of the crowd, those passing by, chief priests, scribes, elders, soldiers, and two criminals—Matt. 27: 39-44; Mk. 15: 29-32; Lk. 23: 35-37**

In Psalm 22: 6-8, 12-13 we read, “But I am a worm and not a man, A reproach of men and despised by the people. *All who see me sneer at me*; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, *saying*, ‘Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.’” “Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong *bulls* of Bashan have encircled me. They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion.”

There were basically four groups of people hurling insults at Christ while He suffered and died. These included, of course, the members of the Sanhedrin—chief priests, scribes, and elders—which had instigated the trial before Pilate and the sentencing. (Doubtless other scribes and Pharisees were present who were not members of the Sanhedrin.) There was the multitude which had come to observe the whole scene of the crucifixion (cf. Lk. 23: 48). There were also those who were too disinterested in yet another crucifixion to spend any significant time observing it. They just happened to pass by the way while Jesus was being crucified. Finally, the two criminals were contributing their insults.

Matthew mentions “wagging the head”, a sign of derision (insult) and disgust (v. 39, v. 29). The primary source of their derision was something Jesus had said three years earlier, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2: 19). The statement was made in response to the Jews who demanded a sign of His authority to overturn the money-changers’ tables in the temple. In His trial before the Sanhedrin, false witnesses twisted the statement to imply that Jesus Himself was planning to destroy the temple (Matt. 26: 61; Mk. 14: 58). Rumors of this twisted accusation had spread rapidly throughout Jerusalem even among the “passers-by” who glanced at the spectacle on their way to something else “more important”. Desecration of worship centers was a capital offense in any ancient culture (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 554), and the Jews were particularly protective of their temple since its destruction in 587 BC as a visible symbol of Yahweh’s covenant presence and blessing. (They had not learned the lesson of *Jeremiah* 7). They now make sport of what they consider as false claims to power and glory. If Jesus was capable of destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days, He should have no trouble coming down from the cross. Since it is apparent that He cannot do so, then His great

claims for Himself are false exaggerations. “Another false Messiah bites the dust—and good riddance! We have had enough of those. What we need and want is a real Messiah who delivers results!” The irony of their derision is that it would have been much easier for Christ to literally destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days than for Him to rise again from the dead. In three days, He will do something far more amazing than single-handedly building a temple; He will conquer the greatest enemy of us all—death, the wages of sin.

Another irony occurs in their insult, “*If* You are the Son of God, come down from the cross. Save yourself.” But precisely *because* He was the Son of God, He “could not” come down from the cross, for it was His eternal destiny and purpose to die for the sins of His people. In the same way, He could not save *Himself* if He saved *others*. If His overruling interest was saving Himself, He would not have submitted to the cross. It was not the Roman soldiers or nails which held Him there, but the internal constraints of obedience to His Father and the eternal bonds of love for those He came to save. Coming down would have been a denial of His divine nature and mission as the Son of God. He *could not* because He *would not*.

The *chief priests* join the passers-by in their derision, gladly losing all their dignity as religious leaders in this gleeful moment of victory. They had often asked for signs verifying His claims, so now they demand another they are convinced He is incapable of providing. If He will come down from the cross, *they will believe in Him*. The hypocrisy of this statement is evident when Christ rises from the dead. Rather than believing the undeniable evidence of His resurrection, they falsify the record by bribing the guards to circulate a lie—“His disciples stole the body.” There is more irony when they unwittingly fulfill prophecy by quoting from Ps. 22: 8 (see above, cf. Matt. v. 43). Poor theology dies hard. The irony behind these words both here and in Ps. 22: 8 is that if God is pleased with someone, He will prosper him. It is the *retribution theology* of Job’s three friends who argued strenuously that if Job had not sinned grievously in some way, he would not be in such terrible trouble. In this life God *always* blesses the righteous and curses the wicked—no exceptions. It is a rule that works all the time, every time. The chief priests were from the wealthiest families in Jerusalem, “proof” that “sometime in their life or childhood, they must have done something good”. Jesus, on the other hand, is now hanging helplessly (from all appearances) on a cross, verifiable evidence that God was most certainly *not* pleased with Him and had *no* delight in Him. This could not be true if He were the Messiah. Jesus on a cross thus becomes the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense (Rom. 9: 33). Hanging from a cross as a sign of being cursed by God (Deut. 21: 23) became the ultimate stumbling block to Jewish reception of their Messiah (1 Cor. 1: 23).

The irony saturating John’s account is now evident in *Matthew*. The NT writers present Christ as the “propitiation” or “satisfaction” for our sins (Rom. 3: 25; Heb. 2: 17; 1 Jn. 2: 2; 4: 10). Who, then, is satisfied? The answer is that God the Father is satisfied with the atoning work of Christ to the extent that He is willing to turn His wrath away from sinners for whom this propitiation has been made. Furthermore, God demonstrated His satisfaction with the blood of Christ by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand. For this reason, we have *peace* with God *through* the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5: 1). We must not assume that Christ merely appeases the wrath of an angry, unloving Father who is eager to punish man for his sin, for Paul says that God (the Father) publicly displayed Christ on the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice. God takes the initiative in satisfying His own wrath against sin through the death of His Son. At this point we understand the *irony*. While the Sanhedrin views Christ suspiciously

as a sinner and blasphemer in need of punishment, at no time during the active obedience of Christ in His earthly ministry is the Father *more pleased* with and *more delighted* in His Son than at this very moment—His passive obedience on the cross. Christ’s voluntary submission to “publicly display” the solution to man’s sin problem and the alienation it brings between man and God is the final, grand justification for the Father’s pleasure revealed at His baptism, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased” (Matt. 3: 17).

This *appears contradictory* to the comments above (*h*). How can Christ be pleasing to the Father in His passive obedience while receiving in His person the fury of His wrath? The answer lies in the fact that the suspended (interrupted) fellowship with the Father occurs *during* the crucifixion but *not throughout* the entire ordeal (so also Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, p. 175). The statements of Christ from the cross clearly demonstrate continuing fellowship with the Father up *until* and even *after* the time of abandonment expressed in the cry of dereliction, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” (Matt. 27: 46) *Before* this, Christ intercedes for His persecutors with the usual intimacy of the Son, “*Father*, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” He utters words of forgiveness and hope with the authority of one whose requests will most certainly be granted, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” He lovingly commits His mother into the care of His beloved disciple, “Woman, behold your son!...Behold, your mother.” *After* the cry of dereliction, He is fully conscious of His momentous accomplishment of redemption, “It is finished!” and in His final breath “kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously” saying, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT” (Lk. 23: 46; cf. 1 Pet. 2: 23) (see further comments below).

The *soldiers* continued their mocking by offering Him sour wine to drink (Lk. 23: 36). Later, this same drink was requested by Christ possibly as a means of clearing His throat and uttering His final words from the cross (Jn. 19: 28-30).

At first both *criminals* participated in denouncing Christ (Matt. 27: 44; Mk. 15: 32). Luke records the derision of only one, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” (v. 39) We are not told exactly *what* caused a change of heart or *when* this change occurred, but one criminal finally came to a realization of his sin and the sinlessness of Christ (vv. 40-41). The forgiveness granted (v. 43) has had far-reaching theological implications ever since.

***JJ. The Seven Words of Christ from the Cross—Lk. 23: 34, 43; Jn. 19: 26-27; Matt. 27: 36 Mk. 15: 34; Jn. 19: 28, 30; Lk. 23: 46***

We will now examine the sayings of Christ from the cross in the order in which they were spoken. The Savior who instructs His disciples in the way of truth continues to do so to the very last.

***1. "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"—Lk. 23: 34***

Luke reports this saying in the context of the soldiers dividing His garments; thus, their actions may have stimulated the petition. However, there is no conclusive contextual evidence that the petition and the soldiers’ activity are immediately connected. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus

instructed His disciples to love their enemies and pray for their persecutors (Matt. 5: 44). ***He will not command us to do what He has not done and continues to do.***

The petition may be interpreted specifically as intercession for the hundreds or thousands of ***ignorant*** Jews calling for His crucifixion. Saul became a violent persecutor of the church, but he was shown mercy because he “acted ***ignorantly*** in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1: 13). Generally, it may apply to the billions today who are blinded by Satan, most of whom will never know Christ. On the Day of Judgment, no one will be held accountable for rejecting a Savior of whom they have never heard. They will be judged for rejecting the truth about God revealed in creation and in their own conscience (Rom. 1: 18-32). The petition could not have included the members of the Sanhedrin participating in Jesus’ trial or any scribes and Pharisees accused of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12: 31; see commentary above). Such sinners ***knew full well*** what they were doing and persisted in sin despite the overwhelming evidence of Christ’s miracles and His resurrection. The petition also does not include the sinners described in Heb. 6: 4-6a “who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and *then* have fallen away...” For these, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance (6: 6).

The petition most assuredly applies to all the elect of God in every age and those now alive who have not yet come to Christ. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed on behalf of those whom the Father had given Him, not generally for the whole world (Jn. 17: 9). He prayed for Peter that his faith would not ultimately fail, but no such petition is recorded for Judas Iscariot. Those who are given to Christ by the Father will come to Him, and they will never perish, for He continues to intercede for them (Jn. 10: 28-29).

## ***2. “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise”—Lk. 23: 43***

Since most people die in the same way they have lived, there are probably few “death-bed” conversions; but Jesus assures us that last-minute conversions are not impossible. As mentioned earlier, we have no details of how such a change of heart occurred or when, but only that it did occur. The clue may be found in Jesus’ first saying on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Did this expression of mercy leave a powerful impression upon this hardened criminal whose life was driven by hate? No cursing, no swearing—just forgiveness. He had never encountered such a man and did not believe that such a person even existed, and this encounter changed his life in the knick of time.

Jesus’ simple statement in v. 43 carries a lot of theological freight. ***First***, if any text of scripture teaches salvation by grace alone through faith alone, this one does. There were no good works to rely on and none to perform. He casts himself completely at the mercy of Christ, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” (v. 42)

***Second***, the criminal was never baptized, shattering the arguments of Roman Catholics, teachers in The Church of Christ (a denomination of neo-Catholics), and other legalists who insist on the necessity of baptism for salvation. It is needless to dismiss this as only one example which diverges from the biblical norm. Is baptism essential for salvation or not? If Jesus can save ***one*** without it, He can save ***others***; for salvation is in Christ, not in baptism (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 17, where

Paul differentiates baptism from the preaching of the gospel. See Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, p. 17; Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 63-64). Although we cannot interpret our Lord's statement as a negation of the command to be baptized or a diminution (diminishing) of its importance (Matt. 28: 19), the common question concerning what happens to the person who repents and believes but dies before being baptized is hereby answered once and for all. Forgiveness is not based on baptism or on anything else we do, but upon what God does. The problem is not with the uniqueness of this situation but with the legalists who insist on salvation by works. The point at issue is that the criminal had nothing but repentance and faith—the two essential elements of conversion.

**Third**, there is no “soul sleep”—a period of unconsciousness until the return of Christ. “Today”, not tomorrow, not 10,000 years hence, the criminal would be with Christ in Paradise. The word “Paradise” (*paradeisos*) occurs three times in the NT (2 Cor. 12: 4; Rev. 2: 7; and here). John informs us in Rev. 2: 7 that the tree of life exists in Paradise and in Rev. 22 that the tree of life exists in the “New Jerusalem”, a symbol for the new heaven and new earth which includes the righteous and excludes the unrighteous (cf. Rev. 21 and 22, esp. Rev. 21: 2; Rev. 22: 2, 14, 19). If there are some who insist that “Paradise” is not heaven, but some intermediate place, they must explain what Christ means when He says, “with Me”. For my part, I want to be *with* Christ *wherever* He is—call it whatever you wish.

**Fourth**, there is the mystery of the Spirit's work of calling and regeneration. Two men observed the Son of Man praying for the forgiveness of ignorant sinners; *only one* comprehended it. Was one less evil than the other? Not likely; both probably led a life of violence and theft. Jesus did not leave us in doubt about the secret, sovereign operations of the Holy Spirit, “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3: 8).

**Fifth**, when you depart this life, the thing of most crucial importance is not whether others will remember you for your wealth, your talents and abilities, your intelligence, your earthly accomplishments, your family, or even your kindness and charity to others. The most important thing—essentially the *only* important thing—will be whether *Christ will remember you*. It goes without saying that the criminal on the cross would leave few if any fond memories in the minds of others who knew him well other than perhaps his immediate family who *may* have loved him. But on that very day when his eternal spirit appeared before a holy God, Christ would remember him.

### 3. “Woman, behold your son!... Behold, your mother”—Jn. 19: 25a-27

Four women were standing beside Jesus' cross: Mary the mother of Jesus, her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. John the beloved disciple was also there. Joseph, the husband of Mary, has not been mentioned in the Gospels past Jesus' twelfth year (Lk. 2: 41-52), and we may assume that he died before His public ministry (cf. Matt. 13: 55-56, where Joseph is not mentioned among Jesus' mother, brothers, and sisters). Jesus' brothers according to the flesh were not yet believers when Christ died (Jn. 7: 3-5) and rather than entrusting Mary into the hands of unbelievers—even her own sons—He chooses to abandon all socially accepted customs of the day. Whoever believes in Him, and thereby does the will of His Father, is His mother,

brother, and sister (Matt. 12: 48-50). From that day until her death, John took care of Mary as his own mother.

Jesus had chastised the Pharisees for their callous disregard for their parents. By declaring as “corban” (“given to God”) anything which could have been used to provide for them, they presumed to shelter themselves from moral responsibility (Mk. 7: 10-13 and commentary). That Christ, in the fleeting moments before His death, would be considerate of His mother’s material and spiritual welfare is proof enough how much weight He placed upon the fifth commandment, “Honor your father and your mother.” At this moment, His primary concern was for the emotional support of His mother who was undoubtedly overwhelmed by intense sorrow at the crucifixion of her Son.

#### 4. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”—Matt. 27: 46; Mk. 15: 34

This is the most mysterious statement of all, the cry of dereliction (abandonment). As a true human being, Jesus had increased in wisdom and in favor with God (Lk. 2: 52). He spent time in prayer and in the study of the OT scriptures, learning in the same way we all learn. It is evident from the gospels that He cultivated a healthy prayer life with the Father, sometimes spending all night in prayer. But at this moment in time, He *feels* abandoned. Is He *actually* abandoned, or is this only the subjective *perception* of someone who has been beaten half to death, emotionally traumatized, and deprived of food and sleep? Reason alone suggests that the Son, who had enjoyed perfect, uninterrupted fellowship with the Father His whole life, would now sense infallibly the reality of being abandoned by His Father (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 579; so also Chamblin, *Matthew*, p. 251; Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 972). The witness of the OT confirms that this was *real* abandonment. While Christ cried out in anguish, the Father—for the first time—refused to answer (Isa. 53: 4-5, 10; Ps. 22: 1-2, especially v. 2; cf.).

Beside the unanswered prayer there was the loss of the filial consciousness. In the moment of dereliction, there is no sense of his own sonship. Even in Gethsemane, Jesus had been able to say, ‘Abba!’ But now the cry is ‘Elōi, Elōi’. He is aware only of the god-ness and power and holiness and otherness of God. In his self-image, he is no longer Son, but Sin; no longer *Monogenēs*, the Beloved with whom God is well-pleased, but *Katara*, the cursed one: vile, foul and repulsive. Here it is helpful to recall a remark of the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian, Hugh Martin, stressing the connection between intellectual and emotional finitude [limitation of human nature]. Christ’s soul, he wrote, being a true human soul, ‘could not possibly behold all elements of truth in one act of contemplation’. Hence, ‘the object of dread for an instant engrossed the whole reflective faculty’.

Corresponding to the loss of the sense of sonship there was a real abandonment by God. No-one was ever less prepared for such an experience than Jesus. As the eternal Word he had always been God (Jn. 1: 1). As the incarnate Son the Father had always been with him (Jn. 16: 32). They had gone up from Bethlehem to Calvary, like Abraham and Isaac, ‘together’ (Gn. 22: 6, 8). But now, in the hour of his greatest need, God is not there. When he most needs encouragement, there is no voice to cry, ‘This is my beloved Son.’ When he most needs reassurance, there is no-one to say, ‘I am well-pleased.’ No grace was extended to him, no favor shown, no comfort administered, no concession made. God was present only as displeased, expressing the displeasure with overwhelming force in all the circumstances of Calvary. Every detail in a drama which walked a fine line between chaos and liturgy declared, ‘This is what God thinks of you and of the sin you bear!’ He was cursed (Gal. 3: 13), because he became ‘the greatest thief, murderer, adulterer, robber, desecrator, blasphemer, etc. there has ever been anywhere in the world’ (Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, pp. 176-177; bold emphasis his; words in brackets and underlined emphasis mine).



God rejected His Son. But why? Christ Himself asks this question, but not because He did not intellectually comprehend the reason. His whole life had been characterized by intimate contact with the worst of sinners whose identity He now assumed to the utmost. His understanding of the ancient predictions of His suffering would have informed Him that the iniquities of all His people from the beginning of history to the end were at this climactic moment falling upon Him (Chamblin, p. 251). The sin He had now become was the accumulation of all sins—idolatry, blasphemy, murder, rape, theft, adultery, fornication, foul speech, lies—piled up in one massive, putrid heap emitting a stench utterly abhorrent to His holy Father in whose presence no man can live (Ex. 33: 20). The agony of the cross for the perfect God-man transcends intellectual analysis—possibly why Matthew and Mark make no attempt to answer the question of “Why?” Jesus knew why, but His agony ““overwhelmed understanding”” (Chamblin, p. 251, citing John White, *Daring to Draw Near*, p. 153).

At this moment, His standing before a **Holy** Father was different from any other human being. In the OT God overlooked the sins of His people temporarily through the mediation of animal sacrifices because of their inevitable, organic connection with the final sacrifice of Christ. In this sense, the inexorable (unalterable) atonement of Christ 1500 years hence served the practical result of propitiating (satisfying) the wrath of God before His atonement became an actual fact. The blood of bulls and goats cannot themselves take away sin, but only as they are typically related to the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 10: 4). The Levitical system was thus, mediatory through its inextricable (incapable of disentanglement) connection with Christ’s atonement. In the Christian dispensation, the New Covenant, the Christian’s status before this holy God is based upon the **accomplished** atonement of Christ and His on-going mediation on our behalf. God’s relationship to us is not founded upon what we are experientially in actual fact, but who we are in Christ, our Mediator. But it is here that the mystery of Christ’s abandonment is partially revealed, for **who could mediate for Christ?** Who could stand in the gap between a holy God and the Son upon whom the sins of the world had been laid (Isa. 53: 6)? There was no one qualified for the task, thus, no one available. Having no mediator, Christ receives the full brunt of the Father’s wrath. There was no one to turn it back.

Matthew and Mark prepare us for the cry of **dereliction** (vv. 45, 33). **A mysterious darkness had fallen upon the land from the sixth** to the ninth hour—from noon to three o’clock in the afternoon. From any reckoning the darkness was a supernatural act of God scientifically unexplainable. Total eclipses of the sun do not last three hours—a few minutes at most—and dark thunder clouds would not have attracted the attention of the Synoptists. The darkness portended (warned) of judgment and is the ultimate fulfillment of Amos’ prophecy (Amos 8: 9-10; cited by Chamblin, p. 250).

It is impossible to determine the time-frame between the third statement from the cross (Jn. 19: 36-37) and this one. It is clear from the Synoptics and *John* that the cry of dereliction occurs very close in time to the **last three** statements and the death of Christ (see below). However, Christ suffered on the cross for a period of about three hours. If the **first three** statements were made during the first hour, a reasonable possibility, He made **no other statement** for almost two hours, remaining silent in His suffering. Though the Father’s rejection did not include the entire time on the cross, it could have been a **significantly long time**, the two hours of silence. If so, the cry of dereliction was but the **climax and lowest point** of His abandonment, the conclusion but not the whole experience expressed in the Apostles’ Creed, “He descended into hell.” This is

only speculation, but it is doubtful that His abandonment included only a brief moment. Further, though the infinite suffering of Christ cannot be quantified or measured by time, a longer period of rejection would more adequately explain Christ's agony in Gethsemane as He contemplated the ordeal ahead of Him.

Though crying out in desperation, Christ does not falter in faith. Although the terms of intimacy are absent—"My Father"—He still owns God as *His* God, "*My* God, *My* God, why have you forsaken me?" (Macleod, p. 178).

It was necessary for Christ to experience complete abandonment, for without it He would not have suffered the full measure of God's wrath against sinners. Total desertion by God is the *fundamental substance of hell*. There has been much speculation about the extent of physical suffering after the resurrection of the unrighteous (Jn. 5: 28-29), but there can be no doubt about one thing: in hell, the unforgiven sinner will be left completely *alone* to his fate. Throughout his life he has *shunned the presence* and fellowship with the living God. In hell he will have what he wished for—though then understood as his condemnation—and God will leave him alone with a haunting self-hatred producing weeping and gnashing of teeth.

When Jesus cries out, some bystanders think—or jest (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 973)—that He is calling for Elijah, who according to popular belief would come in time of critical need to rescue those who were perishing (Lane, *Mark*, p. 573; Carson, p. 579). It could be that this was yet another source of amusement, but there is no definite proof of this from the text. The drink offered is sour wine, a common drink which quenched the thirst, in contrast with the wine mixed with bitter myrrh offered by the soldiers previously. Further, it seems that one of the bystanders, who may have been more sympathetic to Jesus, fetched the wine, not one of the jeering soldiers. The important thing is that Jesus indirectly requested the wine because He needed it to clear His throat. There were three more things He wished to say.

### 5. "*I am thirsty*"—*Jn. 19: 28*

This statement is reported only in *John*. It appears from the accounts of Matthew and Mark that someone provides the sour wine in response to His call for Elijah (Matt. v. 48; Mk. v. 36). But when we examine John's account, it makes more sense that the drink of sour wine is provided in response to Jesus' fifth word from the cross, "I am thirsty." Thus, immediately after the cry of dereliction, Christ says, "I am thirsty", followed by the offer of sour wine which He accepts.

The statement has a dual meaning. On the one hand, Christ is physically thirsty and seriously dehydrated. He has lost a lot of blood and other bodily fluids through His torture both before crucifixion and afterwards. His mouth was dry, and He needed anything which would enable Him to utter the remaining words from the cross. The statement is also loaded with spiritual significance and John tells us that Jesus utters this word to fulfill the Scriptures. Ps. 22 has been the focal point of the OT throughout the crucifixion, and it is likely He is indirectly referring to Ps. 22: 15, "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; and You lay me in the dust of death." Alternatively, the word is possibly a reference to Ps. 69: 21. Considering the metaphorical meaning of thirst in the Psalms, I prefer to see the Scriptural fulfillment here in the same metaphorical sense. The Psalmist wrote, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;

When shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42: 1-2) At this moment, He who was the “living water”—which if a man drank would never be thirsty again (Jn. 4: 10, 14)—is Himself **thirsty**. It is a fitting conclusion to the earlier cry of abandonment. He has cried out to His Father for comfort, but His Father has not replied. He is therefore left desolate and thirsty for fellowship with His father like a man looking for water in the desert, “O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps. 63: 1).

#### 6. “It is finished”—Jn. 19: 30

When Jesus had received the sour wine and regained His ability to speak, He uttered His sixth word from the cross with a loud voice (cf. Matt. v. 50; Mk. v. 37). The word “finished” is *tetélestai* and was used in legal documents to indicate the cancellation of debts—“Paid in full” (source unknown). Used elsewhere in *John*, the word signifies the completion of the work commissioned to the Son by the Father—“I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished [*teleiōō*] the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn. 17: 4). Before the fifth word, “I am thirsty”, Jesus realized that all things had been accomplished (*tetélestai*, same word) which were necessary for the salvation of His people (19: 28), both His active obedience in keeping the Law—thus earning the blessings of the covenant—and His passive obedience in suffering the Law’s curse. He now expresses this awareness more clearly. He had not come to do His own will but the will of Him who sent Him, and He had **fully succeeded** in accomplishing this mission. There was nothing left for Him to do that had not already been done, and His resurrection from the dead was seen by Him as an accomplished fact. Soteriologically, there is nothing left for us to do but simply **believe** in the accomplished work of Christ—both His active and passive obedience. We need not **add** our works of obedience to His work, as if our works somehow **complete** or perfect His work. If this were so, then Christ would not have said, “It is finished [completed]”.

Christ does not imply by these words that everything has been done to **apply** His completed work to the hearts of men. In this respect there is still much to be done in the missionary expanse of the gospel, including the self-sacrifice of millions of Christians like the Apostle Paul who said, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is **lacking** in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1: 24). Paul is not speaking soteriologically, but **missiologically**, for there is nothing lacking in Christ’s afflictions which is necessary to make us acceptable to God. But in order for Christ’s disciples to **apply** the work of Christ to the world, Christ’s people will have to sacrifice their time, energies, money, personal ambitions, reputations, relationships with family, even their lives for the sake of publishing the good news of the gospel to a lost world. From his conversion onward, Paul sacrificed ordinary comforts, marriage and family, money, and the rest of his life to the proclamation of the gospel, finally paying the ultimate price of martyrdom. In this sense he was “filling up” what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions by continuing and expanding the incarnational ministry of Christ on earth.

The work of the Holy Spirit on earth was also **not** finished when Christ uttered these words. He would “come” on the Day of Pentecost with a mighty demonstration of power producing repentance and faith which Christ had never witnessed during His entire three years of ministry.

However, without the atoning work of Christ and His ascension to the Father, the Spirit would not come (Jn. 16: 7). The Holy Spirit had not been given in the fullest measure since Christ had not been glorified (Jn. 7: 39). His presence and work during the earthy ministry of Christ had continued to be the *anticipatory* work of the Spirit throughout the OT dispensation—promised but not yet fulfilled (Joel 2: 28). Christ now continues His work on earth not in bodily form but through the work of His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The *advantage* of Christ “going away” becomes understandable to us when we compare the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane with those same disciples on the Day of Pentecost and thereafter. Christ was bodily present with them in Gethsemane, but His presence did not prevent them from deserting Him, nor did it prevent Peter from denying Him three times. After the “coming” of the Holy Spirit—and without the bodily presence of Christ—they preach the gospel boldly and are ready to lay down their lives for the privilege of proclaiming the truth (Acts 2—4). Such transformation can only be explained by the *superior* presence of Christ with His people by means of the Holy Spirit—the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel principle, “God with us”.

### 7. “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit”—Lk. 23: 46

Now that everything had been finished, the wrath of God against the Son—on whom the sins of the world had been laid—was also *finished*. The filial relationship (sonship) is restored, and Christ addresses God as “Father”. The last word of Christ is a quotation of Ps. 31:5, the quiet assurance of David that God would deliver him from the hands of his persecutors (cf. vv. 1-4). Christ fittingly omits the last part of the verse, “You have ransomed [redeemed] me” since no such redemption of Christ was either necessary or possible (Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 1036). Throughout the ordeal, Christ had never wavered in faith. Chamblin (p. 252) suggests that He had been meditating on Ps. 22 in which there is progress from “despair to victory”, especially in the words of v. 24, “For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.” The debt of sin fully paid, God’s holiness vindicated, His wrath against sin fully satisfied and turned away, the Father no longer turns away in abhorrence from His Son. With confidence Christ says, “*Father*, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

The spirit committed is Christ’s *human* spirit or human soul which He entrusts to the Father for safe-keeping (cf. 1 Tim. 1: 18, where the same word is used, *paratithemai*). While on earth He had been slandered and reviled, and as a condemned criminal He had been handed over to men to be mocked and unjustly executed. Christ now entrusts Himself as the innocent Son of God to the Judge of all the earth who cannot fail in acquitting Him of all guilt. As Peter later writes, “while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet. 2: 23).

### KK. Events Immediately after Jesus’ Death—Matt. 27: 52-56; Mk. 15: 38-51; Lk. 23: 47-49

Immediately after saying the last word loudly, Jesus “gave up” (Jn. v. 30) or “yielded up” (Matt. v. 50) His spirit. Matthew and John use words signifying that Christ voluntarily relinquishes His life. No man, nor even the whole Roman army, can take it away from Him (Jn. 10: 18).

#### 1. The tearing of the temple veil

As soon as the atoning work of Christ was completed, everything concerning the temple ritual, as well as the temple itself, became obsolete (out-dated and invalid). There was no more need for repeated animal sacrifices since the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ had been offered and accepted. The temple veil mentioned here is probably the one between the holy place and the most holy place where the high priest entered once a year on the Day of Atonement to atone for the sins of Israel (Ex. 26: 31-35). The writer of *Hebrews* describes the work of Christ as entering the most holy place not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with His own blood (Heb. 9: 12). What's more, He entered "the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation" (v. 11), namely, the tabernacle of heaven itself in the presence of God (v. 24). The most holy place was the location of the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled. Only the high priest could enter this sacred place once a year and not without blood (Ex. 30: 10; Lev. 16: 34). The infrequency of the Day of Atonement (only once a year), compared to the daily sacrifices, typified the sacrifice of Christ which would occur, not once a year, but once only. As Aaron and the other high priests of Israel entered within the veil, so Christ has now entered within the veil with His own blood; and since this sacrifice is never to be repeated, the veil separating the sinner from a holy God is forever removed in Christ. We are thus invited to come boldly into the throne of grace to find help in time of need (Heb. 4: 16).

## ***2. The earthquake and the opening of the tombs***

As Christ gave up His spirit, the earth reeled and quaked in response to such a stupendous (astonishing) event. Rocks were split in pieces opening up the tombs of believers who had fallen asleep (a euphemism for "died"). These same believers were raised from the dead but ***not until*** the resurrection of Christ occurred (v. 53). The geophysical phenomena reported by Matthew foreshadow the renewal of the heaven and earth in response to the work of Christ and serve as a pledge or guarantee to this future renewal. For OT references see Isa. 11: 6-10; 35; 65: 17; and 66: 22. Peter quotes the last two references in his second epistle.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ***But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells*** (2 Pet. 3: 10-13).

The "promise" in v. 13 is the promise of Isaiah 65: 17 and 66: 12. Paul vividly describes the present material creation as groaning in the pains of childbirth awaiting the ultimate fulfillment of the adoption of sons, namely the redemption of our bodies. The present creation has been subjected to "futility" because of man's sin, but in the new heaven and earth, there will be no sin to spoil the perfect order and beauty that God has re-created.

Notice that the resurrection of some believers is reported by Matthew in conjunction with the earthquake even before these resurrections actually occur. I do not accept Hendriksen's view that these believers rose from the dead ***before*** Christ was raised but did not make their appearance to others until the resurrection of Christ. A better explanation, I believe, is that of

Carson (*Matthew*, p. 581, following J. W. Wenham) who argues that the end of the sentence beginning in v. 51 is the word “opened” (NASB) or “broke open” (NIV) in v. 52, not “split” in v. 51. (Punctuation marks are not inspired by the Holy Spirit but were added long after the original documents had been copied and recopied.) Therefore, vv. 51-53 could read as follows:

And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split, **and** the tombs were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

I have included the “and” (*kai*) with the translation (“**and** the tombs were opened”) because the Greek text includes it. The *kai* is not translated in the NASB and NIV but is translated in the KJV, NKJ, and ASV. When the *kai* is translated, the sentence reads more smoothly, and stopping the sentence at “opened” makes more sense.

The question arises why Matthew reports these resurrections here rather than in chapter 28 after the resurrection of Christ when they actually occurred. Carson gives three reasons (p. 582). My own opinion is that the opening of the tombs and the resurrections are reported in the **closest possible connection** with the earthquake and the splitting open of the rocks to heighten the similarity of the events surrounding Christ’s atonement with the momentous events accompanying the **return** of Christ. Earthquakes in Scripture are generally associated with judgment and the vindication of God’s glory (cf. Ps. 18: 7; Acts 16: 26; Hag. 2: 6). Not only will the dead rise from their graves (Jn. 5: 28-29), but there will be severe upheaval upon the earth as described in 2 *Peter* as the consumption of the earth and its works by fire (2 Pet. 3: 10-12). The exact nature of these catastrophic events is not clear, but since the final judgment is likened to the flood (2 Pet. 3: 5-6), we may expect cataclysmic geophysical phenomena to accompany the return of Christ and the judgment—earthquakes, fires, volcanic eruptions (?), etc. Matthew would have been familiar with the association of the return of Christ with the cataclysmic events of the flood (Matt. 24: 37-39).

What is further unexplained in the text is whether the bodies of those resurrected are glorified bodies or the same mortal bodies returned to those whom Christ raised from the dead—the widow’s son from Nain, Jairus’ daughter, and Lazarus. All these faced death again, for they could not have continued on earth with glorified bodies. On the other hand, the resurrection of believers in connection with Christ’s resurrection must have been of the same order as His, resulting in a glorified body. Although they **appeared** to many people, nothing in the text suggests that they **remained**. Hendriksen is correct when He says,

If their resurrection was like that of Lazarus, who died again, then the expression “they **appeared** to many” requires explanation. [In other words, why **wouldn’t** they appear to many if they remained on earth?]. Also, in that case, the resurrection of these saints would not be a true foretoken of the glorious resurrection at Christ’s return. Accordingly, it would then not truly symbolize the significance of Christ’s death for our future bodily resurrection (*Matthew*, p. 975, footnote; bold emphasis his, words in brackets and underlined emphasis mine; see also p. 976).

### 3. *The centurion’s confession*

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Christ observed what was happening, they concluded that Jesus was truly the Son of God (v. 54, where the verb “said” is plural). What

was happening does *not* include the resurrection of the dead (v. 53), but the darkening of the sky (v. 45) and the earthquake, both of which frightened them (v. 54). Nature itself seemed to be responding to the death of this man, and they had participated in it and mocked. But they were no longer mocking. Mark links the confession strictly to the centurion and his observation of Jesus when he died, “When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (v. 39) Luke adds, “Certainly, this man was innocent” (v. 47). Thus, it was a combination of things, not the least of which was the calm dignity of Christ even as He breathed His last breath, which so impressed upon him and others the truth of Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God.

There is more irony here. While the Jews had witnessed the works of Christ in healing and casting out demons, but had not believed in Him, these Gentile soldiers, with far less evidence, bestow upon Him the title by which the Jews mock Him (v. 43), “HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Carson, p. 583). And while the Jews shout, “Crucify Him!”, the centurion, like Pilate, proclaims His innocence. Their confession is yet another foreshadowing (characteristic of Matthew) of the kingdom of God being taken away from the Jews and given to the Gentiles producing the fruit of it (Matt. 21: 43).

#### ***4. The crowd’s reaction***

Besides the passersby (Matt. v. 39; Mk. v. 29) who did not consider the crucifixion significant enough to merit their time, there were others at the crucifixion who had gathered to witness the “spectacle”, probably those who had demanded His execution (Lk. 23: 48; cf. 23: 27, 35; Joel Green, *Luke*, p. 827). We have ample reason to believe that Jesus uttered the fourth, sixth, and seventh words from the cross with a ***loud voice*** which could be heard by the crowds (cf. Matt. 27: 46; Mk. 15: 34; Jn. 19: 30 compared with Matt. 27: 50; Mk. 15: 37; and Lk. 23: 46). When the crowds heard these cries and witnessed the darkness and the earthquake, they realized with the centurion that the crucifixion had been a travesty of justice. They had demanded the death of an innocent man and would be judged guilty at God’s bar of justice (so also Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 612) The “return” does not necessarily indicate repentance, but a return to the city (Green, p. 827). It is possible that their sorrow (beating their breasts) is akin to Judas’ regret, but it is equally possible that their guilt prepared them to receive Peter’s message on the Day of Pentecost (Geldenhuys, p. 612).

#### ***5. The women and other acquaintances at Jesus’ crucifixion***

While four women are standing at the cross when Christ speaks His third word, Matthew mentions three who are now looking on from a distance—“Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph [or Joses], and the mother of the sons of Zebedee” (Matt. v. 56; cf. Lk. v. 49). The sons of Zebedee were James and John (Mk. 3: 17), the disciple whom Jesus loved, into whose care Jesus entrusted His own mother. (While they had been standing far off, they must have moved closer; or vice versa.) The women noted had been helpful to Jesus during His ministry in Galilee (cf. Lk. 8: 1-3).

Mary Magdalene is easily identified in all three texts and is the woman Jesus healed of evil spirits (Lk. 8: 2). Mary the wife of Clopas is probably *not* the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother; for if she is, then two sisters in the same household are given the name of Mary—quite confusing to parents and children alike (cf. Jn. 19: 25; i.e. “Mary the wife of Clopas” is not in apposition to “sister”). Carson argues that if we assume that John's list of women in Jn. 19 includes Matthew's and Mark's list, then it follows that Salome is the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John, and that Salome is the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, James and Joseph (comparing Jn. 19: 25 with Matt. 27: 56). Hendriksen argues that Mary the wife of Clopas (Jn. 19: 25)—not Mary the mother of Jesus—is the mother of James and Joseph (or Joses). Matthew 13: 55 mentions James, Joses (or Joseph), Simon, and Judas (or Jude) as Mary's other four sons. But James and Joseph are both common names; besides, the absence of Simon and Judas from Matthew's list in v. 56 seems conspicuous if this Mary is the mother of Jesus. And if she is, why doesn't Matthew simply say, “mother of Jesus” rather than “mother of James and Joseph” and why does he mention Mary Magdalene *before* Jesus' mother? Even more puzzling would be Matthew's reference to Jesus' mother as “the other Mary” in v. 61—a very odd way of mentioning Jesus' mother. However you figure it, Salome is the mother of the sons of Zebedee, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. Then, as Carson suggests, Salome's request in Matt. 20: 20 makes more sense (p. 583). She is using her leverage as Jesus' aunt to get Him to show special favor to His two cousins, James and John.

Mark tells us that these were not the only women who had followed Jesus from Galilee (v. 41). The very mention of women is significant since they were not considered important members of Jewish society. Luke mentions other acquaintances which could have included his disciples (v. 49). While John tells us that four of the women and *John* had at one time been close enough to the cross for Jesus to speak to them (Jn. 19: 25-26), *nothing is said in the Gospels about any of the other ten disciples being near the cross*. Whoever these acquaintances are in v. 49, they are standing at a “distance”. Green makes the following observation:

Comparison is also invited with Ps. 38: 11, where the Suffering Righteous One complains, “My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my neighbors stand far off.” It is crucial to the Lukan narrative that they have at least to this degree remained “with” Jesus, but their geographical remoteness indicates a weakened discipleship that is as yet unwilling to identify too closely with Jesus in his humiliation and death. Their comportment vis-à-vis [opposite to] the cross of Christ creates a renewed sense of narrative tension that begs to be resolved. How will they respond to Jesus' death? What will be the future of God's purpose now that Jesus has died? (*Luke*, p. 828, words in brackets mine).

## ***LL. The Examination of Christ's Body before Removal from the Cross—Jn. 19: 31-42***

### ***1. Christ's legs not broken***

Because the Passover Sabbath was a special Sabbath (a “high day”), the Jews (the Sanhedrin) requested that Pilate break the victim's legs to hasten death. Once the legs below the knees were broken, there would be no ability to raise the body to fill the lungs with air (see above). Victims did not last long once the legs were broken. Once more, John exposes the hypocrisy of the Jews who are more concerned with ceremonial protocol (proper procedure) than they are with the premeditated murder of an innocent man. Far be it to have dead bodies on crosses when the Sabbath Day dawned despite the fact that the land had *already* been polluted with innocent blood (Deut. 21: 8-9; 21: 23; Num. 35: 33).



When they came to break Jesus' legs, He had already died. For the skeptics who wish to think that Christ merely recovered in the tomb from unconsciousness, this text proves otherwise. Had he been alive and breathing, the Roman soldier would have broken His legs.

We gather from Mk. 15: 44-45 that Pilate may have been surprised at just how quickly Jesus died. There were many reasons for this. If we are correct in assuming two beatings rather than one (see above), He was more traumatized than either of the other two criminals. He had also been subjected to multiple cross-examinations (trials) by Annas, the Sanhedrin (twice), Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again. He had been without sleep, food, or adequate water for a long period of time. But the main reason for His exhaustion was the ordeal which no man can understand, the Father's rejection and abandonment. The physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma that Christ endured from this abandonment was more than any human will ever endure precisely because no other human is God. Finally, Christ died more quickly than the typical crucified victim because His work on the cross was accomplished, and there was no more reason to prolong His life. He accordingly, gave up His spirit, laying down His life voluntarily.

The breaking of the legs was one of the cruelest parts of a cruel execution and consisted of brutal blows to the lower legs by a heavy mallet. The physical shock alone would speed death (Morris, p. 818). The dual emphasis in *John* is (1) that Jesus the Passover lamb would have none of His bones broken, according to the ritual requirements of the Law (cf. Ex. 12: 46; Num. 9: 12). He was the perfect Passover sacrifice. Further, (2) the context of this statement is Ps. 34 and God's deliverance of the righteous man. "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones, not one of them is broken. Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned" (Ps. 34: 18-22). God spared Jesus the additional pain of having His legs broken, proving that His loving care for His Son had been interrupted no longer than absolutely necessary. Although Christ was crushed for our iniquities, He is not ultimately condemned along with the wicked, but is raised from the dead (cf. Carson, *John*, p. 627).

## 2. *The piercing of His side*

Just to make sure Jesus was dead, a soldier pierced His side. (This is yet another text proving that Christ was really dead before being placed in the tomb.) When pierced, blood and water poured out. The piercing of His side fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 12: 10, "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that **they will look on Me whom they have pierced**; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." In Chapter 11 of *Zechariah*, the people of Israel had despised their prophet by giving him the wages of a common slave, thirty pieces of silver. This action receives its ultimate fulfillment in the activity of Judas who accepts a paltry (insignificant) sum of thirty pieces of silver as a bribe to betray Christ (see commentary above). Because Israel despises the Lord's prophet (Zechariah, a type of the greater Prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ), she has despised the Lord Himself (11: 13), her Shepherd, and has rendered herself a "flock doomed to slaughter" (11: 7). This is a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD in which over a million

Jews died of various causes and during which the dead bodies of slain Jews were cannibalized (11: 9; cf. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*). Since the Lord, her true Shepherd, has been despised, He will send Israel another “shepherd” who will rule over her with ruthless cruelty and will not care for the helpless and the perishing (11: 16). The shepherd is none other than the rulers of the Roman Empire which roughly 450 years later, beginning in 63 BC, began to rule over the land of Palestine with an iron rod (cf. T.V. Moore, *Zechariah*, pp. 184-185; C.F. Keil, *Zechariah*, p. 378) (Keep in mind that *Zechariah* is a post-exilic prophet; thus, the danger of Assyria and Babylon are no longer on the horizon. A far more powerful nation of oppressors will come, the Roman Empire.)

But as always, God will judge the nations which afflict His people (Chapter 12). The ruthless shepherd of v. 16 (Rome) will be judged (v. 17)—a prediction of the fall of Rome to the Barbarian hordes (Moore, p. 185). Jerusalem will be besieged, but God will defend her and eventually destroy all the nations which come against Jerusalem (12: 1-9). At this point in the prophecy, we must interpret “Jerusalem” more generally not only in terms of the **remnant of Israel** but also in terms of its antitype, the **NT church**. Israel as a nation fell to the Roman legions in 70 AD as a judgment against its unbelief and rejection of her Messiah, but God has created the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6: 16) which includes both Jews and Gentiles, those who are children of Abraham by faith and not by birth (Gal. 3: 7). On the other hand, we cannot completely spiritualize the text in *Zechariah* since God still loves **national** Israel because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom. 11: 28). The mighty Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman Empires are relics of the past, but God is still blessing the Jewish people throughout the world with many material blessings. Such blessing foreshadows their great spiritual blessing when finally recognizing their Messiah (Rom. 11, a prophecy of Paul yet unfulfilled).

Finally we come to v. 10 and the promise of grace. Israel has despised her Shepherd—a prophecy of Christ’s rejection—but God will nevertheless extend grace to the house of David. How will He do this? He does this through the preaching of the gospel by the apostles on the Day of Pentecost when 3,000 people—Jews from many nations attending the festival—respond in repentance and faith (Acts 2: 41). On that day, Peter reminded them that they had been responsible for nailing Jesus to the cross to be crucified (2: 23), the very One whom the Father has made “both Lord and Christ”, that is, the Messiah whom God also raised from the dead as a vindication of His innocence and Messianic identity (vv. 24-36). “Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” to which Peter replies, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (vv. 37-38).

Thus, the “Spirit of grace and supplication” was poured out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zech. 12: 10—the Holy Spirit who produced genuine repentance and faith. Some of those visiting Jerusalem during the Pentecost looked upon Him whom they had pierced and mourned over Him. The **piercing of Jesus’ side** (Jn. 19: 34) produced, as it were, a virtual **fountain** of grace and blessing being poured out upon the nation of Israel—a **fountain of blood and water** representing His atoning blood and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 6: 53-56; 3: 5; 4: 10; Jn. 7: 37-39; Morris, p. 820; Carson, *John*, p. 628). This fountain would eventually

spread to the nations of the Gentiles (13: 1). Thus, not all the Gentiles would be judged but only those arrayed against the remnant of Israel and the “new Israel”, the church of Jesus Christ (see below). The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy for national Israel will be their spiritual restoration (as yet unfulfilled) as it turns in repentance and faith to its long-rejected Messiah (cf. Rom. 11; C. F. Keil, *Zechariah*, p. 389; John Murray, *Romans*).

Thus far, the interpretation of Zechariah 12: 10. But the prophecy is a double-edged sword for cursing as well as for blessing. John the Apostle applies it in a different way in *Revelation*, “BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and *every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him*. So it is to be. Amen” (Rev. 1: 7). The mourning here is not the mourning of repentance, but the mourning of terror by unbelievers who behold the Messiah whom they crucified literally and through unbelief coming in power and judgment. In this application, John is alluding to Jesus’ words in the Olivet discourse, “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then *all the tribes of the earth will mourn*, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory” (Matt. 24: 30).

...the argument [in Matt. 24: 30] appears to be *a fortiori* [from the lesser to the greater]...: just as the Jews in Zechariah 12 wept in contrition and repentance when they saw the one whom they pierced, *how much more* will the nations of the earth mourn at the parousia when they see the exalted and returning Christ coming in glory, the Christ whose followers they have been persecuting, the Christ whom they pierced since it was their sins that sent him to the cross? (Carson, *John*, p. 628, emphasis his, words in brackets mine)

All these things John wrote as an eyewitness of the truth, that we might believe (Jn. 19: 35).

**MM. The Burial of Christ—Matt. 27: 57-61; Mk.14: 42-47; Lk. 23: 50-56; Jn. 19: 38-42**

### ***1. Buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea***

Although He is executed because of the false accusations and persistence of the Sanhedrin, Jesus is buried by one of its **prominent** members, Joseph of Arimathea—an irony Mark and Luke did not wish us to miss (Mk. v. 43; Lk. v. 50). (John also mentions Nicodemus; see below.) By examining the four accounts, we arrive at Joseph’s spiritual profile. He was a good and righteous man (Lk.), a disciple of Christ (Matt., Jn.) waiting for the kingdom of God (Mk., Lk.), but a “secret” disciple “for fear of the Jews” (Jn.) who must gather up courage to ask Pilate for Jesus’ body (Mk. v. 43). Luke is careful to inform us that Joseph had not consented to Jesus’ premeditated murder by the Sanhedrin. Based on John’s comment, he had not likely been present in the early morning hours either at the first trial before the Sanhedrin or the second, and there is no mention of him in either of these contexts. At any rate, his fear of Caiaphas and the other members would have caused Him to avoid any contact with them.

But we must not be too judgmental of Joseph considering the actions of the disciples on the night Jesus was betrayed, nor should we be over-confident of our own courage and commitment given similar circumstances. We have in these texts the divine assessment of the man’s character, only **one** comment out of many being overtly (plainly) negative. He was a disciple of Jesus waiting for the kingdom of God, a good and righteous man who, though fearful, mustered up the courage to ask Pilate for Jesus’ body. Not only this, but he actually took down Jesus’ body from the

cross himself (Lk. v. 53). He was also generous enough to honor His Lord with the gift of his own personal tomb, hewn out of rock (labor-intensive and very expensive). By coming before Pilate and removing Christ's body from the cross, he was now confessing Christ before men, unashamed and obviously *less fearful* of His association with Him. The story teaches us something about how God evaluates people. None of God's people are perfect, but none of us are all bad, either. Our lives are mixed with good *and* bad; and while the bad should not be excused, the good should be affirmed. In spite of Joseph's past fear, Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls him "a good and righteous man".

Unable to prevent Jesus' death, Joseph did what he could; he donated his own tomb for His burial, thus fulfilling Scripture, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death (Isa. 53: 9a). The clause, "assigned with wicked men" refers to the Jewish practice of burying criminals outside the city. It was against the Law for the Jews to leave the bodies of criminals exposed all night upon a tree, thus defiling the land (Deut. 21: 22-23). The Romans, on the other hand, would leave the bodies on the cross to rot and be eaten by vultures as a warning against sedition (Carson, p. 629, citing Josephus). But Jesus' "hell" was now past, and having accomplished His task, was given a decent Jewish burial, even that of a rich man. God would not allow the body of "The Holy One to undergo decay" (Ps. 16: 10; Acts 2: 27). (Again, we would ask the skeptics: How could a deluded megalomaniac (deluded in thinking himself someone great) arrange to fulfill this particular prophecy?)

Joseph followed the customary procedure for the preparation of the body, wrapping it in multiple layers of linen with spices placed between the folds to mask the smell of decaying flesh (Jn. v. 40; cf. Jn. 11: 44). The Egyptian practice of embalming the body by removing internal organs and filling the spaces with spices was not Jewish practice. There is no mutilation of Jesus' body (cf. Morris, *John*, p. 826; Carson, *John*, p. 630). The details of this preparation are filled out by comparing the different accounts. Nicodemus, the Pharisee who had come to Christ some time ago and had believed (cf. Jn. 3; Jn. 7: 50-51), came with 100 pounds (75; NIV) of myrrh and aloes, another significant burial gift reminding us of the gifts of the wise men at Jesus' birth, gifts fit for a king (Matt. 2: 11). The quantity of spices used to bury Jesus was common only to royalty, John's insinuation that Jesus *is* a king and should be buried as such (Morris, p. 825). Like Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus was likely a member of the Sanhedrin, "a ruler of the Jews" (Jn. 3: 1; Carson, p. 629), one of the Pharisaical minority. Together, possibly with the help of their servants, they wrap the body in linen and spices and roll a large stone over the entrance of the tomb. While all this is taking place, Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary" (Mary the wife of Clopas and mother of James and Josesph) are "looking on" while sitting opposite the grave (compare Matt. v. 61 with Mk. v. 47). Matthew has already mentioned Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph in v. 56; thus, the "other Mary" in v. 61 is the same Mary, wife of Clopas and mother of James and Joseph (Joses) (see explanation above).

The next question concerns the women who are preparing spices (Lk. 23: 56). These same women come to the tomb on the first day of the week after the Sabbath for the purpose of anointing Jesus' body (Lk. 24: 1), but if Joseph and Nicodemus had already done this the day Jesus died, why would the women come now? We will take up this question below.

Rather than getting knotted up in the details, let us not miss the obvious. Not *one*, but *two* members of the Sanhedrin participated in the burial of Jesus. *Though the prospects of a Jewish church were bleak (discouraging), they were not hopeless.* John (writing sometime between 60 and 90 AD) is preparing us for the Jewish Pentecost only fifty days from now.

After Joseph and Nicodemus prepare the body of Jesus, Pilate orders the tomb sealed.

## 2. The sealing of the tomb—Matt. 27: 62-66; 28: 11-15

The Sanhedrin is concerned that Jesus' disciples will steal the body and thereby claim that He had risen from the dead. There is amusing irony here. Had the Sanhedrin left the tomb *unguarded*, then the story later circulated by the Sanhedrin (Matt. 28: 13) would have been credible (believable); but since the tomb was heavily guarded, their story *loses* credibility. Thus, the Sanhedrin inadvertently (unintentionally) promotes the credibility of the resurrection of Christ by setting a guard at the tomb.

The difference in interpretation over this passage is concerned with whether the guard placed over the tomb is a *Roman guard* or the *temple police* consisting of Jews. Carson and Chamblin are convinced that the guard is the Jewish temple police for the following reasons: First, Pilate says to them, "You have a guard" (v. 65a), which seems to imply their own temple guard. Second, after Christ is resurrected, the guards do not report to Pilate, but to the chief priests (28: 11). This would seem to indicate that they were not under the direct jurisdiction of Pilate, but the chief priests (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 586; Chamblin, unpublished class notes on *Matthew*, p. 257). Another problem with the Roman guard interpretation is Pilate's statement, "make it *as* secure as you know how" (v. 65b), but if this were a Roman guard, it is Pilate that would know how to make it secure, not the chief priests and Pharisees.

But the interpretation above also has problems. Hendriksen argues for a Roman guard since the temple police would have no jurisdiction outside the temple complex (*Matthew*, p. 982, footnote). This problem might be explained by the fact the chief priests must ask permission from Pilate to grant special jurisdiction to their police outside the temple, but it is doubtful that Pilate would do so. Further, after the resurrection, why would the chief priests have to protect the *temple police* from Pilate's punishment (28: 14)? Why would Pilate have any jurisdiction over the temple police in the first place? (Hendriksen, p. 982) For that matter, why would Pilate even care whether the disciples stole the body if only temple police were involved representing exclusively the authority of the chief priests? This begs the question of *what kind* of "seal" was placed over the tomb. The placing of a seal involved stretching a cord over the entrance and fastening it to the rock on either end with soft clay. An official seal would then be impressed upon the clay (Henry Alford, quoted in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell; Carson, p. 586). Did the seal signify *Roman* authority or the authority of the *chief priests*? Since a guard is requested of Pilate, every indication is that the seal would represent Roman authority. But if so, Pilate would not likely have entrusted the tomb's protection to inferior temple police for the simple reason that his already fragile reputation in Rome would be further damaged if the body went missing, something Pilate could ill afford. A *Roman* seal would require *Roman* soldiers. But if the seal was only vested with the authority of the chief priests,

then, once again, why must the soldiers be protected from Pilate and why would he be involved in the first place? After the body of Jesus goes missing, it is possible that the guards report first to the chief priests seeking protection from Pilate (cf. Acts 12: 19; 16: 27). If it is asked why Pilate does not order the execution of his soldiers for failing in their duty, it may be that Jesus' disappearance awarded him a certain amount of personal revenge for being humiliated by them. Or it could be that he believed that Jesus was, indeed, *a son of god* (little "g"). Another possibility: Had he ordered their execution, Pilate would have to report their execution to Caesar, but he could conveniently ignore the missing body of an executed criminal.

The reader can decide for himself, but I believe that the guard placed over the tomb was a Roman guard. This is also the opinion of A.T. Robertson, who argues that *koustodia*, a Latin term, refers to a Roman guard (Robertson's Word Pictures in BibleWorks). Other proponents of this view are Harold Smith, Henry Alford, T.J. Thorburn, and Albert Roper, all cited by Josh McDowell in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 217-221.

But whether Roman soldiers or Jewish, it is far-fetched to believe that fearful disciples untrained in any military tactics (with the possible exception of Simon the Zealot) could steal the body of Jesus while the guards slept. But if the guard consisted of Roman soldiers whose failure in the line of duty resulted in execution (the assumption of 28: 14), then the story propagated by the chief priests is even more preposterous (ridiculous). Furthermore, what they lacked in military skill is compounded by lack of courage. Other than Peter, we haven't even heard of the disciples again since Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. They have scattered to the wind; and apart from the Spirit's coming at Pentecost, there is no hope that Christ's work will be continued. Lacking any serious credibility, the story was completely unsuccessful in stemming the tide of Christianity throughout Palestine and the Roman Empire.

***NN. The Resurrection Day Appearances of Christ—Matt. 28: 1-10, 16-20; Mk. 16: 1-8; Lk. 24: 1-49; Jn. 20: 1-25; 21: 1-25***

The women of Lk. 23: 56 and 24: 1 are identified by Mark as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome who is the wife of Zebedee (Mk. 16: 1). Matthew identifies them as Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary", leaving out any mention of Salome (28: 1; cf. 27: 61), and Luke adds Joanna (v. 10). These women had come to anoint the body of Jesus (Mk. 16: 1). But if Mary Magdalene and the other Mary had been looking on while the body was being prepared by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, why were they now there to anoint the body (cf. Matt. 27: 61; Mk. 15: 47)? From their perspective, another application of spices would be needed to mask the stench of Jesus' decaying body. Furthermore, they did not know that Pilate had ordered a seal placed over the tomb, otherwise they would not have presumed that someone could roll the stone away giving them access to the body (Mk. 16: 3).

The next problem involves the differences between the Synoptic accounts and *John* concerning the resurrection appearances of Christ on the first day of the week. The reconciliation below is only an attempt, and there are other possible solutions. For the reader's convenience, I have provided some of the texts below from the NASB, 1995.

***1. A word of caution***

The modern reader is advised not to force modern methods of reporting upon the biblical writers, especially when their differences in reporting the same event may be reasonably reconciled. Many times in the Synoptics one writer may report two people present when another reports one or three. The writers were not really concerned how many people were present but only that a certain message is being conveyed by the story. All the Synoptic writers and John are trying to convey a certain message to achieve their individual purposes. What this message or purpose is may at times be difficult to determine or to distinguish from the other writers, but the story is accurate within the boundaries of their intended purposes. All of us make general statements about time, people, and events which, if scrutinized (carefully examined) for pinpoint accuracy, would fall short of scientific precision; yet, no one accuses us of lying (at least, rarely). We were accurate in what we said within the confines of our specific intent or purpose in telling the story. We may, however, breathe a sigh of relief knowing that the stories in the Bible are infallibly true and accurate—even if not complete with all the details—and that the writer does not have some hidden agenda which he intends to force upon the unsuspecting reader. This is more than I can say for the reporting I read or watch in the modern news media which commonly withholds relevant information necessary for the accurate interpretation of a specific event. While none of the Synoptists or John include *all* of the details of Christ's resurrection appearances, with time and effort we can piece together most of the story or, at least, what God intended us to have. We must not, however, accuse them of fraud for leaving out the information we would like to have had for a neat and tidy story. Besides, will it not be exciting to get the rest of the story when we get to heaven?

## ***2. My purpose in attempting to reconcile the resurrection accounts in the Synoptics and John***

While I agree with Carson “that it is more important to come to grips with the distinctive emphasis of each NT writer” (p. 587), the confusing elements of the different accounts compel me to move forward in some attempt at reconciliation—especially since the major commentaries offer very little help in this regard. Furthermore, my African students (for whom I am writing) will not have the benefit of extensive libraries to sort this out, and ***I do not want them falling prey to liberal theologians*** sweeping over the African continent who would say, “You see, there ***are*** errors in the Bible, but the historical accounts don't matter, anyway. It doesn't even matter whether Jesus rose from the dead or not—and He probably didn't—because faith is a personal matter which does not depend on the historical resurrection of Jesus.” And so on and so on. The apostle Paul had a much different perspective on the resurrection of Christ saying, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is ***worthless***; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 5: 17). If this is so—and it is—then it is important to show that the resurrection accounts are consistent with one another, although they do not follow strict Western procedures of investigative reporting (nor are they dishonest like so many Western reporters; see comments above).

Liberals who refuse ***a priori*** (before examining the evidence) to believe in miracles like the resurrection will use the ***apparent*** (but not real) discrepancies in the Synoptics and *John* as a means of discounting the resurrection as the mythical fabrication of the “Jesus tradition” by His zealous followers after His death. But they are seriously mistaken. The purpose of the resurrection accounts is to inspire the settled conviction that Jesus did, indeed, rise from the dead and ***appeared to many witnesses*** before His final ascension into heaven (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 3-8). Without such witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, the Christian faith would have perished

with Christ on the cross, a fact clearly evident from the behavior of His chosen apostles on the night He was betrayed. The resurrection of Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian faith upon which the whole edifice is built. Destroy this cornerstone and the building crumbles into the dust along with *every ethical teaching*—"If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE" (1 Cor. 15: 19); or, to put it in the language of modern hedonists, "You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get!"—whether "gusto" is sex, money, drugs, or whatever it is. Continuing, Paul says, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be *pitied*" (1 Cor. 15: 32). "Pitied" because we have denied ourselves many pleasures in life enjoyed by unbelievers with the expectation that "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My [Christ's] sake, he is the one who will save it" (Lk. 9: 25).

### *Matthew's account*

**Matthew** 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.  
 2 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it.  
 3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.  
 4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.  
 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified.  
 6 "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying.  
 7 "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."  
 8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.  
 9 And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.  
 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me."  
 16 But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.  
 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but **some were doubtful**.  
 18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.  
 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

### *Mark's account*

**Mark** 16:1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him.  
 2 Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb **when the sun had risen**.



3 They were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?"

4 Looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away, although it was extremely large.

5 Entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed.

6 And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He has risen; He is not here; behold, *here is* the place where they laid Him.

7 "But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He told you.'"

8 They went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had gripped them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

### ***Luke's account***

***Luke 24:1*** But on the first day of the week, at ***early dawn***, ***they*** came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

2 And ***they*** found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, ***two men*** suddenly stood near them in ***dazzling clothing***;

5 and as ***the women*** were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, ***the men*** said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead?"

6 "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

8 And they remembered His words,

9 and returned from the tomb and ***reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest***.

10 Now they were ***Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles***.

11 But these words appeared to them ***as nonsense***, and they would ***not believe*** them.

12 But ***Peter*** got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

13 And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem.

14 And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place.

15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and ***began*** traveling with them.

16 But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.

17 And He said to them, "What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?" And they stood still, looking sad.

18 One of ***them***, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?"

19 And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people,

20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to the sentence of death, and crucified Him.

21 "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.

22 "But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning,

23 and did not find His body, they came, *saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive.*

24 "Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see."

25 And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!

26 "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"

27 Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

28 And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted as though He were going farther.

29 But they urged Him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is *getting* toward evening, and the day is now nearly over." So He went in to stay with them.

30 When He had reclined *at the table* with them, He took the bread and blessed *it*, and breaking *it*, He *began* giving *it* to them.

31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight.

32 They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"

33 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them,

34 saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon."

35 They *began* to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread.

36 While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst.

37 But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

38 And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?

39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

40 And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.

41 While they still could not believe *it* because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

42 They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish;

43 and He took it and ate *it* before them.

44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,

47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

48 "You are witnesses of these things.

49 "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

### ***John's account***

***John 20:1*** Now on the first *day* of the week ***Mary Magdalene*** came early to the tomb, ***while it was still dark***, and saw the stone *already* taken away from the tomb.

2 So she ran and came to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and ***we do not know where they have laid Him.***"

3 So ***Peter and the other disciple*** went forth, and they were going to the tomb.

4 The two were running together; and the other disciple ran ahead faster than Peter and came to the tomb first;

5 and stooping and looking in, he ***saw the linen wrappings lying there***; but he did not go in.

6 And so Simon Peter also came, following him, and entered the tomb; and he ***saw the linen wrappings lying there***,

7 and the face-cloth which had been on His head, not lying with the linen wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself.

8 So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and ***believed.***

9 For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

10 So the disciples ***went away again to their own homes.***

11 But Mary was standing outside the tomb ***weeping***; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

12 and she saw ***two angels in white*** sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying.

13 And they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, ***"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."***

14 When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus.

15 Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, "Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means, Teacher).

17 Jesus said to her, "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"

18 ***Mary Magdalene*** came, announcing to the disciples, ***"I have seen the Lord,"*** and *that* He had said these things to her.

19 So when it was evening on that day, the ***first day of the week***, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace *be* with you."

20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

23 "If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained."

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

25 So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

### ***3. An attempted harmony of the resurrection accounts from the Synoptics and John***

#### ***a. The women who are first to visit the empty tomb***

In Matthew's account, Mary Magdalene is not alone as she *appears* to be in John's account but is accompanied by the "other Mary" (the mother of James and Joses, the wife of Clopas; Matt. 28: 1; Jn. 20: 1; cf. Matt. 27: 56 and commentary above). Notice that when Mary Magdalene reports the missing body to Peter and John, she says, "*we* [not 'I'] do not know where they have laid Him" (Jn. v. 2). This implies that Mary Magdalene was not alone when she visits the tomb (Jn. 20: 1). Mark also mentions Salome as part of this group of women along with Mary the mother of James—the same person as Mary the mother of James and Joses (16: 1; Mark simply omits the mention of Joses, or Joseph, as does Luke). Luke adds Joanna and an indefinite number of other women (24: 10). Only Mary Magdalene is included in every list.

#### ***b. The time***

All four gospels indicate that it was the first day of the week, in other words, Sunday after Saturday, the Sabbath. Matthew says that it was beginning to dawn, Mark that the sun had risen, Luke early dawn, and John that it was still dark. The accounts may be reconciled by recognizing that the women embark on their journey at dark and arrive after the sun had risen at dawn (Hendriksen). Symbolically, the differences contribute to the overall theme of the resurrection event. The whole earth has lain in the darkness of unbelief; but with the resurrection, Jesus dispels the darkness and brings mankind into the light of dawn (see also Carson, *John*, p. 641).

#### ***c. The earthquake and the guards***

This is reported only by Matthew. God sends the earthquake and dispatches the angel who rolls the stone away from the door—not to let Jesus *out* but to allow believers *in* (cf. Chamblin, p. 259, who argues that His glorified body was more substantial, not less, than His pre-resurrection body). Jesus was quite capable of moving through the stone door *without removing it* (cf. Jn. 20: 19). Seeing the angel and experiencing the earthquake simultaneously, the guards are frightened to the point of unconsciousness (in other words, they pass out—cold) providing a humorous contrast to the soldiers' mockery earlier. These are probably not the same soldiers, but they are nevertheless symbols of Rome's mighty power rendered impotent (powerless) in the presence of *two* angels (only *one* angel reported in Matthew). Yet, Christ could have called

72,000 (12 legions) angels had He wished to be delivered from the cross (Matt. 26: 53). All of this happens before the women arrive, and by that time the guards have already awakened; *some* have reported to the chief priests (Matt. 28: 11). Others, we may presume, have gone into hiding.

#### *d. The angels*

Only one angel is mentioned by Matthew, but he does not say that there was *only* one. He simply *mentions* one, as does Mark. Mark mentions a *young man* and Luke mentions *two men*—all of whom are clothed in white or bright clothing signifying angelic beings. John reports *two* angels. There should be no question from the context and their descriptions that in *Mark* and *Luke*, the men are angels. Matthew and Mark report the message from one angel while Luke and John report both angels speaking. Again, this is not worth any hand-wringing over the doctrine of inspiration. Besides, we should not assume that any of the accounts give us *every* detail of what the angels said. At times one was speaking while at other times two were speaking. Both angels address the women after they enter the tomb. In Matthew's account, it seems to imply that one angel addresses the women while he is sitting on the stone, but this is only apparent. Notice that the guards see him sitting on the stone and then faint; but by the time the women arrive, the guards are gone and the angel has moved to the inside of the tomb with another angel.

#### *e. The women's activity at the tomb*

This is where the resurrection story gets confusing. In John's account, Mary Magdalene appears completely alone (and in the dark) when she discovers the stone rolled away from the tomb. If alone, this would mean that this is *not* the same incident reported in the Synoptics with other women present. But if it is not the same incident, we will have difficulty explaining why Mary Magdalene *does not know* that the stone is rolled away from the tomb (Mk. v. 3). In other words, if Mary Magdalene had already discovered the stone rolled away before dawn (Jn. v. 1), the question in Mk. v. 3 makes no sense. It would only make sense if Mary Magdalene were not present with the other women, but Matthew (v. 1) and Mark (v. 1) indicate that she *was* present with the other women who come to the tomb to *anoint* the body of Jesus (cf. Lk. v. 1). (This anointing was in *addition* to the preparation of the body by Joseph and Nicodemus). Luke does not reveal the names of any women at this point in the narrative, but later acknowledges Mary's part in reporting to the disciples (Lk. v. 10; see below).

Again, if Mary (alone) discovered the stone rolled away while it was still dark, then she would not be asking with the other women at dawn, "Who will roll away the stone for us...? She would already know that the stone has been removed. It is clear from Matthew and Mark's report that Mary Magdalene is present in the company of other women who are first at the tomb. The confusion lies not in the presence of women with Mary Magdalene—a fact which John simply leaves out—but how to reconcile the rest of John's account with the Synoptics—an account in which John focuses on Mary Magdalene (see below).

At v. 3 in Mark's narrative, the women—including Mary Magdalene—are still wondering who will roll the stone away. Apparently, they did not know that the chief priests had requested and

received Pilate's order to place a seal on the tomb and put it under guard. If they had understood this, they would have known that access to the body was impossible. They did not know of the order, so they proceed with the purpose of anointing the body with more spices. As they come closer they realize that the stone has already been rolled away and the tomb is open, but they have not yet seen the angels. Furthermore, the guards are no longer there but have either gone into hiding or have gone to the chief priests to report what has happened.

Before they enter the tomb, Mary Magdalene reacts to the situation by leaving the company of women and rushing off to report the empty tomb to the disciples. Thus, at v. 4 in Mark's account, Mary Magdalene, along with the other women, notice the tomb open; but while the other women approach the tomb to enter it, Mary Magdalene runs to report the *missing body* to Peter and John (Jn. v. 2). Did she only presume that it was missing, or did she actually look into the tomb? The text seems to imply that she looked inside, but this is not specifically mentioned. Mary is no longer with the other women when they are addressed by the two angels (Matt. vv. 5-7; Mk. vv. 5-7; Lk. vv. 3-8) and moments later by Christ (Matt. vv. 9-10). The problem with this interpretation is that Matthew reports only two women going to the tomb, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Yet, the angel addresses the "women" in v. 5 even though Mary Magdalene has left the scene (if the above interpretation is correct). Therefore, we have to infer that Matthew assumes the presence of other women who are identified as Salome (Mk.) and Joanna (Lk. v. 10). After many hours of attempting to reconcile the Synoptists and John, I am indebted to Norval Geldenhuys and his commentary on *Luke* (p. 627) for the theory that Mary Magdalene left the original party to announce the empty tomb to Peter and John (Jn. vv. 1-2). The Synoptics do not report this.

The scene unfolds with the other women—including Joanna, the other Mary, etc.—entering the tomb while Mary Magdalene is running to report to the disciples. Notice that in her report, Mary Magdalene has nothing to say about angels or a message from angels (Jn. v. 2). She simply says that the body has been taken and "we" don't know where it is. Grave robberies were common in those days, and thieves would grab anything of value they could find (cf. Carson, *John*, p. 636). Even the powdered spices wrapped in the grave clothes would be valuable. She might have thought that Jesus' enemies had gone a further step in their hatred of Christ by stealing the body out of a rich man's tomb and dumping it in the Valley of Hinnom where garbage was normally burned. We can only speculate, but throughout John's account Mary Magdalene is consumed with sorrow over the missing body. She had departed before the angelic message that Jesus had risen and had not seen Christ as the others had done (cf. Matt. v. 9).

As soon as Mary Magdalene (from this point on referred to only as Mary M.) makes her report, Peter and "the other disciple whom Jesus loved" (John) start running to the tomb to see for themselves. We don't know how long it takes them to get there; but in the length of time Mary M. runs *from* the tomb and makes her report to the arrival of Peter and John *at* the tomb, the other women have already heard the angel's message and left rejoicing (Matt. v. 8; Mk. v. 8; Lk. v. 9).

#### *f. The angels' message and the women's obedience*

Notice that the angel's message in Matt. vv. 5-7 and Mk. vv. 6-7 is essentially the same. Apparently, this is the message of the angel who appeared as a young man in Mark's account. Before their arrival, he had come down from the stone and had entered the tomb. Luke reports that two men (i.e. two angels) appear suddenly. The differences are easily reconciled. Only Luke mentions the two angels (as John does later), and only Luke reports their sudden appearance. Each Synoptists provides different details. While Matthew and Mark report *part* of their message to the women, Luke reports *another* part.

One angel tells them that he knows they are looking for Jesus, but that He is not there but has risen. He then instructs them to see for themselves where Jesus had been lying. As they do this, they also must notice the same linen wrappings that Peter and John see moments *later*. Had someone stolen the body, they would have stolen it with linen clothes, spices, and all. They would not have stolen it without the grave clothes. He also tells them to report the resurrection to the disciples who then must go ahead into Galilee where they will meet Him. Together, the angels remind the women of Jesus' predictions of His arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection on the third day (vv. 6-7). This is why the angels preface this remark with the question, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead?" (v. 5) The women should have been looking for a living Savior, not a dead one.

When the angels remind the women of Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection, they remember His words (Lk. v. 8). They then leave the tomb "quickly" to obey the angels' instructions to report the resurrection to the disciples (Lk. v. 9; Matt. v. 8). Matthew reports them leaving the tomb "with fear and *great joy*" (v. 8). In other words, they *believe* the angel's words about Jesus' resurrection without actually seeing Him (so also Chamblin, p. 259), and are among those Jesus calls "blessed" in Jn. 20: 29. This detail is important for sorting out the difference between their visit to the tomb and encounter with the angels with Mary Magdalene's encounter and her persistent "*weeping*" (Jn. vv. 11, 13, 15). This is clearly not the same event. Perhaps as an acclamation (approval) of their faith, Jesus meets the women on their way before they report to the disciples (Matt. v. 9). The text implies that they have no trouble recognizing Christ, contrary to Mary M. who first believes Him to be a gardener (Jn. v. 15). *There was, therefore, no essential change in His appearance* although at various times after the resurrection He prevents identification (Lk. 24: 16). As they are worshiping Him, He gives them essentially the same message they have already received from the angels, to leave for Galilee where He will meet them. The repetition of the same message implies that they had not yet reported to the disciples. If they had already done so, there would have been no need to repeat the instructions. Thus, v. 9 simply means that they were on their way to report to them but had not done so.

Mark makes the addition, "But go, tell His disciples and Peter..." (v. 7), an addition which assures those reading this gospel that Peter had been fully restored to God's favor (Lane, p. 589). Mark also reports that the women were afraid and "said *nothing to anyone*" (v. 8) but their silence has no reference to the disciples. Furthermore, they meet Jesus on their way back who specifically tells them to report to the disciples.

(As for Mk. 16: 9-20, most *evangelical* scholarship *rejects* these verses as the ending of *Mark*. They are not contained in the earliest manuscripts. The reader is referred to technical commentaries to explore the question.)

For now, we will postpone the content of the women's report (Lk. vv. 9-10) for the reader will notice that Mary M. *participates* in this report. The words, "*all these things*" (Lk. v. 10) must refer to (1) the empty tomb and the presence of grave clothes, (2) the two angels and their announcement of Jesus' resurrection, (3) Jesus' appearance to them on the way. Mary M. is with them reporting "all these things"; yet, in John's account, she is still "weeping" over the missing body at about the same time Jesus is meeting the other women. Although she later joins them in the joyful report of the resurrection, her encounter with the angels and with Christ is separate from that of the other women.

### *g. Peter and John visit the empty tomb*

As stated above, we don't know how long it took Mary M. to run from the tomb to get Peter and John or how long it took them to run back to the tomb. But by the time they get there, the other women (Mary the mother of James and Joses, Joanna, et al) have left and were on their way to report to the disciples. Furthermore, they were detained by Christ along the way, and we don't know how long they were with Him. While all this is happening, Peter and John are running to the tomb (Jn. v. 3). John gets there first and sees the grave clothes from the door. Peter enters the tomb as soon as he arrives and is followed inside by John. Both of them see the linen wrappings up close smelling of spices and revealing the blood stains from Jesus' multiple wounds. Not only do the wrappings prove the body has not been stolen, but the face cloth is "rolled up". Even if robbers had taken off the grave clothes, they would not have gone to the trouble of folding up the clothing.

We may ask at this point: Where are the two angels? There is nothing in the text of Jn. vv. 3-10 suggesting the presence of any angels. They have either *left the tomb momentarily* or have made themselves *invisible*. While they reveal themselves to the women and announce the resurrection of Christ, there is no such appearance or announcement to Peter and John. Why not? We can only speculate, but my opinion is that the two disciples *should not have needed* any angelic appearance or message. Christ had predicted His resurrection on a number of occasions (Matt. 16: 21; 17: 22-23; 20: 18-19). The angels offer the women a mild rebuke for seeking a living Christ among dead people (v. 5), but they don't bother to reveal themselves to the disciples who by now should have *jumped* to the conclusion that Christ had risen. John *appears* to do just that (but maybe not; see below) without the angelic witness, but does Peter do likewise?

John saw these things and "*believed*" (*pisteuō*, generally used of believing the gospel, but there are some exceptions). While v. 8 by itself could mean that John simply believed Mary M.'s report of the missing body, the immediate context seems to suggest another interpretation. John adds, "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (v. 9). If John only means that he believed Mary M.'s report, there is no clear connection between vv. 8 and 9. But if John means that he believed in the resurrection, it follows that



although he had not understood the prophetic predictions of Christ's resurrection, he now believes because of the visible evidence (Morris, p. 834; Carson, *John*, p. 639). However, the first interpretation is not ruled out conclusively, namely, that John only believed Mary M's report of the missing body. Notice that no mention is made of Peter or John *rejoicing* over Jesus' resurrection (cf. Matt. v. 8). If John has truly believed, why not? There is also no effort on their part to console Mary M. at the tomb (Jn. v. 11), an interesting omission if John had believed that Christ had risen. Consider also the final report made by the women of "all these things" (Lk. v. 9) to the "eleven" which appears to them as "nonsense" (Lk. vv. 9, 11). How do we account for the fact that the *eleven* disciples considered the women's report as "nonsense" if, on the basis of Jn. v. 8, John believed in the resurrection? (See below for a possible explanation). Lastly, if John believed the resurrection, why doesn't he go straightway to the other disciples to tell them the good news? Rather, he goes home; and assuming he takes this good news to Mary, the mother of Jesus who is now living in his home, why does he not include this as a very important part of the story here? Further, in Luke's story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, they make no mention of John (one of the three prominent disciples) believing in the resurrection. They are still "sad" (Lk. 24: 17). But surely John's conviction that Jesus had risen should have been some encouragement to them. It apparently isn't, and we are left wondering why.

It is important to note that while John "believed" (whatever this means) *nothing* is said about *Peter* believing (cf. Carson, p. 639). This would be a strange omission, indeed, if Peter had believed. By the time John writes his gospel, he would have already found out whether, on this particular occasion, Peter had believed. If he had, then it would be odd if John had failed to include this fact in his gospel. Otherwise, the omission would have been an unnecessary depreciation of Peter's faith—as if his faith had not been depreciated enough already by his denial of Christ. Later on, we will see Peter visiting the tomb a *second* time (my opinion) to re-confirm what he saw on the first visit (Lk. v. 12, assuming that it is not the same visit as Jn. vv. 3-10). Thus, at this point in John's account, I don't think Peter had reached a firm conviction that Christ had risen from the dead (so also Carson, p. 639), and I am not convinced that John had, either. *Both* of them simply go home (Jn. v. 10), a very *non-climactic conclusion* to seeing the empty tomb, possibly the reason some expositors conclude that John only "believed" Mary's report of the empty tomb (cf. G.W. Broomfield, *John, Peter, and the Fourth Gospel*, p. 49, cited in Morris, p. 834, footnote).

#### *h. Mary Magdalene's encounter with the angels and Christ*

While Peter and John are running to the tomb, Mary M. is following behind them. Seriously, would she have stayed behind? As they leave the tomb and go home, she is standing outside the tomb still weeping over the missing body (vv. 11, 13, 15). If John has already believed, why does he make no attempt to console her or convince her of the resurrection? Maybe he doesn't see her standing there. Could she have been far enough away from the tomb not to be noticed by either of them? If Broomfield is correct, there is no basis for consolation. The body is gone, just as Mary M. has said, and that is all there is to it. Or, it could be that at this point John's belief in the resurrection is too tentative and hesitant to be of much consolation to Mary Magdalene, but this is too far-fetched. I am of the opinion that she is right outside the tomb (Where else would she be, hiding in the bushes?) and that Peter and John walk right past her without saying

anything. Why? Because there is nothing exciting to say—and because men can be very insensitive to weeping women!

Mary M. then decides to look into the tomb (v. 11), and as soon as she does, she sees two angels, obviously the same two who announced Jesus' resurrection to the other women (Matt. vv. 5-7). The interesting difference in John's account from the Synoptics is that there is no indication of *amazement or fear* on Mary M.'s part, even after being addressed by the two angels. When the other women see the angels, Matthew reports fear (vv. 5, 8); Mark reports amazement (vv. 5-6); and Luke reports terror and worship (v. 5). Perhaps her eyes are so clouded with tears that she does not see them clearly, but it is not likely that she would not notice two men in dazzling white clothes with the appearance of "lightening" (Matt.). Mary is consumed with grief, but the angels make no effort to chide her or unbraid her for unbelief, but offer only a *mild* rebuke, "Woman, why are you weeping?" as if to say, "If you would only believe, there would be no cause for weeping" (cf. Carson, p. 640). Unlike their encounter with the other women, the angels say nothing else. There is no need to, for in a moment she will see the risen Christ. She responds in v. 13, "Because they have taken away *my Lord*, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Notice the emphasized words, "my Lord". Though, in her estimation, dead, Jesus is still *her Lord*. His ignominious (shameful) death has not in the least diminished her estimation of Christ. Even dead, He is as glorious to her as He ever was. Therefore, what happens next should not be surprising.

"When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus." The word, "this" is emphasized in the Greek construction, "*This* she said..." Jesus was still her Lord, and her Lord would allow her to suffer no more. While Jesus has yet to reveal Himself to *any apostle*—even to the inner circle of Peter, James, and John—He has revealed Himself to a group of *women* and now Mary Magdalene, *another woman*, no one of any particular importance in His ministry or in the future of the church (cf. Morris, p. 836). The Bible *must be* the inspired word of God for John and the Synoptists to report their first witnesses in this manner. In ancient Palestine the testimony of women was not even allowed in a court of law; and they were, for all practical purposes, second-class (inferior) citizens in any culture (cf. Lane, p. 581; Green, p. 840, including footnote). Here, however, we have the inspired record of *our Lord's great estimation of women*. He is the true liberator of women, and He grants them the privilege of being the first witnesses of His resurrection and fellow heirs with men in the grace of life (1 Pet. 3: 7). As far as one's relationship to Christ, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3: 28)!

The account is much different from Matthew's report in which the women had already left the tomb and were on their way to the disciples when they met the Lord (Matt. vv. 8-9). Here, however, her response to the angels had scarcely left her mouth when she turned around and sees Jesus (v. 14; "When she had said this"). This is, therefore, not the same encounter with Christ as Matt. vv. 9-10).

Mary M. did not recognize Jesus (v. 14 compared with Matt. v. 9) maybe because of the tears in her eyes or because she was too exhausted with grief. Asking her the same question, "Woman, why are you weeping?", He also adds, "Whom are you seeking?" Morris remarks wittily, "She was looking for a corpse whereas she should have been seeking a person" (p. 838). Mistaking

Him for a gardener, she asks Him to reveal Jesus' whereabouts so she can have Him properly buried. Interestingly, it is not His first two spoken questions which attracts her attention, but the very utterance of her name, "Mary" (v. 16). At that moment, she recognized Him as "Rabboni". The true sheep hears the Shepherd's voice and knows Him (Carson, p. 641).

Although there has been much speculation about v. 17, the simple meaning is captured by Morris.

"Stop clinging to Me. There is no need for this, as I am not yet at the point of permanent ascension. You will have opportunity of seeing Me." (*John*, p. 841).

Jesus had earlier allowed other women to take hold of His feet and worship Him without any hindrance (Matt. v. 9). He would later tell "doubting Thomas" to touch His hands and side (Jn. 20: 27). Thus, there can be no deep, mysterious reason for forbidding Mary M. to touch His glorified body before His final ascension. He simply wants her to stop clinging to Him as if she will never let Him go for fear of leaving her again. But such is the love of this woman for the Lord to whom she owes so much. She fears to let Him out of her sight, but she need not fear any longer! He will not leave her as an orphan, but will soon send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide her (Jn. 14: 16-18).

"My brethren" is obviously a reference to the apostles as well as other believers (cf. Matt. 12: 50), not to His immediate family members some of whom (all of whom except Mary?) did not yet believe (Jn. 7: 5; James and Jude would join Him in faith later and author two epistles in the NT). Further, Jesus identifies His God with their God and His Father with their Father. All believers are adopted children of God the Father.

The account ends with Mary M. reporting her encounter to the disciples (v. 18). This is most likely the same report of Lk. vv. 9-10 because Mary M. is included with the other women (Joanna, Mary the mother of James and Joses, et al) who have now converged upon the disciples with their exciting story of the resurrection (v. 10). However, we do not have to assume that the *timing* of Mary M.'s report is the same. Luke could be conflating (combining) both reports into one when in actual fact they may have occurred separately. The report consists of (1) the testimony of the other group of women who first enter the tomb and see the angels, the angel's announcement of Jesus' resurrection, and the appearance of Christ (reported in the Synoptics) and (2) Mary M.'s individual report of her encounter with the angels and, most importantly, with the Lord Himself (John's gospel).

#### *i. The women's report to the disciples and Peter's second visit to the tomb*

Although thinking their report would be the most exciting good news the disciples ever heard, the women are sorely disappointed (Lk. v. 11). Their testimony was nothing but the foolish babbling of women—sheer "nonsense." The eleven apostles don't inspire us with faith in these stories. If the women are slow to understand and believe—and they are—the apostles are much slower. Come to think of it, no one really emerges as a hero of faith in these post-resurrection appearances, and this appears to be the main point of all the Synoptists and John. Writing their accounts many years later, they are humble enough to reveal their stubborn disbelief in Jesus' explicit predictions of His resurrection (see references above). However, the good and sovereign

Lord has built His church these last two thousand years upon the testimonies of those who were—and still are—slow to understand and hesitant to believe. His sovereign glory shines more brightly against the backdrop of our weakness.

The report in Lk. vv. 9-10 is made to “the *eleven* and to all the rest” but they (the apostles are implied from v. 10) did not believe them (v. 11). Based on the interpretation of Jn. 20: 8 above, this begs the question: But what about John? Had he not *already* “believed”? For the reasons given above, I still have doubts about John’s convictions about the resurrection at this point. And what about Peter? Had he not already seen the empty tomb and the linen wrappings? This, of course, assumes that Peter’s and John’s visit to the tomb occurs *before* this report is given—the position I have taken. Admittedly, Luke v. 12 could be interpreted as Peter’s *first* visit to the tomb rather than the *second* implying that Luke omits any mention of John accompanying Peter. But this scenario presents more problems that it solves. If this is Peter’s first visit to the tomb—the one reported in Jn. vv. 3-10—how do we explain the fact that Mary M. is *no longer weeping* outside the tomb but *announcing exciting news* with the other women (Jn. v. 11 compared with Lk. v. 10)? This would be especially difficult to understand when her encounter at the tomb appears to be so closely related to Peter’s and John’s discovery of the grave clothes. Another possibility is that Luke (v. 12) reported Peter’s discovery out of chronological sequence, but what purpose would this serve?

It is inconceivable to me that the report in Lk. v. 12 is Peter’s *initial* discovery of the empty tomb. If this is true, then a considerable period of time must have elapsed between the women’s first discovery and Peter’s and John’s first visit to the tomb. But the account in *John* seems clearly to indicate a sense of urgency on their part. *As soon* as they hear Mary’ M.’s report of an empty tomb, they immediately *run* (v. 4), not walk, to the tomb to see for themselves. If they had waited until all the women—including Mary M.—report the news, a considerable length of time would have passed before they bothered to check out the empty tomb themselves. At that point, they would have walked, not ran. Considering Peter’s impulsive nature, I don’t think this lapse in time is possible. Further, John’s account in vv. 1-2 contains *only* the report of the empty tomb and nothing concerning angels or the risen Christ, a very odd omission if this is the *same* report as Lk. vv. 9-10.

It is true that Peter’s return home (Lk. v. 12) sounds very similar to Jn. v. 10, but this time he goes home “marveling at what had happened”. Did he now believe? Based upon the testimony of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus later in the evening (see below), I still do not believe that Peter had come to a firm conviction of the resurrection. He had confirmed what he had seen on the first visit—an empty tomb with linen wrappings. Were those really blood-stained grave clothes smelling of spices or did he look at them carefully enough the first time? (Don’t we all have to take a second look from time to time, especially of something which seems puzzling?) Remember that neither he nor John had seen the angels for themselves. Their understanding of the situation was based solely upon an empty tomb, linen wrappings, and the women’s report—and Jewish men assumed the inadequacy of women’s testimonies.

However, the disciples had *no excuse* for unbelief because Jesus had told them ahead of time on a number of occasions that he would be turned over to the Gentiles, killed, and would rise from the dead the third day. There was also the testimony of the OT (see below). The only barrier to

belief substantiated by the evidence was *unbelief un*-substantiated by contrary evidence. There was simply no evidence indicating anything other than a resurrected Christ.

The main difficulty with this proposed sequence of events is John's statement in 20: 8 that *he, John*, believed. This is difficult to reconcile with Lk. 24: 9-11 which seems to implicate *all eleven* of the apostles in disbelief. One solution is that Luke is making a *generalized statement* about the apostles as a whole group and not about every individual apostle. Hendriksen maintains that "the eleven" had become a technical term for the Synoptists who speak of the remaining apostles as the eleven and no longer the twelve. This is especially convincing from Lk. 24: 33 in which Luke mentions "the eleven". This was the same resurrection appearance reported in Jn. 20: 19-24 in which Thomas was absent (note especially vv. 24, 19, "evening" compared with Lk. 24: 29, "toward evening"). Thus, the mention of "the eleven" is not a definite assurance that *all* eleven apostles are represented. On the other hand, why doesn't Luke mention John's dissenting opinion from the others in 24: 11 when it would seem to be a very relevant detail in the story?

Another option is to take John's belief as simply *belief in Mary's report* (see above). In this case, both he and Peter were *still skeptical* of the resurrection up until the women's report (including that of Mary M.) in Lk. 24: 9-10 and possibly afterwards. By the time evening had arrived, the two disciples going to Emmaus were still saddened about all that had happened concerning the crucifixion although they were fully aware of the women's announcement of the resurrected Christ (cf. Lk. 24: 17-24). If John had believed, why do they mention only the women and not John (vv. 22-24)? At this point then, I am not convinced that either Peter or John believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. Perhaps further investigation of the texts will help the reader decide for himself.

#### *j. Christ's appearance to two disciples on the road to Emmaus*

On "that very day"—the day of Christ's resurrection, the first day of the week (v. 21)—two other "disciples" who were not apostles were traveling to Emmaus. One was named Cleopas (v. 18). The "things which had taken place" (v. 14)—according to their recollection—included the crucifixion (v. 20) and the testimony of the women (v. 23). Verse 24 makes mention of Peter's and John's discovery of the empty tomb. *Conspicuously absent* is any mention that some women *had actually seen* the risen Christ Himself, including Mary Magdalene. This adds another *confusing obstacle* to reconciling the Synoptics with John's account.

This resurrection appearance must have happened after the women's encounter with the angels at the tomb. This much is evident from vv. 22-23, but it also *appears* to have occurred *before* the women encountered the risen Christ. But how can this be, for Mary M. is among the women reporting in Lk. vv. 9-10. Let us assume that at this point the larger group of women who had visited the tomb *without* Mary M. had not yet seen the risen Christ, but had only seen the angels. This reconstruction of events is possible from Matt. vv. 8-10. It is possible that Jesus appeared to them *after* they had *already reported* the angels to the disciples. (Appearance of the angels to the women—report to disciples; Lk. vv. 9-10—appearance of the risen Christ. The first and third event are separated in time by their report to the disciples in Lk. v. 9) This is not the interpretation I have given above, but it *is* possible from Matthew's account alone (although not

probable from Matt. v. 10; see commentary above). If correct, this would account for the fact that the disciples on the road to Emmaus **do not mention** the appearance of the risen Christ but only the angels (v. 23). The women had not yet seen Christ.

But assuming this to be the case, how do we account for the **separation in time** between Mary M.'s encounter with the angels and her encounter with Christ? In other words, how could Mary M. encounter the angels, report this encounter to the disciples, and then encounter the risen Christ at a **later** time? (Encounter with angels—report to the disciples; Lk. vv. 9-10—encounter with Christ). **John's account in vv. 10-18 precludes (makes impossible) any such separation between Mary M.'s encounter with the angels and her encounter with Christ.** Both encounters are part of the **same** event. Immediately after being addressed by the angels, she turns around and sees Christ (v. 14, "When she had said this..."). Further, the content of her report in Jn. v. 18 has nothing to do with the angels. It is a report that she has seen the risen Lord and that He "had said these things to her", not that the angels had told her about the resurrection. They didn't have to tell her (and there is no indication from the text that they told her) for she sees Christ with her own eyes only moments later.

Yet, Luke reports the women, including Mary M., "telling **these things** to the apostles" (v. 11). For the sake of the argument, even if "these things" did not include the resurrection appearance of Christ **to the larger group of women**, it **must** include Christ's appearance to Mary M., for the risen Christ is the **sum total** of all she had to report—at least according to **John's account**. Further, there are just too many differences between Mary M.'s encounter with Christ and that of the other women to consider them the same resurrection appearance. Immediately after speaking with the two angels, Mary M. turns around and sees Christ. Again, notice the verse, "**When she had said this**, she turned around and saw Jesus standing *there*..." Second, she did not immediately recognize who He was, but there seems to be no indication in Matthew's account that the women did not recognize Him as soon as they met Him.

There is also the element of time. When Jesus meets the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, it was "getting toward evening" and the day was "nearly over" (v. 29, that is, the evening of the first day of the week; cf. v. 13, "that very day", the day of the resurrection). It was very early in the morning when the women visit the tomb to anoint the body with spices. It was still early in the day when Peter and John respond to Mary Magdalene's report that someone had taken the body, and we have every reason to believe from John's account that Mary M. followed Peter and John to the tomb and was left outside the tomb weeping when they left. Therefore, it was still early in the morning when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. Yet, in Lk. 24: 29 the day is almost over, many hours since Christ's first resurrection appearances to Mary M. and the other women. The women's report mentioned in vv. 22-23 **must** have contained the eye-witness accounts of the risen Christ.

Based upon the weight of John's account, I cannot accept the possibility that the disciples on the road to Emmaus **had not been told** of His resurrection appearances **because they had not yet occurred**. Instead, I conclude that Luke is continuing to highlight the **differences in faith between Jesus' male and female disciples**. Although apprised (made aware) of Jesus' resurrection (two separate appearances—one to the larger group of women and another to Mary M. alone), **the male disciples continue in unbelief while the women rejoice**.

This helps explain why Christ chides the two men for their unbelief, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (v. 25) Admittedly, He does not specifically chide them for disbelieving the women, but for failure to believe the OT predictions of His resurrection. However, their failure to believe the OT predictions is especially egregious (outstanding for its negative character) considering the eye-witness accounts of His resurrection. Thus, it made no difference to the male disciples whether the women reported *angels* or the *risen Christ*. It was all one and the same to disciples who had little understanding of Jesus’ expressed predictions of His death and the predictions of the OT. Luke’s emphasis upon the unbelief of the *eleven* as well as other *male* disciples proves that without the continuing appearances of Christ to the eleven apostles and others for *forty days* (Acts 1: 3), there would have been no hope for the propagation of the Christian faith. (A religion led by women would not have survived in the ancient world, nor was it ever God’s intention.)

Beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus then gives the two disciples a condensed course in Biblical Theology—the history of redemption from Genesis to that very moment (v. 25). Along with so many Jews, they had understood only *one side* of the many predictions concerning the Messiah. They had rightly believed in His exaltation as predicted in Ps. 2, Isa. 9 and 11, Zech. 9: 9, and so many other OT texts; but they had forgotten that He would also pass through a period of humiliation and suffering expressed in Isa. 53, Ps. 22, Zech. 11: 13, etc. They doubtless understood that Jesus was *The Prophet* predicted in Deut. 18: 15, but they had failed to recognize that “as God’s prophet, Jesus must fulfill the destiny of the prophets: rejection, suffering, and death. They thus misunderstand the prophetic pattern in the Scriptures that Jesus fulfills (Green, p. 846). It was a classic case of *selective understanding*. Those parts of the Bible which appeal to us are more readily understood and believed, but the parts which are distasteful are misunderstood or simply ignored. They presupposed (assumed without proof) that the Messiah could not suffer. *Jesus’ admonition (vv. 25-26) provides definitive proof that the crucified Messiah should not have been a stumbling block to the Jews*. The prophets had made the necessity of the Messiah’s suffering sufficiently plain. Luke’s emphasis, therefore, is upon the resurrection as the fulfillment of the OT scriptures.

Within this short story, there is also a significant statement concerning *the necessity of the atonement of Jesus Christ*. Did Christ really have to die on the cross, or was this one means among many for God to solve the ancient problem of man’s sin without sacrificing His holiness and justice? It was, indeed, “necessary” for Christ to suffer and be crucified (v. 26, a rhetorical question demanding a positive answer). Had there been *any other way* to bring us to God, then surely God would have chosen *another way* (see my discussion of the necessity of the atonement in *Systematic Theology*).

Upon their insistence, Jesus remains with them through the evening meal. As yet to the two disciples, Jesus is *just another disciple* of Christ who happens to know the Scriptures better than they do. Verse 16 makes it clear that they were prevented from recognizing Him, but as He broke bread with them their eyes were opened to recognize who He was (v. 31). But, too late! As soon as they do, He vanishes in thin air from their sight, a miraculous *disappearance* similar to His miraculous *appearance* in a locked room eight days later (Jn. 20: 26).

### ***k. Christ's Appearance to Ten Apostles and the Promise of the Holy Spirit***

#### ***(1) The arrival of the disciples from Emmaus***

Losing no time to announce their news to the eleven, the two disciples left Emmaus and journeyed the seven miles back to Jerusalem at night, for there was no time to waste (v. 33; cf. vv. 13, 29). When they arrived they found others gathered with “the eleven”, but Thomas is missing (Jn. v. 24). As noted above, “the eleven” had become a technical term for the apostles just as “the twelve” had once been (Mk. 3: 16; Lk. 8: 1; Jn. 6: 67). The statement in v. 34 is *not* the address of Cleopas and the other disciple from Emmaus who would not have heard that Christ had appeared to Simon Peter and in any case would not have made this announcement with Simon Peter present in the room! Rather, before these two men announce *their* good news, others already present were announcing the news *they* had received from Simon Peter (Geldenhuis, p. 635). Sorry “fellas”, but your news is now old news.

#### ***(2) Christ's appearance to Peter and its significance***

The appearance of Christ to Simon Peter is *new* news which has not been reported by any of the Synoptists or John until now. When did this occur? Christ must have appeared to Peter sometime between the women's report in the morning (Lk. vv. 9-11) and the evening before the eleven had gathered together. Obviously, Peter would not have gone back to the tomb after the women's report (Lk. v. 12) if he had *already* seen the risen Lord. What would be the point? The Apostle Paul mentions Peter in 1 Cor. 15: 5 with the same order as Luke. Christ appeared to Peter, and then He appeared to the twelve later. Why we have so little information about this appearance is a mystery. It is quite interesting that while Matthew and John emphasize Jesus' appearance to the group of women and to Mary Magdalene individually, Luke makes only a passing comment about Jesus' separate appearance to Peter, and none of the Synoptists and John mention His appearance to James, the Lord's brother (see below).

Nevertheless, the brief reference to Peter is packed with weight, for ***Christ makes no individual appearance to any other apostle numbered with the original twelve***, not even to the disciple “whom He loved” in a very special way, the Apostle John. By appearing to Peter *first* among the apostles, Christ intends to fulfill His prophetic pronouncement that “upon this rock”—Peter, the first among equals—He will build His church (Matt. 16: 18; see commentary above lest you think I have drifted into Roman Catholicism). Peter is not the hierarchical head of a new ecclesiastical organization, but as the first among equals he will be the predominate missionary-apostle for the first twelve chapters in the *Acts of the Apostles*, later giving place to that apostle “untimely born” the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 15: 8) whose presence dominates the rest of *Acts* (cf. Green, *Luke*, p. 851. “The twelve” in 1 Cor. 15: 5 refers to Jesus' appearance to “the eleven” (minus Thomas) in Lk. 24: 33-49 and Jn. 20: 19-25. The technical term “the twelve” is used by Paul in full awareness that Judas was dead and that Thomas had not been absent on that occasion.

#### ***(3) Christ's appearance to James, His brother***

Paul also mentions another appearance to James, one that is not mentioned in the Synoptics or *John* (1 Cor. 15: 7). Who is this James? Some commentators have concluded that this is not



James the brother of John, but James the son of Mary and Joseph, Jesus' sibling brother (Gordon D. Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 731; also Charles Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, p. 316). We can only speculate, for the text and context do not conclusively prove that this is not James the son of Zebedee (Mk. 10: 35). However, the *context of 1 Cor. 11* does give us a significant hint. Paul is building a case for the resurrection of believers *based upon the resurrection of Christ*. The resurrection of Christ is established on the basis of eye-witness testimonies which Paul enumerates in vv. 5-8. Of the five hundred Christians Christ appeared to at one time, most of them were still alive to verify their testimony, but some had died (v. 6). It was to Paul's advantage to mention testimonies of those who were *still alive*, especially apostles. Peter was still alive, but James the brother of John had already been executed by Herod Antipas (Acts 12: 2). James, the Lord's sibling brother, on the other hand, had risen to a prominent place of leadership in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12: 17; 15: 13; 21: 18; especially Gal. 1: 19; 2: 9) and was still alive at the time Paul wrote this epistle. Thus, it would serve the interest of his argument to mention the testimony of James, the Lord's brother, who was still living and well-known to all the churches.

The question now arises: Why did Jesus make a resurrection appearance to James, his brother, even when he had not believed in Him during His earthly ministry (Jn. 7: 3-5)? The answer is that James was a lost sheep not yet in the fold whom Jesus must gather before His ascension (Jn. 10: 16). But further, as indicated above, Christ had chosen him to become one of two principle leaders (next to Peter) in the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15 in which he and Peter make the principle speeches during the council at Jerusalem). We are not told *when* Jesus appeared to James, but the tradition of the church preserved by Jerome says that it occurred immediately after Christ's resurrection (Hodge, p. 316).

#### ***(4) Jesus' glorified body of flesh and bone and its significance for the resurrected believer***

Getting back to Lk. 24, after the announcement about Peter, the two men from Emmaus corroborate this report with their experience on the road to Emmaus (v. 35). At that point Jesus suddenly stood in their midst miraculously (cf. Jn. v. 19; "when the doors were shut"). Discerning their fear and their thoughts that He was only a ghost (a "spirit" without a real body), He invites them to examine His body for themselves. Jesus' *glorified* body was made of flesh and bone. His hands and feet still bore the nail-prints, and His side revealed the scar from the spear thrust—inescapable proof that He was the risen Christ. But if this was not enough proof, He then eats some broiled fish right in front of them. They knew the *fish* was real, so if the fish did not appear dangling in mid-air as He ate it, this would be an assurance that His body was real.

The heresies of Docetism and Gnosticism arose in the first century of the church and gained strength in the second century. The Docetic heresy insisted that Christ only "seemed" (from the Greek word, *dokeō*) to have a real body, but this was only a phantom or spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 12: 22; 2 Cor. 10: 9; Heb. 4: 1 for other uses of *dokeō*). Therefore, the Docetists claimed that while some disciples thought they were seeing the body of Jesus, they were only seeing a spirit. Inspiring this account in *Luke* and *John*, the Holy Spirit anticipates this heresy with unambiguous testimony of the bodily existence of Christ even *after* His resurrection—even adding a bit of humor to go with it (Lk. v. 37). The disciples only "thought" (also *dokeō*) they were seeing a

*spirit*, but they were actually seeing *the real human body of Christ*. As the saying goes, “Things are not always what they *seem* to be.”

Both texts in *Luke* and *John* have far-reaching theological significance. If Christ’s post-resurrection body is a real body of flesh and bone, then our resurrection bodies will also be flesh and bone. We will have bodies which are much like our present bodies but with certain *substantial* improvements. As noted earlier from Chamblin, Jesus’ resurrected body was *more* substantial, not *less*, and could pass through less substantial materials like the stone entrance to the tomb and locked doors in the same way as some earthly materials pass through others—water through air, a steel pipe through water (*Matthew*, p. 259). It is also imperishable (1 Cor. 15: 42) and thus not subject to disease or death. It is, therefore, accommodated to a more substantial existence in the new heaven and earth and is re-created to go the extra mile (or extra billion miles), never get tired and never wear out—according to the original blueprint before its sabotage by the Fall. Personally, I plan to take up hang-gliding in heaven since one mistake, or a thousand, will no longer be fatal. I will simply dust myself off and try again!

#### ***(5) The importance of empirical evidence of the resurrection of Christ***

Throughout this event, Jesus was more than accommodating to the disciple’s disbelief—as He was eight days later to Thomas’ disbelief. Based upon the eye-witnesses to the resurrection, belief in the gospel would not pose an insurmountable difficulty for timid disciples. Jesus was now building the case for the resurrection which would be sorely needed for the future testimony of the nascent (being born) church (see Paul’s testimonies in *Acts*; also Green, p. 855). Notice v. 48, “You are witnesses of these things.” And while this empirical proof alone was not sufficient to bring people to faith in Christ, it certainly functioned to remove needless arguments against the resurrection which lacked any substantiated evidence to the contrary—arguments to the effect that “miracles cannot happen”, which are *not* arguments.

While the skeptics may claim all these resurrection stories as nothing more than the reconstructions of wishful thinking, they fail to account for the fact that Jesus’ disciples have been willing for 2000 years to sacrifice their time, material comforts, personal fortunes, and even their lives for a dead(?) Savior. This will not do. No, Jesus is a *living* Savior and nothing else can account for the sacrifices that have been made in His name for two millennia. If the counter-argument is made that Muslims have made similar sacrifices for Allah, the argument is well-noted, but nothing in the history of the Muslim faith (a very faint imitation of the OT worship of Yahweh) compares with the self-sacrifice and missionary activity of the Christian church—nothing. Furthermore, it cannot be successfully argued that the Quran comes even close to the consistency and genius of the Holy Bible, nor that frolicking in bed with 70 virgins is a close approximation to the eternal, spiritual fellowship with the Triune God and His people; but these are things which cannot be treated here.

#### ***(6) The internal witness of the OT concerning the resurrection of Christ***

As with Cleopas and his traveling companion, Jesus reminds the others that everything written about Him in the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms (i.e. the entire OT) must be fulfilled (v. 44; cf. Gen. 12: 3; 17: 4-5; 1 Kings 8: 41-43; Ps. 22; 69; 72: 11; Ps. 118; Is. 2: 3; 11: 10; 49: 6;

53; 66: 18-19; etc., some of these texts cited in Hendriksen, *Luke*, p. 1075). We do not find a specific OT reference to the Messiah being raised from the dead after three days (cf. v. 46). Christ's purpose is not to provide specific proof-texts which can be checked off a list but, rather, to point the disciples to the *entire witness of the OT*, the same method He uses when speaking to the two disciples from Emmaus. When one carefully examines this witness, everything will add up to the conclusion that He is the promised Messiah who must not only suffer but must be restored (cf. Ps. 2; esp. v. 12, doing homage to a *dead* Messiah is hardly necessary). The truth of God must remain unbroken. If He cannot *predict* the future, and if these predictions are not fulfilled in the future, then we *have* no future. Only a God who declares the end from the beginning can assure us that we have eternal life in the new heaven and earth. Any god less than this cannot guarantee salvation since he cannot guarantee that one event will follow another.

We must notice the connection between the prophetic witness of the OT, its fulfillment in Christ, and the gospel—on the one hand (vv. 46-47)—and the apostolic witness on the other (v. 48). Jesus says emphatically, “*You* are witnesses of these things”. They are *eye*-witnesses of the truth that He is the fulfillment of the OT and that He has risen from the dead. If this is true, then *the gospel of repentance is also true*. Thus, the verification (proof) of the gospel depends upon the *historical fact* of the active and passive obedience of Christ and His resurrection. If the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are only myths, then the gospel is also a myth.

#### *(7) Divine illumination necessary for interpreting the evidence*

Divine illumination was necessary to understand what had been hidden to them previously in the OT (v. 45). Spiritual truth cannot be discerned with the natural, unaided mind, but only by the mind illumined with spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 2: 14; Matt. 16: 17). As noted above, empirical evidence of the resurrection is not sufficient by itself to bring anyone to faith in Christ. It certainly helped to “jump-start” the church, and it was essential in laying the basis for the future mission of the church. Nevertheless, the witness of the Holy Spirit for *interpreting the evidence* was indispensable to saving faith *then*, and especially *now* when no eye-witnesses are still living. Before the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8: 9), is given at Pentecost, the glorified Christ provides the needed interpretation and illumination necessary for their comprehension of His person and work from the beginning to the end of the OT scriptures.

#### *(8) The gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations*

In v. 47, Christ summarizes the *basic message* which must be preached to the nations. Notice carefully that this is not the “easy-believism” characteristically preached among the nations today, the “gospel” (falsely so-called) which omits any mention of repentance (cf. Walter J. Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic*). The good news is only good news when one understands the bad news. The bad news is that men are sinners who have broken God's moral laws, His standards, and who are worthy of eternal punishment. They are rebels against God who will not stand for Christ to rule over them. To invite them into the kingdom of God still clinging to their old gods, their rebellion, and their immoral way of life is a contradiction of the message Jesus consistently taught and so teaches here (cf. Matt. 7: 21-23). Jesus invited people to

renounce their sin and follow Him, an invitation which meant, for some, selling their possessions. But if they failed to do so, He did not go running after them with diminished requirements more palatable to their individual tastes—"Excuse me, maybe I was a little too demanding. Would you consider selling your wrist-watch?" The gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins is the *only* gospel Jesus has *authorized* to be preached among the nations. It is the only message of salvation.

"Beginning from Jerusalem" indicates that the church consisting of all nations would be born in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 1: 8) in spite of the seemingly overwhelming opposition of the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests, and in spite of the complicity (partnership) of the Roman government in putting Jesus to death. *No power on earth*, religious or secular, can prevent the spread of the gospel, and the gates of hell cannot withstand its onslaught. The disciples did not have to evacuate Jerusalem, seemingly held in the strangle-hold of Satan, to begin their mission. Satan possessed no territory "off-limits" to the preaching of the gospel, and the nations could no longer be deceived (Rev. 20: 3). On the contrary, Satan was the one on the defensive, and when the Holy Spirit arrived at Pentecost, the routing of his forces through the missionary expanse of the gospel would officially begin.

#### ***(9) The promise of the Holy Spirit***

But the fortresses of Satan will not be overcome with human effort alone, but by the power of God *enabling human effort and rendering it effective* (v. 49). The disciples must not get in a hurry and rush out to accomplish their mission. By now they had been sufficiently humiliated by self-effort and the realization that *none* of them were "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven". Even now they are hiding behind closed doors "for fear of the Jews" (Jn. v. 19). Thus, when they are now told to wait for power from on high, they are listening. (There is nothing like failure to grab our attention.) This power would be granted to them only a few days from now at Pentecost (v. 49), and they should not embark on their evangelistic mission until that happened. In John's account Jesus identifies "the promise of My Father" by saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

What did Christ imply by this statement? Did the disciples actually receive the Holy Spirit at this moment, or did they receive Him at Pentecost? Since the account in *Luke* is parallel with that in *John*, we may legitimately rely on the additional information found in *Luke*. He says in *Luke* that the promise of the Father is coming, but that they must wait in the city until they receive it (Lk. v. 49)—implying a *future* endowment. Therefore, at this moment He was simply *preparing* them for the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, but not actually *bestowing* the Spirit at the present time. His action was in anticipation of the Spirit. Carson concludes that the act of breathing on them (v. 22) was "a kind of acted parable pointing forward to the full endowment still to come" (*John*, p. 655).

#### ***(10) The activity of the apostles in forgiving and retaining sins***

*John 20: 23* sounds a lot like John's version of Matt. 16: 19 and Matt. 18: 18 (see commentary above), but as Carson has rightly observed, itinerant preachers like Christ have been known to repeat themselves (p. 655). So here, Christ repeats something that needs repeating. The verbs,

“shall have been bound” and “shall have been loosed” in *Matthew* are perfect participles. The verbs “have been forgiven” and “have been retained” in v. 23 are perfect indicative verbs indicating ***an action completed in the past with continuing results in the present***. Thus, the actions of forgiving or retaining have already taken place in heaven according to the strict parameters or standards of forgiveness eternally established. Forgiveness of sins or the lack of it is on the basis of genuine belief in the blood atonement of Christ or the absence of such belief inevitably registered in one’s behavior—for one will act on what he truly believes. As the apostles preach the ***true*** gospel, one’s response to this gospel will result in forgiveness or continuing condemnation. In the same way, the ***confessing church*** has in its possession the ***true apostolic gospel*** as the only means of forgiveness with God—registered in *Matthew* as the keys to the kingdom of heaven. If that gospel is received, one’s sins will be forgiven, but if it is rejected, his sins will be retained and will serve as the basis of condemnation on the Day of Judgment. Since every believer has been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4) and every unbeliever passed over to pursue his own course (Rom. 9), the present activity of the church in forgiving or retaining sins on earth is simply the ***continuing result*** or confirmation of the same ***completed*** activity in heaven.

As in *Matthew*, so also in *John*, Jesus does not in any sense give the administration of salvation or damnation into the hands of an ecclesiastical organization with hierarchical government—an institution that, historically, has miserably failed to believe and apply the gospel consistently. Rather, this administration is given into the hands of the ***confessing community of God’s people***, the church which preaches the true gospel, the ***only gospel*** applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts of sinners. It must be emphasized that the real activity of forgiving or retaining is ***God’s alone***, a fact which is indicated by the passive voice of the verbs (“have ***been*** forgiven” and “have ***been*** retained”). The authority of the confessing community in the administration of forgiveness or lack of it is strictly derived from Him (Carson, *John*, pp. 655-656).

### ***1. Christ’s appearance to Thomas—Jn. 20: 24-31***

Thomas is often unduly criticized as “Doubting Thomas”. But there was also “Doubting Peter”, “Doubting John”, “Doubting James” and “Doubting Everyone Else” among the apostles with the possible exception of John. Thomas is really no worse than all the others (well, maybe a little worse), and he has yet to see Jesus in the flesh, something the others had to see to believe that Christ had actually risen from the dead. When the women had reported the risen Savior, the apostles had accused them of spreading “nonsense”. They are now getting a dose of their own medicine.

For Thomas, at least, “seeing is ***not*** believing.” He also had to touch (v. 25b), and anything less than tangible evidence would not supply the assurance he needed. The persistent doubt of the apostles serves a very important apologetic function. These men were not gullible fanatics who were ready to believe anything and accept any evidence, however flimsy, to support their claims of a resurrected Savior. Matthew, Luke, and John all testify to the hesitancy of the apostles and others in the broader community of faith to believe the resurrection. They were, in a word, skeptical, and this skepticism proves that nothing less than seeing the risen Christ up close and personal would suffice to change their skepticism into confidence and fearless witness.

...Jesus’ resurrection was not an ***anticipated*** episode that required only enthusiasm and gullibility to win adherents among Jesus’ followers. Far from it, they were still hesitant; and their failure to understand his

repeated predictions of his resurrection, compounded with their despair after his crucifixion, worked to maintain their hesitancy for some time before they came to full faith. Jesus' resurrection did not instantly transform men of little faith and faltering understanding into spiritual giants (Carson, *Matthew*, p. 594, emphasis mine).

Jesus did not immediately appear to Thomas, but allowed him to stew in his doubting soup for seven more days. Perhaps it was one thing for the rest of the apostles to doubt the women. They were, after all, men of their times and still affected by cultural prejudice against women. But doubting the eye-witness testimonies of ten apostles, plus many other disciples who had been present that evening, was another matter altogether. (So let him stew! He deserves it!) Finally, after eight days, Christ appears suddenly through shut doors the same way He appeared before (v. 26). No doubt Thomas had been told how Jesus just passed through the doors into the room, but he had not believed that part of the story, either. Adding to the embarrassment of the moment, He uses Thomas' very words against him, exposing the nail-prints in His hands and the scar in His side, challenging him to believe, "Don't be a skeptic, Thomas" (v. 27).

What Thomas needed is what he got—tangible proof (v. 28). There were others who needed less evidence, and Jesus offers him a mild rebuke for needing more (v. 29). Who were these who believed without seeing? Not the ten apostles (with the possible exception of John) who saw Him on Easter evening in a locked room. Not Peter or James, the Lord's brother, who saw Him alone sometime between morning and evening. Not Mary Magdalene who saw Him on Easter morning. They include the women who had visited the tomb early in the morning. Although they saw Him only moments later, their enthusiasm and joy before meeting Christ exhibited belief (Matt. v. 8; see comments above). Christ is also speaking of the broader group of disciples who had believed the apostles' eye-witness accounts and perhaps the eye-witness accounts of the women. There were probably scores of women believers who had rejoiced to hear stories of the risen Christ from Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses (wife of Clopas), Joanna, and others before seeing Him personally (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 6)—and I am certain these women were more than happy to share their story!

Jesus' acclamation of faith without sight is used by John as an encouragement to all generations of believers from that day to the present who believe that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. As Peter later assures us, "and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1: 8). Yet, our faith without sight is based soundly on the testimony of those who *have seen*, for John assures us,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, *what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life*—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1: 1-3).

John did not include every sign Jesus performed either before or after His resurrection (v. 30). Had he done so, it would have been a much bigger book (21: 25)! But the ones he did include have one singular purpose, to inspire belief in Jesus Christ the Son of God to the end that we might have eternal life in Him (v. 31).

### *m. Christ's third appearance to some of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias—Jn. 21*

I will not be commenting on this passage except to make note of v. 14. This was the **third** time Christ had appeared to a group of His apostles since His resurrection. This takes place after His appearance to Thomas. Note 21: 1, “After these things...”

***n. Christ’s great commission to the apostles and other brethren—Matt. 28: 16-20***

***(1) The timing of the great commission***

Matthew gives us no temporal connection between this story and the one in vv. 1-10. The story of the guards reporting to the Sanhedrin (vv. 11-15) is a parenthesis between vv. 10 and 16. In v. 10, Jesus had repeated the instructions given by the angels to take word to the “brethren” to leave for **Galilee** where they would see Him (cf. v. 7; Mk. v. 7). Now we find the disciples finally doing as they are instructed, but when? A comparison of this text with those in *Luke* and *John* suggests that the Galilean appearance on a mountain must have occurred **after** the resurrection appearances we have already discussed. In Matt. vv. 16-20 there is no mention of **surprise or amazement** as there was on Easter evening when Christ appeared to the ten apostles (Lk. 24: 37; note the words, “**startled and frightened** and thought that they were seeing a spirit”). But on the mountain in Galilee, when the apostles see Him they **worship** Him without any hint of hesitation (so also Carson, *Matthew*, p. 594). Although “some were doubtful” this does not refer to the apostles (see below).

Further, the timing of this occasion must be during the daylight hours. Jesus would not have required them travel to Galilee and meet Him on a mountain during the night; but most importantly, He would have wanted them to have the full benefit of daylight to recognize Him as Jesus, the risen Savior. If during daylight, it could **not** have been the daylight hours of the first day of the week for the following reason: It would make no sense for them to be worshipping Him on the mountain without any hesitation while full of fear and amazement hours **later** in a locked room hiding for fear of the Jews (Jn. v. 19). By the time the disciples met Him on the mountain, their fear of the Jews had apparently subsided to the point that they now felt comfortable traveling in the open. Reading the account as it stands, it does not logically follow that this incident occurs before Jesus’ meeting with the disciples in the closed room (Lk. 24, Jn. 20). Carson places it after the eighth day when Christ appears to the ten plus Thomas (*Matthew*, p. 594), and this is also reasonable since Christ would have wanted **all eleven** of the apostles present to receive the great commission directly from Him, not third-hand from the other apostles.

The question may arise why Jesus had not already met the “brethren” in Galilee before now, over eight days since the resurrection, when the command to meet Him had been issued the morning of His resurrection. The reason is obvious: The apostles had not believed in the resurrection and, therefore, had ignored the command until now.

***(2) Those present at the Great Commission***

Who, then, are the “some” who are doubtful? Admittedly, Matthew mentions only “the eleven

disciples” who “proceeded to Galilee”, but this does not prove that they were *alone*. Jesus did not specifically limit the instructions about going ahead of Him to Galilee to the apostles. He issued these instructions to the “*brethren*” (Matt. v. 10). He also gave Mary Magdalene another message for the “*brethren*”, not specifically for the eleven (Jn. 20: 17). This, of course, begs the question of whether “brethren” (*adelphos*) applies only to the eleven apostles, but Matthew’s use of the term is much less specific (Carson, p. 589; cf. Matt. 18: 15, 21, 35; 23: 8; 5: 22-24; 7: 3-5; especially 12: 49-50; 25: 40; all texts cited by Carson). I agree with Carson that the “some” who are “doubtful” (Matt. v. 17) refer to the “brethren” (Matt. v. 10) who were part of the broader group of disciples who had *not yet* seen the risen Lord (cf. Carson, p. 594). The two men from Emmaus, Cleopas and his friend, had been given the unique privilege along with other disciples who were not apostles of seeing Christ on Easter evening (cf. Lk. v. 33b; “the eleven and those who were with them”). However, there were many others who were part of this broader community of faith who had not seen Him but doubtless had heard stories of His resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would have been included in this number as well as many anonymous (unnamed) “acquaintances” who had been watching the crucifixion at a distance (Lk. 23: 49; Matt. 27: 55). Most likely they had also heard about the command Christ had given the women about meeting Him in Galilee. It is altogether possible that the Great Commission is given in the presence of the “five hundred” Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 15: 6 (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 997; Carson, p. 589). ***If this is correct, it is significant that not only the apostles but the broader community of faith—possibly 500 people—is given the command to make disciples, baptize, and teach in the name of the Triune God.***

Although we don’t know exactly when the Great Commission took place, it is sufficient to know that it is not the ascension story reported in *Luke* and *Acts* which takes place on the Mount of Olives near Bethany, only six miles or so from Jerusalem in Judea, not in Galilee (Lk. v. 50; Acts 1: 12). For the ascension story, see below.

### ***(3) The location of the Great Commission***

Matthew simply ignores Jesus’ other resurrection appearances in and near Jerusalem in order to focus on the one in *Galilee* exclusively. The reason may have something to do with Matthew’s emphasis throughout his gospel. At the beginning Matthew reports Jesus growing up in Nazareth of Galilee and beginning His ministry in Galilee of the Gentiles, the despised region of Palestine consisting of many Gentiles (Matt. 2: 23; 4: 12-16). The emphasis on the despised and lowly and Jesus’ warnings that the kingdom would be taken away from the Jews and given to the despised Gentiles both contribute to Matthew’s theme (5: 3; “poor in spirit”; 21: 43). Matthew reports the presence of women at the crucifixion, women who were the first to arrive at the empty tomb, and Jesus’ first appearance to *women*—marginalized members of society who were not important even in Jewish culture (Matt. 27: 55-56; 28: 1-10) (Carson, p. 590). Truly, Matthew wishes to emphasize the fact that through the gospel, God is raising up the meek and lowly to an exalted position never seen before in the history of the world.

Galilee was also the important center of Jesus’ earthly ministry. Most of His time was spent in Galilee. Four out of five (four out of six if you included Matt. 23: 1-39) major discourses occur in Galilee. Finally, it was in Galilee that the magi find the Christ and worship Him as He is now being worshiped by His disciples. This forms an interesting *inclusio* within which the entire life



of Christ is bracketed: the worship of the magi—Matt. 2: 1-2 [The life, death, and resurrection of Christ] the worship of His disciples (Matt. 28: 17).

It is, therefore, appropriate that the **command** to make disciples of all the **nations** should occur in Galilee (cf. Chamblin, p. 261). It is also appropriate for the Great Commission (or the Great Command) to take place on a **mountain**. The Sermon on the Mount, Christ's instructions concerning daily living in the kingdom of God, is given from a mountain, possibly the same one in v. 16. Christ also appeared in His transfigured glory on a mountain (Chamblin, p. 261; cf. Matt. 5: 1; 17: 1).

#### ***(4) The basis of the Great Commission***

The foundation or basis of the Great Commission is the authority of Christ (v. 18). There was nothing fundamentally new about Jesus' authority, an authority which had been evident throughout His ministry (cf. Matt. 7: 29; 8:9; 9: 6, 8; 10: 1; 21: 23, 24, 27; cited by Chamblin, p. 262). However, through His atoning death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, Christ had been given universal authority over the heaven and the earth and a name above every name. Refusing to receive the kingdoms of this world by by-passing the cross, Jesus receives both heaven and earth legitimately through His active and passive obedience (Chamblin, p. 262; cf. Dan. 7: 13-14; Phil. 2: 9-11; Matt. 4: 8-10; cited by Chamblin).

We do well to remember the source of our authority as ministers and missionaries. Preaching upon our own authority will ultimately lead to embarrassment and disillusionment if our message is rejected, or pride if it is received. But if we remember that all authority for making disciples is derived from Christ, we will be able to leave success or failure in His hands alone. He alone is able, and He can do as He pleases with His own gospel, whether making it an aroma of life to life or one of death to death (2 Cor. 2: 14-16).

#### ***(5) The task of the Great Commission***

The task of Jesus' followers is to **"make disciples"** (*mathēteuō*, a verb) not "make converts" who merely profess to believe in Him. This is clear from v. 20, **"teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"**. Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the **initial phase** of discipleship which continues throughout one's life as **learning-how-to-observe His teaching**. The teaching-how-to-observe dare not be omitted lest apostasy become the common state of the church. Given the testimony of church history and the present antinomianism (lawlessness) rampant in the modern church, this should go without saying.

The main verb, "make disciples" is the only imperative verb in vv. 19-20; and many have translated the commission accordingly, "As you are going, make disciples...." There is something to be said for this interpretation in that it presents discipleship as the natural on-going activity of the church independent of rigid programs and formulas. The church, by its very nature, is a mission agency. However, the participles "going", "baptizing", and "teaching" derive some imperatival force from the main verb; and we can scarcely avoid the continuing obligations of going, baptizing, and teaching (Carson, p. 595). There are many who believe the task of missions is complete once the church has been firmly established in a given location. There are even those today who view expatriate (foreign) missions as passé, something

belonging to a bygone era and no longer needed in a time when the gospel has been taken to virtually every corner of the world. But unless the church is well-taught in Christian doctrine and practice, it is not well-established and is subject to extinction in any locality (e.g. Turkey, modern Asia Minor, the cradle of Paul's missionary endeavors). Further, if there is a shortage of national Christian teachers who are able to provide this instruction, then the global church community is obligated to fill in the gaps. We are one body of Christ and, therefore, obligated to assist our fellow brothers and sisters in the specific area of need (2 Cor. 8: 14)—and in ways which truly help, not hurt.

Disciples must be made of all *nations* through the process mentioned in vv. 19-20. Satan no longer has the ability to deceive the nations (Rev. 20: 3), and we can be confident that if we are faithful in this task, God will reward our efforts with results. By mentioning “nations” rather than people, Jesus is not implying that every political entity or country must be discipled, as if the mission is not accomplished unless every country is “Christianized”. The word for nation is *ethnos* (from which we get the word, “ethnic”) which could be translated “people-group”. On the other hand, the term should not be stripped of its corporate and global significance. When Jesus invaded the earth in time and space, He did not come to rescue a hand-full of individuals from hell. He came to take over His creation and restore it to the full potential for which He created it. Thus, every people-group and nation is designed to reflect the glory of God expressed in that particular culture. The righteousness and glory of God is a prism with many angles reflecting the light of His truth in many colors and in many ways. The glory of kings will be brought into the gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21: 24 and context; cf. Ps. 102: 15; Is. 62: 2). In this we see the continuity between the New Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant in which God promises Abraham, “And in you *all the families* of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12: 3b).

#### **(6) *The Triune God of the Great Commission***

Making disciples must be done in the *name* of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Note that this name is singular, not plural. God is three persons but one God, and His singular name emphasizes His singular essence shared by all three persons (cf. Ex. 3: 3, in which God gives Moses His name indicating His essence or reputation). Christian missions—including preaching, mercy ministries, etc, (see Matt. 10)—will only be “Christian” if they are accomplished in the singular name of the Triune God. If people are drowning in a hurricane or tsunami, Muslims and Christians can join arms together in rescuing the perishing—no questions asked. However, when coordinating ongoing relief efforts which last months and even years, Christians should desire *no other name* exalted and praised than the Triune God. There is no other God but the Triune God, and Jesus Christ is His Son, the second person of the Trinity.

#### **(7) *The promise of the Great Commission***

Jesus is returning to His Father in heaven, but He is not leaving His disciples as helpless orphans to accomplish an impossible task (Jn. 14: 18). He will be always present with them even to the end of the gospel age and until His return. This is the Immanuel principle, “God with us” found in Matt. 1: 23, forming another *inclusio* in *Matthew*: “God with us”—Matt. 1: 23 [Jesus' life, death, and resurrection] “I will be with you”—Matt. 28: 20b (Chamblin, p. 262).

*n. Christ's Ascension into Heaven—Lk. 24: 50-53*

Hendriksen suggests a division between Lk. v. 43 and v. 44, saying that Christ spoke the words from v. 44 to v. 49 at the ascension, not on the evening of His resurrection (*Luke*, p. 1074). Given the similarity of Lk. v. 49 with Acts 1: 4, this is entirely plausible (reasonable), but I prefer to divide the text between v. 49 and v. 50 and postulate (pose a theory) that Christ either repeated these words shortly before His ascension or that Luke rehearsed what Christ had said on this earlier occasion. “And He led them out as far as Bethany” (v. 50) does not have a strong temporal connection with v. 49 and sounds like something which could have occurred later than the discourse in the closed room (vv. 33-49). We know that the ascension occurred forty days later, but even the wording here allows a temporal break between v. 49 and v. 50. Furthermore, the *subject of Jesus’ discourses* in vv. 25-27 and vv. 44-46 is the same leading the reader to believe that these two discourses occurred *on the same evening* in response to the obtuse (slow-learning) disciples—including the ten apostles—who did not understand the OT. Since Christ had already coached the two men from Emmaus on how to interpret the OT scriptures concerning the Messiah, He simply continues this coaching with the larger group that evening. The content of His teaching leads me to connect vv. 33-49 with the events of Easter day, the first day of the week.

Luke gives us a more complete account of the ascension in *Acts* than in *Luke*. Acts 1: 3 informs us that Christ made appearances to His disciples over a period of forty days before His permanent ascension into heaven—ten days before the Day of Pentecost which occurred 50 days after Passover. Acts 1: 4-5 rehearses what Christ had said on Easter evening at His first appearance to the ten apostles (cf. Lk. v. 49), but He may have repeated Himself on this occasion with the additional reference to John the Baptist. Acts 1: 6 implies that the disciples had gathered together again, this time at the ascension, asking another question. After seeing Christ on various occasions for forty days, the disciple’s confidence was steadily growing, leading up to their favorite subject, the kingdom of God, which they were convinced was imminent (close at hand) as a consequence of His resurrection. Furthermore, they are still convinced this kingdom must resemble the earthly kingdom of David in which God would liberate them from the dominion of foreign oppressors (“restoring the kingdom to Israel”).

Patently, Christ informs them that they were on a “need-to-know-basis”. Everything they needed to know would be revealed them, but they would not be informed about things they didn’t need to know (v. 7). It was clear, however, that they had much to learn about the *kind* of kingdom Jesus had inaugurated and what it would look like in the years to come. They had no idea concerning the suffering ahead of them. The important thing is that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them not many days from then, thus empowering them for witness beginning in Jerusalem, spreading to all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (v. 8). When He had said this He was lifted up into a cloud out of their sight. Two angels then inform them that Jesus’ return would be in the same manner as His departure (cf. Rev. 1: 7). Although now separated from their Master, there is now reason for worship and rejoicing (v. 52). The fact that they continue worshiping in the temple indicates that there is no radical departure from the normal places of Jewish worship in the temple and synagogues (v. 53). This radical break would come later after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

