

BREAKFAST WITH
LUKE
A Thematic Exposition

By Marshall Mead

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Marshall_Mead@icoc.org

Foreword

God provided his people with manna for breakfast during the forty years of their wandering to remind them of this crucial fact: “*Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*” **Deut. 8:3b**. It is essential for every man or woman of God to set aside time to be nourished from the Word of the LORD. In a world where the love of most has grown cold, it may be unwise to even leave the house before we allow the scriptures to set our hearts and minds on things above.

But is our Bible study accomplishing this? Do we actually feel nourished after a routine time spent in the scriptures? Did we really dig deep enough in the Word to soften and mold our hearts? Are God’s commands really on our minds throughout the day – governing the way we think and perceive the world around us? Does our study match the depth of passion described in **Psalm 119**?

Psalm 119:15-16, 32, 97

*¹⁵I meditate on your precepts
and consider your ways.*

*¹⁶I delight in your decrees;
I will not neglect your word.*

*³²I run in the path of your commands,
for you have set my heart free.*

*⁹⁷Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.*

It’s been said that no matter how many times you read the Bible you will never fail to discover new insight. Unfortunately, that’s not necessarily true. A deeper knowledge and love for the Word depends on your continual willingness to *think* and *learn* while you read. A first time reader plowing through the scriptures will no doubt be flooded with new stories, new ideas, new questions, and new convictions. They will be inspired almost effortlessly. Their faith in God and understanding of his commands will expand rapidly. And even after scanning through an identical chapter or passage for the third or fourth time, a new light will turn on from time to time. Our questions will get answered, our beliefs reaffirmed, and our convictions deepened.

However, if we do not put forth an increasing effort to further grasp the scriptures, our Bible study can plateau, becoming bland and legalistic. We begin to hunger for any small morsel of new insight and then feel nourished again for days when we finally get it. Our expectations for our own Bible study diminish. Unaware of this, we begin to rely solely on the ministers and church leaders to supply us with new understanding and reveal the deeper truths of the scriptures.

I can’t recount the number of times I have systematically read the Bible morning after morning without any new revelation. I may have read three or four chapters in Revelation. But unfortunately, I had been too lazy to slow down and

think about what I was reading. The same level of intensity that once carried me to new heights of spirituality was now just enough to sooth my callused conscience. It allowed me to move on with my day, telling myself that I had started my morning as any good Christian should. I was content simply knowing I had read the Bible. The desire to actually study the scriptures and learn from God's Word had somehow become lost in the shuffle. Many afternoons and evenings I would catch myself trying to recall what I had read earlier that morning. The warning lights should have gone off then. But I simply pledged to dig a bit deeper the next morning and I would continue on with that day's busy schedule – which often included teaching the Bible to others! (Pharisee alert!)

Maybe you relate. If so, I hope you find these notes on the book of Luke useful. For that is what this book is – simply my personal notes that accompanied my daily study in the book of Luke for the past couple years. Years? Yes, it took me the better part of two years to read and compile my notes on twenty-four chapters of a book I have read perhaps a dozen times before. In the past I could have breezed through Luke in little more than a week. Yet I will never forget this time. I made so many new discoveries that refreshed my mind. The Word replenished and even transformed many of my convictions. My study in Luke renewed my zeal for deeper knowledge of God's Word and it forever changed my approach to daily Quiet Times.

In years past, I was so concerned with how many chapters a day I read. This outweighed the question of whether or not I had learned anything that would help my walk with God. This time through Luke, I made sure to dig in each day and leave time to meditate, think, and wrestle with the scriptures and their meaning. Sometimes I'd only progress with just a few verses or even a few words for two or three days. Often I would head out on tangents that would send me searching through scripture references from Genesis to Revelation and back again. I wanted to identify common themes throughout the Old and New Testaments and relate them back to the rich passages in the Gospel of Luke. I would begin my mornings with genuine anticipation. For the first time in a while, the Bible was like a gripping book that I just couldn't put down. I was always excited to join my reading at the point I had stopped the day before. I began setting aside more and more time to study because the usual interval I ordinarily spent now whisked by too quickly.

For those of you who have stopped counting how many times you've read the Bible, I urge you to push yourself to become a thinker again. When you have your time of daily personal Bible study, do just that – STUDY! Try to set aside a quiet forty-five minutes or more and involve a concordance, an English dictionary, a Greek and Hebrew dictionary, a Greek Interlinear New Testament, a variety of translations of the scriptures, and certainly a notepad. Or do like I do – simply fire up your computer and have all of these Bible cross-references as well as the scriptures in various translations on CD-ROM and write all your notes in a document file. (It may not be how the ancient scribes or the Massorettes set about it, but it works for me.) The key is getting some kind of a system down that works for you.

Don't worry if you only get through a couple scriptures and spend the rest of the time looking up definitions, cross-referencing verses, simply meditating, or scribbling out a page or two of notes. At times you will want to back out of your intense study and read through the same passage in context like a book or a letter. I would be surprised if you didn't begin to absorb more in your time with God's Word than if you had legalistically plugged through four or five chapters in a half hour. If you get in a rut, take a break for a day or two. Spend a week or a month in the Psalms and the Proverbs. Go through the book of 1 John and get rebuked for a couple days. Then return to your study.

For those of you who consider yourselves Bible novices, I hope these notes are useful to you as well. Although the mysteries of the scriptures are endless, the principle truths of the Bible are quite elementary. There are many reoccurring themes that are woven in scripture from beginning to end. These I have tried to highlight. I have also tried to demonstrate the consistency between the Old and New Testaments, for the same God inspired them both. *Please read the verse references that I have listed in each segment of this exposition*, for they are often listed to demonstrate the harmony between the Old and New Testaments and the never-changing nature of our sovereign and merciful God. Fundamental Christian principles like the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, the plan of salvation, the kingdom of God, and others I have also given ample weight. I have attempted to encompass a good measure of doctrine that is important for each disciple of Jesus to understand and to be able to teach. I have also tried to tackle some of the more difficult passages in Luke with some very practical solutions. Again, many other verses are referenced that will help us grasp the fullness of Christ as revealed in Luke's Gospel.

I have also posed several postulations in this exposition that I cannot positively substantiate. These are meant to stimulate thought, not doctrinal debate. I have offered many theories in this book that can be argued just as convincingly to the contrary. If you disagree, that's fine. At least I got you to think. After all, if the world could not contain the amount of books that could be written about the life of Jesus, can we not enjoy the freedom to speculate on what it must have been like to have actually witnessed the brief time in which God became flesh and dwelt among us? Furthermore, this book takes a much greater license than do many commentaries. In addition to presenting facts, scripture references, and postulations, I have also tried to include some paragraphs of guidance, helpful hints, and challenges to today's disciples. This is perhaps outside the bounds of an unbiased scriptural commentary – thus the name *thematic exposition*.

If the preceding paragraph sounded like a disclaimer, it should very well be taken as such. This book is at best a help that may enable a student of God's Word to better discern the meaning and context of the scriptures. At worst, there are some if not many assumptions and opinions I've made that do not represent the scriptures as God intended it to be understood. At critical points of doctrine and faith, I wholeheartedly believe this not to be the case. In any event, the Bible alone is the inspired Word of God, which spells out the path to eternal life. Our

goal when reading it should be to lay hold of the truth, not to interpret as we see fit. I hope it cannot be said that I am guilty of this wrong.

The essential issues of doctrine such as the deity of Christ, the inspiration of the scriptures, the establishment of the New Covenant, the kingdom of God, the revelation of Christ's church, and the plan of salvation I feel an overwhelming burden to be biblically precise and correct. I can easily credit this portion of the commentary to those whom God has placed in my life to instruct me in the scriptures and others in the church from whom I have learned an immeasurable amount. Indeed a good portion of this book is simply an arrangement of what was passed on to me by my many teachers. However, I have also given myself some freedom to explore the more ambiguous points in Luke's account and the possible ways in which the apparent differences in the four Gospels and their unique elements can be harmonized.

All that being said, I hope you find your time in this book useful and enriching. More than that, I pray that the Spirit of God continues to direct and sustain your personal Bible study so that you may remain forever rooted in the saving faith that is ours as disciples of Jesus.

Marshall J. Mead

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THE MESSIAH

Breakfast with Luke

Chapters 1 - 6

Introduction to the Gospel of Luke

Luke 1:1-4

In the opening of his narrative Luke indicates that many others had already written various stories and accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The most authoritative undertakings on this subject would become known as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four chronicles of the life of Jesus rapidly became the most reproduced of all others in the first, second, and third century before they received their canon in the fourth.

We can be sure however that the Bible is not the only source of writing that exists regarding the life of Jesus or the early church. A vast array of apocryphal books and writings from the first and second centuries (and beyond) has endured through the years. Proof of their inspiration and authenticity however is far less weighty than the twenty-seven books and letters that have comprised the New Testament for the some sixteen centuries. One narrative on the life of Christ has been associated to the Pharisee convert Nicodemus. Other preserved Gospels have been attributed to Thomas, called Didymus, and Philip. A first or second century work known as the *Gospel According to the Hebrews* claims to contain expressions of Jesus not found in the four Gospels. In London's British Library is a fragment of papyrus (author unknown) with a short story of Jesus taking water with his hand and sprinkling it on a patch of dirt, which immediately thereafter produces a plant. We can neither confirm nor deny the authenticity of this story. The existence of all such material simply confirms what Luke states in **vs. 1**, that many sources of writing about our Lord began to emerge in the years and decades following his crucifixion.

We have no reason to conclude that there exists any substantial product of ancient writing regarding the life of Christ whose reliability and preservation even remotely compares with the works of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Regarding Luke's account, we can be certain of its divine authority and historical accuracy for several reasons. Of significant importance is the fact that the eyewitnesses that have handed down their testimony about the Lord are still living at the time his book was penned. Luke was not collecting passed down folklore or second and third generation accounts. His sources saw the Lord. They sat at his feet when he preached and surrounded his table when he ate. Because of his missionary career with Paul, Luke had exposure to the original apostles and many

other key eyewitnesses. As an educated man and a doctor by trade (**Col. 4:14**), Luke would have certainly been very judicious and detailed in his research. He would be forced to decipher between valid testimony, exaggeration, and pure fabrication. In his own words, Luke's account was drafted as a result of a careful investigation. His desire for integrity in his account would have led him in pursuit of the verifiable facts. We can be confident that the narrative of Christ given us by Luke is the product of a highly selective research process and many years of meticulous and heartfelt labor.

The precise date in which the Gospel of Luke was published is not known. A likely time for its origin occurs during the time of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, a period of two years (58-60 AD) as stated in **Acts 24:27**. This suggestion provides Luke with the time necessary to investigate the life of Christ, examine many eyewitnesses, compile any previous research, and construct his draft. This puts the authorship and release of the book of Luke around 60-61 AD, making it the second of the four canonical Gospels to be published¹. Some believe that Luke's account was not finished and released until he reached Rome, placing it as the third Gospel to be published following Mark. Rome is the sure location of the release of his second volume, commonly titled *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Luke addressed his first and second works to the same Theophilus, from the Greek "friend of God"². It is possible that this name was generally given to all of his would-be readers, as his two books would soon be recopied and circulated throughout the churches of Christ. However, the title "most excellent" assigned him in **Luke 1:3** lends itself to the notion that this was a specific person, perhaps even an official of some kind. As recipient of this first work – a narrative of the life of Jesus of Nazareth – it may have been his duty to oversee its reproduction and dispersal to the Christians. It seems reasonable to assume that this person was a convert to Christ who held an influential title and had the financial means necessary to facilitate such a task. For Luke to entrust this friend with his original work we might assume that the two were closely bound. It may be that this Theophilus was converted to Christ by Luke himself – either in Antioch, Troas or Philippi (cities in which Luke was known for ministering prior to this written work) – and was indebted to Luke forever for the love and instruction given him. Or perhaps the common bond between them was a doctor-patient relationship in which Luke the physician had in some way treated and helped this person of nobility, again leaving him forever grateful for Luke's involvement in his life.

Whatever the case, as friends of God ourselves we have before us a wonderful summary of our Lord's life and his commands. Without a doubt the Holy Spirit was intimately involved in the scripting and preservation of the words contained within Luke's Gospel. It is more than just a historical account of a great man of God. If understood, believed, and obeyed these very words have the power to lead many to salvation. For disciples, the Gospel of Luke is able to greatly expand our knowledge of Christ and deepen our roots of faith in him. Just

¹ Matthew is dated around 50 AD, Mark around 67 or 68 AD, and John around 80 AD

² Greek 5384; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

as Luke spent years to carefully compile this account, let us take the time to carefully examine and consider the result.

Read Acts 1:1-2



Chosen by God

Luke 1:5-13

In the scriptures and other ancient writings the technique often used to date an event was based on the current reign of kings or political figures. Often the writer will cite the specific year of their period in office. Herod the Great was officially king or ruler over Judea from 37 BC until 4 BC.

The Messiah was soon to come into the world and God was selecting the key players in this most crucial era. He had chosen Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth to play a part and was now going to reveal his plan to them. They were both descendants of Aaron the High Priest. Zechariah was thus given the charge to serve as a priest before the Lord as would any male born to him. Until now, he and Elizabeth remained childless. This was not as a result of sin or God's punishment for Luke makes sure to mention that they walked before the Lord in righteousness. There existed twenty-four priestly divisions who ministered for a total of two weeks per year. Because of the numerous priests within each division, it is likely that this would be one of Zechariah's only opportunities to actually go into the temple to offer incense to the Lord within his lifetime. He was selected by the casting of lots, a process often used in the scriptures to make known the will of God. And in fact the will of the Lord prevailed as Zechariah was chosen and would soon discover the wonderful providence given him.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had to deal with the personal pain and outside scorn of having no children. Perhaps others judged them as having received the consequences of some great sin. Nevertheless, they were soon going to have the child prophesied about since the time of Isaiah. The angel Gabriel himself had been sent to announce this most significant event. Fear was a common biblical response to the appearance of an angelic host and Zechariah was no exception. The temple was the most holy place for the Jewish people and he was most likely visiting the inner area near the altar for the first time in his life. We might easily assume that Zechariah was quite anxious even before the appearance of Gabriel.

How incredible it is to be personally chosen by God to accomplish his perfect will on earth. As disciples we must stand in awe at the fact that God has individually chosen us. He has woven us into the fabric that is his kingdom to accomplish a destiny already planned out long before it was revealed to us. God has left nothing to chance. Even our parents, our siblings, our upbringing, our heritage, our race, our culture, and the cities and countries of origin are all part of the unique plan God has for our lives, just as it was in Zechariah's case. How useless it is to look back on these things that are beyond our control with regret or

self-pity. They have made us who we are today and they are directly related to the ways that we will be used by the Author of life.

Isaiah 45:9

Isaiah 64:8

Jeremiah 18:4-6

Romans 9:21



The Elijah of God

Luke 1:14-17

Zechariah would have quickly recognized Gabriel's instructions regarding the son that was to be born to him. He was to undertake a lifelong vow of separation identifying with the regulations of a Nazarite described in **Numbers 6:1-20**. The regulations included the refusal of any fermented drink and no razor would be allowed touch his head or face. This vow of separation was usually done on a voluntary basis and for a set time in order that a man or woman might consecrate himself or herself as holy to the Lord. The only biblical figures who were Nazarites from birth were Samson (**Judges 13:7**), Samuel (**1 Samuel 1:11**), and now the forthcoming John the Baptist.

Gabriel also prophesied that John would be a joy and a delight to his parents. Surely as he matured and they saw his devotion to the Word of God they would have been pleased. However, if they lived long enough to see John grow older their love for him would have caused their hearts to ache. John would be called into the desert and into lonely places. He would eventually be killed because of his controversial and radical convictions.

John was given a destiny quite similar to that of Elijah the Prophet. He was to turn the hearts of a straying and morally decaying nation back to the Lord their God. He would be given a portion of God's spirit and power that was similar if not identical to that possessed by Elijah. So was John the Baptist in fact the reincarnation of Elijah the prophet? Had Elijah returned to earth in the flesh dwelling in John, the son of Zechariah? Was it necessary for Elijah to return physically before the coming of the Messiah? Let's look first at the scriptures.

Similar mission:

1 Kings 18:36-37

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. ³⁷Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Luke 1:17

And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous--to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Similar look:**2 Kings 1:8**

They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist."

The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

Matthew 3:4

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

Fulfillment of Prophecy:**Malachi 4:5**

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

Matthew 11:14

And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come.

Matthew 17:10-13

The disciples asked him, "Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?"

¹¹Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. ¹²But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." ¹³Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

According to Jesus John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the coming of the prophet Elijah. That does not necessarily mean that John was Elijah nor did Jesus say that in fact John was the second coming of Elijah. We must choose between two conclusions: either John was a prophet who had come "in the spirit and power of Elijah" as Gabriel announced or John was in fact the reincarnate of Elijah as some even today still hold.

The scriptures clearly point to John as a unique person and prophet who, much like the prophet Elisha, inherited a portion of the spirit and power of Elijah. John's mission was similar to the mission given Elijah – to turn the hearts of a lost

nation back to their God. John and Elijah had a lot in common and though they were separated by several centuries they lived somewhat similar lives. They even dressed alike. They both wandered around in lonely places. They both had disciples and yet they stood very much alone in the world. But if we insist that John was actually the reincarnate of Elijah we are faced with some hefty biblical hurdles – including John's own denial. Let us again look at the scriptures.

John 1:20-23

He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ."

²¹They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

²²Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

²³John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' "

Who does the Bible say that John the Baptist is? John is identified as the one spoken of by the prophets Isaiah and Malachi. The original prophecies are as follows:

Isaiah 40:3

A voice of one calling:

"In the desert prepare

the way for the Lord;

make straight in the wilderness

a highway for our God.

Malachi 3:1

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

Fulfilled with the coming of John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:3

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the desert,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him.' "

Luke 7:26-27

*But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷This is the one about whom it is written:
"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."*

Neither Isaiah nor Malachi mentions Elijah by name in these verses nor does Isaiah say that this voice will be the voice of Elijah. John himself was very aware of who he was both in a biblical and historical perspective. He spoke quite frankly about it as we've just read in the book of John. He was the fulfillment of the prophecies that required Elijah to come before the Lord. He was given a measure of the spirit and power that Elijah possessed. But unlike Elijah, John did no recorded miracles. Nevertheless, he was given the power to turn the hearts of a lost nation back to their God. He was as the prophets foresaw: a messenger, a voice in the desert, sent to prepare the way for the Lord.



The Sin of Faithlessness

Luke 1:18

It is not hard to see why Zechariah reacted with such disbelief regarding the angel's announcement. In fact, he reacted much like Abraham and Sarah did when told that they were to give birth in their old age. If the father of our faith was allowed some moments of unbelief we can be sure that all of God's people will fight this sin.

Despite that disclaimer, faithlessness never pleases God. He has little patience for it. The faithlessness of the Israelites in the desert aroused his anger. God began to send prophet after prophet to his people to deal with their unbelief. Because they persisted in their waffling, God eventually rescinded his covenant with Israel and Judah. We see here that the angel Gabriel also has little tolerance for it. Soon, we will see Jesus overlook many of his disciples' shortcomings while sharply rebuking their faithlessness.

Why is faithlessness one of the most deadly sins of the Bible? No other sin thwarts God's plan for mankind faster than unbelief. No other sin limited Jesus' power to do miracles, as exhibited by the inhabitants of his hometown of Nazareth. Faithlessness hinders the power of God on earth. Although it is the sin of pride that God opposes, it is the sin of unbelief that opposes God. How often do we confess faithlessness? How often do we confront others on their lack of belief in the power and promises of God? How quickly do we even recognize the sin of unbelief in our lives or in the lives of those around us?

On the other hand, nothing else excites, inspires, and pleases God more than having great faith! Nothing else enables us to tap into the limitless power of God more than our faith. Paul writes in **2 Cor. 5:9** *"So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."* Our goal is simply to please God with our lives, even unto death. And faith is the key to pleasing God, as written in **Hebrews 11:6** *"And without faith it is impossible to*

please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." The man or woman who wishes to please God must learn to master the sin of faithlessness and to believe the promises of God, no matter how overwhelming and unfeasible they may seem.

Genesis 17:17

Genesis 18:13

Jeremiah 3:8

Matthew 13:58

Mark 16:14

Compare with:

Matthew 15:28

Luke 7:9

Rev. 2:10

Rev. 17:14



I am Gabriel

Luke 1:19-20

Zechariah presented the angel with a question, "*How can I be sure of this?*" and was immediately given an answer. The angel replied, "*I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.*" That was all that needed to be said. Zechariah could be totally sure about the prophetic words spoken to him because one who stood in the very presence of the Creator now stood in his presence. Yet because his question was born out of doubt and disbelief, he was rendered mute as a consequence until the birth of his child. We will soon read that Mary too questioned Gabriel as to the plausibility of the incredulous announcement given her (**Luke 1:34**). Certainly a child born to a virgin was even more preposterous than a child born in old age. Unlike an older-aged birth, no scriptural precedent regarding a virgin giving birth existed. Nevertheless, there must have been a distinction in the heart and faith behind Mary's inquiry and the unbelief that pervaded Zechariah's contest.

The angel Gabriel is mentioned by name in but two books of the Bible yet he is easily the most recognized angel alongside Michael. Several angel sightings are referenced in the scriptures and perhaps he was in attendance there as well, though we cannot be sure. What was Gabriel's role? What is his importance in a historical and spiritual perspective?

In the book of Daniel, Gabriel is sent with a message from heaven in response to Daniel's prayer.

Daniel 8:16

*And I heard a man's voice from the Ulai calling,
"Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of the vision."*

Daniel 9:21

while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice.

In Luke, Gabriel is chosen to deliver the most anticipated news of all time to both Zechariah and to Mary.

Luke 1:19

The angel answered, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

Luke 1:26-27

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

It is clear that one of Gabriel's roles is that of a messenger from heaven sent on behalf of Jehovah God to bring news or prophecies concerning the future. He also was sent to give Daniel the meaning of a vision. However, Gabriel has more responsibilities than that of a messenger. Assuming it is Gabriel who again appears to Daniel with a message from heaven in **Daniel 10** we find out that he is also a mighty warrior within the spiritual realms. The following is an excerpt from the Bible Knowledge Commentary³:

Daniel 10:12-14. Encouraging Daniel not to be afraid (cf. v. 8), Gabriel explained the reason for the delay in God's answer to Daniel's prayer. When Daniel first began fasting and mourning in response to the vision of a great war (vv. 1-2), God had dispatched Gabriel with a message for him, but Gabriel was hindered by the prince of the Persian kingdom (cf. "the prince of Persia," v. 20). Since men cannot fight with angels (Jacob's wrestling was with God, not an angel; cf. comments on Gen. 32:22-32), the prince referred to here must have been a satanic adversary.

God has arranged the angelic realm in differing ranks referred to as "rule, authority, power, and dominion" (Eph. 1:21). Gabriel and Michael have been assigned authority over angels who administer God's affairs for the nation Israel (cf. Michael in Dan. 10:21; 12:1; Jude 9). In imitation Satan has also apparently assigned high-ranking demons to positions of authority over each kingdom. The prince of the Persian kingdom was a satanic representative assigned to Persia. To seek to prevent Gabriel's message from getting to Daniel, the demonic prince attacked Gabriel as he embarked on his mission. This gives insight into the nature of the warfare fought in the heavenlies between God's angels and Satan's demons to which Paul referred (Eph. 6:12): "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities,

³ J. Dwight Pentecost; Bible Knowledge Commentary; selection corresponding to Daniel 10:12-14; NavPress WORDsearch5 CD-ROM

against the powers of the dark world, and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms."

The battle between Gabriel and the prince (demon) of Persia continued for three weeks until Michael, one of the chief princes of the angelic realm (cf. Dan. 10:21; 12:1), came to Gabriel's assistance. Such angelic-demonic conflict indicates something of Satan's power. While the king of Persia was fighting Michael, Gabriel was able to bring a message to Daniel concerning the future of Israel, Daniel's people (cf. "your people," 9:24). It was to be a revelation of the warfare (10:1) between Israel and her neighbors until Israel is given peace by the coming Prince of peace. This vision contains the most detailed prophetic revelation in the Book of Daniel.



A Promise Kept

Luke 1:21-25

It was customary for those ministering in the temple to exit and give the people a dismissal in the form of a benediction (found in **Numbers 6:22-26**) so that the Lord in turn would bless his people. When Zechariah was long in returning the people became concerned. When he appeared and was unable to speak (and perhaps unable to hear, ref. **Luke 1:62**) their curiosity only escalated. It is not clear whether or not Zechariah was able to fully communicate what he had just experienced. He remained with his priestly division to finish out their week of service and then he returned to his wife Elizabeth. We can only assume that he then tried as best he could to communicate to her the encounter with Gabriel and the astonishing message that was delivered to him.

God kept his promise with Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. Although miraculous the Bible makes it clear that this was not an immaculate conception as was Jesus'. Luke is sure to point out that Elizabeth became pregnant only after Zechariah returned home from his service. God was the one directing the course of events and performing the miracle of opening a barren womb. However, Zechariah and Elizabeth were allowed to assist the Lord in his doing. In this way God often keeps the many promises given us in the scriptures. He carefully and skillfully weaves all of the events in our lives together and sets up miracles right in front of our eyes. Still, we are called to have faith in God's power so that we might participate in the very scheme that he has concocted to fulfill his promises. In the end we are simply called to walk faithfully before the Lord and be a useful vessel available to carry out his perfect will.

By fulfilling his promises God often grants us the desires of our hearts. Finally, Elizabeth received from the Lord her most desired wish – a son. The world was full of darkness and now it was preparing to receive the light. God was showing his favor to his chosen servants Zechariah and Elizabeth many years after they began to long for children. And God would next display his favor on his servant Mary before the reality of having a child ever crossed her mind.

Psalm 37:3-4
Hebrews 11:6
Joshua 21:45

2 Cor. 1:20
2 Cor. 7:1
2 Peter 1:4

The Lord is With You

Luke 1:26-30

As Elizabeth moved into her sixth month of pregnancy Luke takes us to another scene some distance away in the town of Nazareth – a town so seemingly insignificant that it is not mentioned at all in the Old Testament. Throughout history the Lord has chosen ordinary men and women to participate in his eternal scheme and share in his glory. Mary, who is estimated by some to be as young as fifteen or sixteen years old at this time, was hand picked by God to join him in the fulfillment of the ages. Mary had found favor with the God who searches the heart and examines the mind. God again sent his messenger Gabriel to deliver this most awesome announcement to her.

She was afraid both at the sight of the angel and the content of his message. Gabriel comforted her with a phrase that has been told to mankind for countless generations to calm their fears, encourage their hearts, and build their confidence: *“The Lord is with you.”* God is not only watching and assisting his faithful; his presence dwells with them. He protects them. He fights the battle ahead of them and fights with them. He scatters enemies before them. He blesses the work of their hands. He speaks to them and speaks through them.

It is amazing that God takes such a personal interest in the affairs of mankind. It is written in **Job 7:17**, *“What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention”* and again in **Psalm 144:3**, *“O Lord, what is man that you care for him, the son of man that you think of him?”* In the book of Genesis, man is the pinnacle of God’s creation formed in his image. Thus, it should not surprise us that he takes great pleasure in molding and directing the lives of those who choose to serve him, love him, and make themselves available to be used by him.

Do you believe that God is with you? **2 Chron. 15:2** states simply, *“The Lord is with you when you are with him.”* God has certainly used his instruments in the past (like Mary, or Moses, or David, or Esther, etc.) who have been chosen to fulfill a specific and awesome destiny. However the Lord is also calling us and has chosen us for a destiny that is both unique and spectacular. Don't let your fears cause you to doubt the plans of God. The Lord is with you.

Genesis 26:24

Genesis 31:3

Deut. 20:1

Deut. 31:23

Joshua 1:9

Judges 6:12

2 Samuel 7:3

1 Chron. 28:20a

2 Chron. 15:2

2 Chron. 20:17

Jeremiah 1:8

Haggai 1:13

Haggai 2:4

Luke 1:28

The Son of God

Luke 1:31-38

The time had finally come for God to dwell with men in the flesh. We are given insight from Gabriel as to the One-ness of the Holy Spirit and Jehovah God Most High. Mary will become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is identical to the power of the Most High overshadowing her. The remaining piece of the Trinity puzzle is Christ the Son of God.

In **John 1:14**, the Bible tells us that the Word (who was God – **John 1:1**), became flesh and “*made his dwelling*” among us. The Greek word for this verb (to dwell) is as follows:

skenoo, *skay-no'-o*; from Greek (skenos); to *tent* or *encamp*, i.e. (figurative) to *occupy* (as a mansion) or (special) to *reside* (as God did in the Tabernacle of old, a symbol of protection and communion) :- dwell.⁴

Many parallels between Jesus as God in flesh and the tabernacle of old can be drawn. Even the eventual construction of the Temple was a foreshadowing of the intricate and profound mystery that is Christ and his church. The tabernacle described in **Exodus 25-27** was not to be the permanent dwelling place of God. Nevertheless it was elaborately constructed so that the Name of Jehovah might reside with his people during their years of wandering. Many years later during the reign of King Solomon the temple was constructed. This temple was a much more glorious and permanent inhabitation and was to be the lasting place for God’s Name to reside with his people. The tabernacle was a foreshadowing of Immanuel God who through Christ would dwell amongst his beloved creation. Thus the physical body of Jesus – his flesh, his blood, and his bones – was simply a tent or a *tabernacle* in which God occupied as he walked with mankind for a short time on earth.

The tabernacle served as God’s dwelling place during a transitory period for Israel – between their departure from their slavery Egypt and their settlement in Canaan. Likewise the Messianic Age would serve to transition between the time of the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Christ. During this Messianic Age the physical body of Jesus was a temporary dwelling for Jehovah God. The temple in this scenario (the permanent dwelling place for God’s name) would be the church. Paul describes in **Eph. 2:19-22** how the church became the Temple in which God lives through his Spirit. The Church Age brought with it the ultimate fulfillment of all that God had purposed for his creation and he revealed this to a chosen faithful remnant of both Jews and Gentiles (**Eph. 1:9-10, 22-23, 3:9-11**).

The church is the place where God’s name would dwell on earth after Jesus’ existence in the flesh concluded and he returned to his heavenly glory. He then bestowed this glory upon the church that bears his name. In much the same way as God’s presence filled the Temple upon its completion (**2 Chron. 5:13b-6:2**), Jesus promised to be with his disciples as they set about their earthy mission (**Matt. 28:18-20**). This all may seem a bit confusing and perhaps Paul says it best

⁴ Greek 4637; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

in **Eph. 5:32** when he states, “*This is a profound mystery -- but I am talking about Christ and the church.*”

Let us return to the scene of Jesus’ conception where the Trinity puzzle is again revealed. At this one moment in time we see the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary, the power of the Most High God overshadowing her, and the conception of the Son of God as the resultant of that overshadowing. God in three persons is evident. Although the word “Trinity” is not found in scripture the properties of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit in all of their One-ness are justly and nicely described by this word.

As we look below into one of the many prophecies fulfilled by the birth of Jesus let us notice that this son of man born of flesh and blood was to be given many titles.

Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan--

*²The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.*

*⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

*He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

*The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.*

Jesus was to be called Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, and Wonderful Counselor. Surely the one who would bear the title Mighty God and Everlasting Father is not less than or someone other than Jehovah God. And Counselor is the description used to signify the Holy Spirit in **John 14:26** and **John 15:26**. So this child to be born cannot be separated the person and work of the Holy Spirit either. Rather Jesus was and is the one true God of the ages,

encompassing all the properties of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Furthermore (and this is almost absurd), this Mighty God has miraculously and implausibly become an embryo in the womb of an unwed, scared teenage girl.



The Outpouring of the Spirit

Luke 1:39-45

It is not clear how closely Mary and Elizabeth were related. However, Mary had some type of prior involvement with Zechariah and Elizabeth and had apparently been to their residence before for she seems to have known the way. The hill country of Judea (perhaps the town of Hebron, ref. **Joshua 21:11**) was a good eighty miles south of Nazareth and would require several days of travel. Exactly why Mary left in haste from her hometown, her fiancé, and her family is not clear. It is possible that she wished to hide the fact that she was pregnant from those closest to her for fear of being viewed or pronounced as an immoral woman. Or perhaps she already revealed her pregnancy to Joseph and was painfully fleeing from him after his apparent disbelief. Joseph would eventually come to the decision to divorce Mary in secret and perhaps this painful announcement triggered her departure. Another possibility is that Elizabeth was nearing the time for giving birth and Mary went to attend her as a midwife. This is unlikely however because Elizabeth could have certainly found one in and around her hometown in Judea and it even appears as if Mary left before the birth of John.

Whatever the reason the two chosen women were now united and they shared a bond much closer than their heritage. Together they were witnessing God's plan of salvation for his people unfold and even partaking in that history-making journey. They were also witnessing the last days of God's present covenant with man and the initiation of a new covenant that would encompass the whole of mankind for the remainder of earth's history.

As was revealed to the prophet Joel, one of the signs of the last days was to be the outpouring of the Spirit on God's servants – both men and women.

Joel 2:28-29

"And afterward,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men will see visions.

²⁹*Even on my servants, both men and women,*

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

God had begun to fulfill this prophecy through Mary and Elizabeth by pouring out his Spirit on them. This was to be the beginning of the end for the present covenant as revealed to Israel through the Law of Moses. In this new covenant God would give his own flesh and blood for the forgiveness of his people –

forgiveness for those who shall enter into his grace and those who lived under his grace throughout all the previous covenants.



Mary's Song

Luke 1:46-55

The content of Mary's Song displays a great familiarity with the nature of God as described in the Old Testament scriptures. Many of the properties of God described in the Psalms and Proverbs are recounted in her verses: God's mercy, his holiness, his might, his love for Abraham's descendants, the way he brings down the proud and lifts up the humble, God's assistance to the poor and needy, and others. Her song also bears a striking resemblance to the prayer of Hannah, the one-time barren mother of Samuel the prophet. Surely both utterances were born from the hearts of godly women; both were humble servants of the Lord and instruments of God for the blessing of his people. **1 Samuel 2:1-10** records Hannah's supplication as she too recounts God's holiness, his ability to weigh both the humble and the proud, his desire to feed the hungry, and his authority to bring down those who oppose him while protecting the saints. It is interesting to compare this text with the song of Mary and peer into the hearts of women that feared and loved the Lord wholeheartedly during their lifetimes.

Just how did Mary's Song and for that matter Zechariah's prophecy (ref. **Luke 1:68-79**) find their way into the book of Luke? If these verses were written around the time of the Messiah's birth, that would allow a sixty-year span before Luke made the decision to include them in his account. From a historical perspective they are fascinating first-hand supplements to this narrative, shedding light on the lives of the parents of John the Baptist and Jesus. But how was Luke able to locate these seemingly obscure writings? We must conclude that both Mary and Zechariah wrote down their inspired thoughts at least to keep a copy for themselves. It is even possible that both Mary's Song and Zechariah's prophecy had at some time been copied and circulated within the family of believers, much like the gospels and the epistles would be. This seems unlikely however for a couple reasons. For one, they appear nowhere else in the New Testament outside of the Gospel of Luke. Secondly, if either text had been circulated even sparsely, it might be safer to assume that Matthew would have been the more likely candidate to include them in his account. He was one of the Twelve and was no doubt much more acquainted with the mother of the Lord. Matthew also included much more of the Old Testament references in his Gospel and both of these writings show great familiarity and harmony with the scriptures.

As mentioned earlier, Luke became a Christian long after the ascension of Christ and was thus forced to compile his account through careful investigation from the beginning (from the events leading up to Jesus' conception and birth). Although he was not an eyewitness to the events in this first chapter, it looks as if Luke was able to uncover a couple of gems in Mary's song and Zechariah's prophecy. Luke most likely sat with Mary in person to capture the essence of her story – something the other Gospel writers might not have felt compelled to do. It

is even possible that Zechariah would have still been alive to speak with Luke even though they gave birth to John at an old age. Perhaps this “old age” was simply an older childbearing age, older than what was common in that day. Even putting Elizabeth as young as thirty years at the time of John's birth would still leave her well past the usual age for her first child. She could still have felt “disgrace among the people” (**Luke 1:25**) as other friends and neighbors at her age could have had children who were close to becoming teenagers. It is also possible that Mary herself was the final owner of Zechariah’s written prophesy and passed it on to Luke as she retold their story to him.

However it occurred we are simply fortunate to be able to look into some incredible first-hand accounts written by two of God's chosen servants. It is obvious that Luke was taking great pains to write a detailed and orderly account of this most awesome series of events.



A Woman Without a Home

Luke 1:56

We are told that Mary stayed with her relative Elizabeth for about three months. I have suggested that Mary fled from her home in Nazareth due to her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. No one could be expected to believe the unlikely tale that she knew to be fact. If she stayed, her pregnancy would eventually be disclosed and she would have received the scorn and ridicule of her family and the entire community. Even the scriptures stood in clear judgement of her apparent crime:

Exodus 20:14

"You shall not commit adultery.

Deut. 22:20-21, 23-24

If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl's virginity can be found, ²¹she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father's house. You must purge the evil from among you.

²³If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, ²⁴you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death--the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.

Gabriel had mentioned Elizabeth’s miraculous pregnancy when he first appeared to Mary. Thus Elizabeth would have been the only person on earth who could believe her unlikely situation. That seems to be the most likely reason why

Mary would leave her friends and family behind to travel southward to Judea. Not even her fiancé Joseph could have been expected to overcome his disappointment and personal hurt as she innocently described to him the unimaginable. I have also suggested that this may have been the time that he came to the painful decision to end his relationship with Mary and disclosed his plan to her. As **Matthew 1:19-24** (excerpts) describes: *“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly... But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream... When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”*

Although they were not officially married Joseph and Mary were betrothed which could only be broken through a legal separation. It seems feasible that these three months that Mary was with Elizabeth began immediately after her future spouse revealed his intentions regarding the divorce. We could then conclude that upon receiving the message from the angel, Joseph went to Elizabeth’s to find Mary and urged her to return home to their families.

For Mary this must have been an incredibly challenging three months. What a range of emotions to deal with – and the rush of hormones afforded her during pregnancy would only serve to magnify those feelings. She had but weeks earlier felt so believed-in as the angel Gabriel himself was sent to her. What an incredible plan God had for her life! What a glorious role she was to play in the history of all human and spiritual events. But where was God now? If she was so precious in the eyes of God why had he allowed her to become such a disgrace in the eyes of the world? Was she to raise this Son of God alone? Why didn’t God simply wait a matter of months until her matrimony with Joseph so that they could have appeared more normal to their friends, their families, and their community?

Lonely. Abandoned. Ashamed. Uncertain. Afraid. When the angel first appeared to her, there was no way for her to understand the extent of the personal cost or the depth of emotional suffering she was being asked to endure. Certainly Mary’s emotions surpassed all of these extremes but were tempered with hope, faith, and comfort from her love and trust in her God. She was learning first hand the cost of being the Lord’s disciple. Perhaps the book of Psalms became a refuge for Mary during this time. The many verses within the Jewish book of hymns and songs seems to have been born out of similar times of desperation, uncertainty, and inescapable dependence on God.

Psalm 9:9-10

Psalm 10:1

Psalm 17:1-8

His Name is John

Luke 1:57-66

In first-century Jewish culture it was expected that a child – especially a first-born son – be given the name of his father, grandfather, or close relative. Elizabeth’s relatives and neighbors were already making plans on naming the boy Zechariah. For Elizabeth to speak up and suggest the name John must have been awkward. The actual Hebrew name for John is **Yehochanan**⁵, which means “*merciful gift from Jehovah*”. This accurately described the circumstances in which John came into the world. He had been a gift to a couple who had many years longed to see offspring brought forth from a barren woman’s womb. Now the Lord had shown his mercy to them and the community recognized that this was of God.

Everyone was astonished as Zechariah confirmed the name John because it simply defied the norm. It could have even been taken as an insult to Zechariah’s family not to extend a family name to their firstborn son. We are witnessing what shall be a pattern of smashing the old traditions to usher in a new message a whole new way of thinking to the Jews. This “new wine” will not only challenge several hundred years of religious tradition but will be abrasive to the cultural norms that ran so deep in the Jewish society of the first century.

Luke 5:37-39

And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. ³⁸No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. ³⁹And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.' "



The Knowledge of Salvation

Luke 1:67-79

Again we see in Zechariah’s prophetic psalm a familiarity and use of Old Testament imagery and language. Surely the visit of the angel and the announcement he made had moved Zechariah to retrace a thorough study of the messianic prophecies. As a priest he would have had access to scrolls of the scriptures. He begins in **vs. 68-75** by praising God for the coming of the Christ, the prophesied descendant of David and fulfillment of all the promises made to Abraham. God was about to raise up and reveal this mighty salvation to once again display his mercy on his chosen people.

In **vs. 75-79** Zechariah joyfully recognized the destiny that his own son John has been born to fulfill. He was to be the trailblazer, the first one sent, the one who would instruct the people living in darkness of the wonderful light. With him would arrive the knowledge of salvation and the means by which forgiveness of sins was to be received for all time. The crux of John’s message then would

⁵ Hebrew 3076; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

revolve around remission of sins, though it would later be the shedding of Jesus' blood that would fulfill the necessary sacrifice of atonement.

In John's recorded ministry his message consisted of three primary components. The first, and perhaps when thinking of John it's the most recognizable component, was the necessity of repentance. John spoke of a genuine and proven change of heart which would then be permanently reflected in a person's actions. Secondly, John instituted the teaching and practice of water baptism for forgiveness of sins ([Mark 1:4](#), [Luke 3:3](#)). Thirdly, he told people to believe in the one coming after him, which was Jesus. So if the knowledge of salvation was to arrive within the ministry of John we must conclude that belief in Jesus, genuine repentance, and water baptism are all essential components that directly correspond to God's generous mercy as he bestows salvation upon his chosen people.

Let us state again clearly: it is only through the blood of Christ spilled for all mankind on the cross that makes it possible for fallen man to be cleansed of our many sins. However, the means by which men and women would participate in that cleansing and the moment a believer's sins were washed away would be ushered into existence by John, who straightforwardly preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Zechariah was able to foresee the destiny that awaited his son for God had revealed it to him. As soon as John matured and embraced his calling the precious knowledge of salvation was revealed to all Israel by a voice crying out in the wilderness of Judea. Jesus himself would come to the Jordan to be baptized by John, displaying a reverence for the commands and knowledge of God. Jesus would then begin his own ministry with many of John's disciples. These men along with the disciples that they continued to gather would also practice and teach this water baptism. For a time all those who wanted to enter into this new covenant of God followed this baptism instituted by John. That time ended when Peter and the Eleven preached repentance and a new form of water baptism, as instructed by Jesus in [Matthew 28:18-20](#) and [Mark 16:15-16](#). This baptism was issued in the name of Jesus Christ. The promise of this baptism included not only the forgiveness of sins as John's baptism also offered but the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as well (ref. [Acts 2:38-41](#)).



The Call of a Prophet

[Luke 1:80](#)

John made his home in the desert wilderness of Judea, a likely place to find a radical prophet of God. The call of a prophet throughout the ages has often meant sacrificing home, family, comfort, and the opportunity to simply live a "normal" life. Filled with the spirit from infancy, John continued to grow in character and in strength. He would not be known as a student of the Rabbis, a graduate of Pharisee training, nor would he be influenced by the priesthood that was his heritage. He was to be a prophet and disciple of God alone, raised up by Jehovah himself in seclusion until he appeared to the public completely trained,

fully taught, and totally focused. He was groomed for a task that offered absolutely no glory on earth, only the hope of a glorious resurrection. This hope is what a prophet lives for and often dies for – the hope that his message will not fall on deaf ears, hope that the seed he has scattered will take root somewhere, hope that God is pleased with him whether his message is received or rejected, and hope that his actions are known in heaven even if they go unheralded on earth.

Who is willing to sacrifice their lives, their dreams, wants, time, normality, and comfort for hope? Most of us need to see a reward in front of our eyes before we can justify leaving all we know for God. Not so for the prophet.

*Who is willing to live only on promises from God, not presents?
Who is willing to carry the burden without crying out for blessings?
Who is willing to sacrifice popularity in order to live with integrity?
Who is willing to be rejected rather than being understood and respected?
The answer is...the Prophet.*

Psalm 22:6-8

Ezekiel 3:7-8

Lament. 3:14-25

Hebrews 11:37-38



The Birth of the King of Kings

Luke 2:1-7

Now traveling as a team and soon-to-be family Joseph and Mary headed for a city in Judea called Bethlehem, the birthplace of King David. They left Nazareth in response to the census ordered by the first Roman Emperor Caius Octavius Caepias, who was given the title Caesar Augustus in 27 BC. His ultimate intention was the taxation of his newly established empire. The census would pave way for the taxation of Palestine under Quirinius who began his governorship over Syria some ten years after the birth of Jesus. Each person within the Roman world was to return to his or her city of origin. Joseph belonged to the line of David and though the pregnancy was far along they still journeyed southward towards Judea to register. Behind the scenes God was orchestrating all these events to bring about the fulfillment of the ages.

When Gabriel had first appeared to Mary she was told that her son would be called the Son of the Most High and that he would sit on the throne of David forever. It was common knowledge to the Jews waiting on their Messiah that the everlasting successor to the throne of David was to be born in Bethlehem, as revealed in a vision to Micah.

Micah 5:2

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,*

*out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."*

John 7:42

Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"

We must conclude then that Joseph and Mary indeed recognized that circumstances beyond their control were now relocating them to the city of the Messiah's birth, for they were certainly familiar with the writings of the prophets. And though the timing of Mary's pregnancy and the difficulty of travel made it a difficult journey, their trust in God and the prophets would have no doubt filled the two with great anticipation and wonder.

Joseph and Mary's trust in God would be put on trial again as they arrived at a city filled to capacity because of the census. They were forced to stay behind a residence in a functional grotto used to lodge livestock (as early 2nd century tradition widely holds). The fact that God was accomplishing his destiny through Joseph and Mary cannot be questioned. But the mysterious way in which the Lord works would make any rational person question the logic behind his plans. Why was God not providing for them even some of the normal and simple comforts and necessities of life especially at such a fragile time as this? It does not even seem likely that Mary had a midwife present at her birth. It appears that Joseph had to simply fill in as best he could, tending to his new bride's numerous requests during and after labor. If this couple's faith, their patience, and their level of surrender in the Lord's plan was not totally secure it would have been revealed many times over the weeks leading up to and including the arrival of their firstborn son. Yet God was indeed moving; he was actually in complete control the whole time. This humble beginning for a child who would someday be called the King of kings was all a part of his carefully orchestrated agenda. God was calling on Joseph and Mary to simply hang on for the ride and trust his leading.

As disciples we too are called to remain surrendered to God's will for our lives at all times. Retaining some percentage control in the direction of the events of their lives is not part of that surrender. We must trust him even when we aren't able to fully understand his plans. We may question him when things don't make sense but we must not doubt his sovereignty. Our decision to follow God does not include the condition that he will work out all things in our favor nor does it mean that God will eliminate the turbulence that life can hand us. In fact, there are no conditions attached to our trust in God. We forfeit the right of last refusal completely. We must only be resolved that in the end all things will be made clear.

Psalm 62:7-8

Proverbs 16:1

Proverbs 3:5-6
Jeremiah 17:7-8
Psalm 33:11

Proverbs 16:9
Proverbs 19:21



Mary's Treasures

Luke 2:8-20

As Luke records this announcement of the Savior's birth we are witnessing the fourth recorded appearance of an angel bringing good tidings to men. Gabriel first appeared to Zechariah in the temple and then he visited Mary. Another angel (or perhaps the same one) appeared to Joseph in a vision. And now a messenger had been sent to a field neighboring Bethlehem to a selection of shepherds enduring another night watch as they had done countless times before. As was the case with Zechariah, the shepherds were terrified upon the arrival of the heavenly messenger. Yet once the announcement was made and a host of angels joined in praise to God their fear was replaced by a resolute and almost childlike faith. They hurried off to see what they now concluded was fact: Christ the Lord had been humbly brought forth from the womb on that very night!

As we look deeper into the book of Luke we must continually be reminded of the methods used by the author to document the life of Christ. As mentioned before, Luke's account is a result of the careful investigation he performed (**Luke 1:3-4**). Certainly it was Jesus' own mother Mary who was now supplying Luke with the details surrounding the Lord's birth. She was able to reveal to him the memories that were still vivid in her mind even after some fifty years. As Mary described the story of Jesus' birth and infancy she must have glowed. Luke twice includes his impression of Mary recalling her precious memories to him as he writes:

Luke 2:19

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:51b

But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

These were more than just memories that Mary shared with Luke. These stories were treasures forever etched in an old woman's heart. Nothing would come easy for the mother of our Lord and her pain ran as deep as her memories. These moments of joy and wonder would be locked away in her soul forever.

The Gospel of Luke is the only book to record the shepherds who visited the newborn babe. Luke also makes no mention of the three Magi who came to visit some weeks (and perhaps months) later. Are we to assume that Mary overlooked the unusual visit and lofty gifts given to her by men of such high esteem? Surely Mary remembered their visit but for some reason the memory of the shepherds was the one she cherished and passed on to Luke.

One probable reason as to why the shepherd's visit made such an impression on Mary was the timing of their arrival. I have suggested that this was a difficult time for Joseph and Mary. A long journey near the end of their pregnancy and their inability to secure lodging and proper delivery conditions could have easily caused them to question God during this most crucial hour. After all, wasn't this to be God's son? Should the Son of the Most High enter the world in a stall used to house animals? Where was the reassurance that God had not left them? Were they disappointing God? Were they even fit to bear this most precious child?

Imagine the range of emotions, questions, doubts, and fears that entered their minds as they struggled to remain patient, faithful, and hopeful. After a stressful labor and delivery Mary's newborn son was brought safely into the world, wrapped in clothes, and placed in a feeding trough. They were no doubt relieved at his healthy birth yet questions may have still troubled their minds. Perhaps only a few hours later the shepherds arrived. They knew of Jesus' birth for they had been surrounded by a host of angels proclaiming the glory of God. As they beheld the tiny babe they described to Joseph and Mary what they had just seen and what they had been told – the Savior, the son of David, and Christ the Lord was in their midst.

All the doubts, fears, and guilty feelings that may have plagued these new young "parents" were now put to rest. God hadn't left them nor was he disappointed in them. He and all of heaven had been looking down at this night's events with a glorious joy that even the heavens could not contain. Joseph and Mary did not need a personal visit from Gabriel this time for the arrival of the shepherds was confirmation enough. As the shepherds described their fear and wonder at the angels' appearance she knew it was God himself that sent these rugged men as his messengers to her that night.

From a spiritual perspective there is something about the arrival of the shepherds that was perhaps more significant than the upcoming visit from the Magi. In regards to his overall character and spirit Jesus would resemble a shepherd much more than royalty during his lifetime. He would be given no majestic title on earth nor would he be adorned with precious jewels or riches. He accepted no crown but one of thorns. He would silence those who called him the Holy One of Israel or the Son of God. At times he would even discourage his disciples from boasting about him as the Christ. He would instead claim to be the good shepherd and that his sheep would know his voice. He was destined to receive a crown and sit on the throne of David, but this would occur only after his suffering and his accession into heaven. Since Mary was only able to bear witness to Jesus in his earthly form, the visit of the lowly shepherds may have meant more to her in time than the impressive honor given him by the Magi. Their simplicity, humility, and unbridled enthusiasm as they described to her the glorious host of angels was perhaps more memorable than the premeditated tribute offered by the astrologers from the east.

From of old, as far back as the book of Genesis, the God of the scriptures has been described as a shepherd. Thus, God in flesh would certainly take on the spirit of a shepherd tending his sheep. We find several prophecies about the

coming of Jesus that refer to him not only as a king and descendant of David but as a shepherd. As was just mentioned, Jesus himself claimed to be the good shepherd. Thus, if Jehovah God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – is referred to as the Shepherd and if Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies describing the shepherd of God's people, then we are given additional scriptural evidence that Jesus was not only the son of God, born of flesh, but that he is indeed the one true God of the Bible. He was and is the Ancient of Days, the Creator of heaven and earth – now appearing as a newborn babe!

Scriptures describing God as a shepherd:

Genesis 48:15 **Psalm 28:9**
Genesis 49:24 **Psalm 80:1**
Psalm 23:1 **Eccles. 12:11**

Prophecies describing Jesus as a shepherd:

Isaiah 40:11 **Micah 5:4**
Ezekiel 34:23 **Zech. 13:7b**
Ezekiel 37:24 **Matthew 2:6**

Jesus' personal claim as the shepherd:

Matthew 26:31
John 10:11

Continued reference to Jesus as the shepherd:

Hebrews 13:20 **1 Peter 5:4**
1 Peter 2:25 **Rev. 7:17**



The Law of Moses

Luke 2:21-24

Even under Roman rule the Jews were allowed the practice of their religious duties. The Romans tolerated most cultural and religious differences within their conquered empire as long as it did not threaten the authority of the Roman governors and military officials that saturated nearly all of the Mediterranean region. Joseph and Mary were devout followers of the laws of Moses and were determined to raise Jesus to respect and obey the commands of God. They observed circumcision, the purification time for Mary, the consecration of the firstborn male, and performed all the required sacrifices. It is interesting to note that Joseph and Mary were unable to afford a lamb to offer per the Levitical requirements but offered instead a pair of doves, which was allowed in cases of poverty.

Read Leviticus 12:2-4
Leviticus 12:6-8

Exodus 13:1-2

Joseph and Mary were able to pass down their love for the scriptures and obedience to the Law of Moses to their son, Jesus. Although Jesus was the fulfillment of the ages and brought with him a new covenant, he still lived under the covenant of Moses and was careful to follow God's commands. Jesus would often confront the Jews on their lack of insight with regards to the scriptures and their traditions that nullified God's word. He would teach them of a pure love for God that surpassed their legalistic observance of the law. The vast majority of the Jewish leaders including their well-versed teachers would hold stubbornly to their own dogmatic approach to the Mosaic Law and rejected Jesus' ideas altogether.

Luke 2:41

Mark 1:44

Luke 4:16

Matthew 15:17-20

Luke 10:25-28

Luke 17:12-14

Luke 18:18-20



The Spirit is Moving

Luke 2:25-28

With the conceptions and births of John and Jesus we have seen the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy regarding the outpouring of the Spirit. We looked first at the outpouring of God's spirit on Elizabeth and Mary. Let us revisit **Joel 2:28-29** keeping in mind this time that even "*your old men will dream dreams.*"

Simeon was a righteous and devout follower of God and was likely well along in years by the time he confronted Joseph and Mary in the temple courts. Before his departure he was to witness the coming of the "*consolation of Israel*", which was the prophesied comfort that God would extend once again towards his people. **Isaiah 49:13, 51:3, 52:3, and 66:13** foretell of this consolation. This was his dream and the Holy Spirit confirmed that indeed he would lay eyes on the Christ. As the Spirit led him to Joseph and Mary his dream became a reality.

Apparently something in this gentle man's demeanor reassured Mary that her newborn son could be trusted in his arms. Although he was a stranger to Joseph and Mary, Simeon was no stranger to God. He was a man guided by the Holy Spirit.

Luke states very precisely that in Simeon's case the Spirit was *upon him* – leading him and even speaking to him through revelation. He did not possess the *indwelling* of the Spirit – or in New Testament vernacular, "filled with the Spirit". This indwelling would be given as promised under the new covenant. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God would come upon people and use them for God's purposes. Men were occasionally filled with a portion of God's spirit giving them wisdom or skills (**Exodus 35:31** and **Deut. 34:9**). However, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – being filled with the Spirit – is a phenomenon beginning with the

events we have witnessed in Luke and shall continue in the ministry of Jesus and then extend throughout the Church Age.

The Spirit came upon them

Numbers 24:2	1 Samuel 11:6
Judges 6:34	1 Samuel 16:13a
Judges 11:29	2 Chron. 15:1
Judges 14:6	Luke 2:25

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

Luke 1:15	Acts 4:8
Luke 1:41	Acts 4:31
Luke 1:67	Acts 9:17
Acts 2:4	Acts 13:52



The Light of the World

Luke 2:29-32

As prophesied here by Simeon, Jesus was to forever be the salvation of all people – both Jew and non-Jew (Gentile). He was a light in the darkness, for the world had been separated from the light of God because of its sin. In fact, the name given him by his parents as commanded by Gabriel literally means “*Jehovah Saves*”. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jehoshua or Joshua.

GREEK

Iesous, *ee-ay-sooce'*; of Hebrew origin [Y^ehowshuwa`]; *Jesus* (i.e. *Jehoshua*), the name of our Lord.⁶

HEBREW

Y^ehowshuwa`, *yeh-ho-shoo'-ah*; or **Y^ehowshu`a**, *yeh-ho-shoo'-ah*; from Hebrew **Y^ehovah** and Hebrew **yasha`**; *Jehovah-saved*; *Jehoshua* (i.e. Joshua), the Jewish leader :- Jehoshua, Jehoshuah, Joshua.⁷

Simeon was no doubt a student of God's word. His prophecy is similar to those predicting the coming of our Lord with the message of salvation reaching the Gentiles.

Isaiah 42:6

*"I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;
I will take hold of your hand.
I will keep you and will make you*

⁶ Greek 2424; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

⁷ Hebrew 3091; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

*to be a covenant for the people
and a light for the Gentiles,*

Isaiah 49:6

he says:

*"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."*

Luke is sure to include Simeon's prophecy concerning the salvation of the Gentiles. Luke was a Gentile convert and joined Paul at times along his missionary journeys as they ministered to the non-Jewish world. Luke is the only non-Jew or non-Hebrew to have his written works (The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles) included as Holy Scripture. His Gospel account was written from a Gentile perspective and was meant to be effective in swaying thought within Gentile society and strengthening the new Greek-comprised churches. Luke and Paul were first seen together at Troas in **Acts 16:10** though they may have been friends or acquaintances before this time. It is speculated that Luke's own missionary efforts inaugurated the church in Troas. Perhaps they first met in the city of Antioch, the city given as Luke's hometown by some early Christian writers⁸.

It may seem odd then that Jesus' message of salvation in his lifetime came almost exclusively to the Jews. He even commanded his disciples to avoid the Gentiles during their missionary journeys. Was this contradictory to Simeon's prophecy? Actually, it was just a matter of God's timing. God gave the Jews an open door to receive salvation long before he grafted in the rest of the non-Jewish world. Several years after Jesus' ascension into heaven the apostles finally recognized the saving power of the Gospel for people of non-Jewish heritage. Peter's visit to the household of Cornelius in **Acts 10** would be the most significant breakthrough that opened up the message of Jesus to the Gentile world. Some years later, Paul would be set apart by Christ for this specific ministry. He would in fact be designated as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Jesus' ministry:

Matthew 10:5-6

Matthew 15:24

The door finally opens to the Gentile world:

Acts 10:45

Acts 11:18

Paul becomes the official Apostle to the Gentiles:

Acts 9:15

Romans 11:13

⁸ See Eusebius, *Church History*, III. 4; and Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, Chapter 7.

Acts 14:27
Acts 15:3
Acts 28:28

Galatians 2:8
1 Tim. 2:7
2 Tim. 4:17



A Double-edged Sword

Luke 2:33-35

Joseph and Mary remained somewhat astonished as God continued to send his messengers (first the shepherds, now Simeon) to them to confirm what Gabriel had originally promised many months ago. They looked on as this old man now held Jesus in his arms and was filled with joy through the Holy Spirit. What a wonderfully impossible realization for Joseph and Mary to believe that this child was in fact the Son of the Most High God, the successor of David's throne, the everlasting king of Israel, and even a light to the Gentiles. After giving thanks to God Simeon turned his attention towards Joseph and Mary and began to disclose the magnitude of the impact that this child would make. Simeon also warned that Jesus would expose men's hearts and bring about transition, turbulence, and unrest to the status quo in Israel causing the rising and falling of many. Because of this he would be hated, spoken against, and opposed.

Finally Simeon revealed to Joseph and Mary that they too would have to wrestle internally with the sword that Jesus would use to divide the righteous and the ungodly. Jesus would confirm the accuracy of Simeon's prophecy and would state quite bluntly in **Matthew 10:34**, "*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" The sword of Jesus' words would penetrate and expose men's hearts. They would put members of one family at odds with one another. They would force men and women to deal with their many sins and to repent of their lack of love for God and for people. His words would prick most fiercely those who falsely set themselves up as examples of righteousness and would remove them from their lofty perches. Yet those who allowed his words to penetrate their hearts and souls would be healed and lifted up. According to Simeon, Joseph and Mary would be no different. Their hearts would likewise be exposed, leaving them the opportunity to either come into the light or reject the truth. And surely a painful sword would pierce the depths of Mary's soul as she would watch her radical son be lifted up and crucified by the Romans.

Hebrews 4:12

Ephes. 6:17

Rev. 1:16

I'll include one last note here. I am suggesting in the previous segment that even Mary had to overcome her doubts and fears in order to put her complete trust in Jesus' words. Widespread false teaching through the ages has elevated Mary to a divine status. She is erroneously taught to have been sinless, without fault, a life-long virgin, able to perform miracles, and one who now intercedes

with God on our behalf. A simple study of the scriptures shows her to be quite human after all. As we would expect, Joseph and Mary appeared to have had intercourse following the birth of their firstborn son, Jesus. The very use of the word “firstborn” in [Luke 2:7](#) to describe Jesus implies that more children were born into this marriage. The very use of the word “until” in [Matthew 1:25](#) implies that their abstinence had a definite time limit, ending upon the arrival of Jesus (and we can certainly assume their union occurred only after the time of Mary’s purification according to [Leviticus 12:1-4](#) had been completed). Mary is clearly depicted as traveling with Jesus’ brothers. We would naturally expect these to be her other sons, although some argue that these are Jesus’ cousins, the sons of Mary’s sister. However, the Gospels and the remainder of the New Testament never refer to Jesus as Mary’s only son; this we might expect to be referenced if it were indeed so. The scriptures never once declare Mary as a lifelong virgin as would be expected if true. The Bible seems to clarify that Joseph and Mary abstained from union only until Jesus’ birth.

Furthermore, the scriptures do not indicate that Mary was given authority to intercede for us as we pray. On the contrary, it is quite clear that Jesus Christ alone is the intercessor between God the Father and mankind. The Bible also makes no mention of Mary’s ability to perform miracles, to forgive sins, or to have the power to comfort us as many still today claim. In fact, all of these qualities are attributed to the one God of the Bible and are demonstrated throughout the scriptures in three persons through God the Father, Jesus the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.

Mary is not a lifelong virgin implied

[Matthew 1:25a](#)

[Luke 2:7a](#)

[Matthew 12:46](#)

[Mark 6:3](#)

Only Christ can intercede for us

[John 14:6](#)

[Hebrews 7:25](#)

[1 Tim. 2:1, 5](#)



The Publicity Begins

[Luke 2:36-39](#)

We could assume that Simeon’s appearance and prophetic words were witnessed simply by Joseph and Mary and did not involve the bustling temple courts. However, the prophetess Anna was far less discreet with her expressions of praise. She didn’t address Jesus’ parents here but gave thanks to God and began to speak to all those around the temple courts who were also waiting for God to move on Israel’s behalf. It would seem that her words made quite an impression on those who heard her, for she was certainly known and a fixture of

worship in the temple and surrounding courts for maybe fifty years. It was perhaps the buzz of this day's events and Anna's words that spread to the Roman occupation of Israel.

However it happened, the news of Jesus' birth reached Herod and he attempted to use the Magi (a sect of men specializing in astrology and other natural sciences) to uncover the child's location. They found Joseph and Mary still residing in Bethlehem. It would not be unlikely for Joseph and his new family to have spent several weeks in Bethlehem. Their extended stay could either have been due to the census or a decision to wait until the baby grew strong enough to withstand a long journey over land. Or perhaps they were simply waiting out the thirty-three day purification required by the Law.

Joseph and Mary completed all of the regulations of the Law requiring the birth of their firstborn son. Again, they demonstrated a heart of obedience to God's covenant and they were determined to instill this into their new child. They then departed from Jerusalem and the surrounding area. Eventually their travels settled them in their hometown of Nazareth as [Luke 2:39](#) reads. Prior to their arrival back home however they had a major detour through Egypt, which is described in the Gospel of Matthew. Luke did not include these events in his Gospel perhaps because Matthew's version had already documented them.

For the Jews, a people that greatly honored the sons born to them and were quite meticulous in the preservation of their family line, the slaughter ordered by Herod was certainly an event that would never be forgotten. The Roman oppression had reached to new heights and as Israel groaned for their redeemer, God was certainly hearing their cries. Soon thereafter in 4 BC, Herod died and Joseph, Mary, and Jesus found their way back to Nazareth.

[Read Matthew 2:13-23](#)



Jesus, the Young Boy

[Luke 2:40](#)

As a young boy, Jesus began to display exceptional wisdom and strength of character. Are we to assume however that from infancy the boy Jesus was perfect? One viewpoint holds that from the time he was a small boy he was mature enough to distinguish good from evil and that he always chose to behave in a manner that pleased God. Although he was no doubt exceptional, was Jesus from infancy just naturally (or supernaturally) flawless in attitude and action? Or can we assume that Joseph and Mary had the opportunity to discipline Jesus who resembled other children and was at times rebellious, stubborn, and disobedient. Is it even permissible to suppose that Joseph and Mary had to deal with all the normal qualities of a young boy in Jesus – including folly – and they were compelled to teach him, correct him, and even punish him as they thought best?

In [Luke 2:40](#), the word “grace” here that is said to have been upon Jesus at this age is the same as the word used in [Ephesians 2:8](#), “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of*

God.” It seems quite possible and even biblical to conclude that God extended his grace on the young boy Jesus until he reached an age where he could distinguish between good and evil and understand the spiritual consequences of sin. This “age of accountability” is the point where a person will decide to voluntarily obey God or they will knowingly rebel against him. The folly of a child is quite different than the sin we commit as mature individuals. It should not even be labeled as sin. It is what it is – folly. And the book of Proverbs clearly teaches us how to deal with the folly bound up in the heart of children so that sin will not master them as adults.

Every child is born with an inherent sinful nature. But this is not equivalent to the widespread belief that every child is born in sin. The notion that all children are born guilty of the sins of their fathers or of Adam and Eve (commonly called the doctrine of Original Sin) is unbiblical (ref. [Ezekiel 18:14-20](#)). It is not the guilt of sin that is passed from one generation to the next. More accurately, since the fall of Adam it is man’s sinful nature that is passed down and inherited by every newborn child. Thus, the groundwork for a child’s salvation is laid during their early years. Their character must be built up and their willfulness refined through biblical parental discipline. During this time God’s love covers over their folly and his saving grace is in effect.

I believe that it is both prudent and correct to assume that since Jesus was born of woman, he inherited with this flesh a sinful nature. This is the same inclination towards sin that all children have inherited since the Garden of Eden. This nature would have been displayed outwardly as a child through folly and disobedience and would require Jesus’ parents to discipline him. As has just been said this should not be defined as sin nor are we contesting the perfection of Christ by assuming the boy Jesus acted out on occasion. As he grew into adulthood, Jesus’ sinful nature would inwardly fight against him through temptations. What made the man Jesus extraordinary was that once he began to reach maturity in age and understanding he never once made the decision to submit to his sinful nature. He never gave in. He never compromised. He never entertained a lustful thought. He never let his pride control him, not even for an instant. Not once did his temper overcome his patience. He was deeply hated yet he never allowed himself to entertain hate. He never once fell victim to the deceitfulness of sin. On the contrary, he mastered his sinful nature completely. He was totally obedient to God. He was perfect.

Isaiah describes Jesus as a normal child who will at some point reach an age of accountability – a time where he would understand good and evil and possess the maturity to choose what is right.

Isaiah 7:14-16

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. ¹⁵He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. ¹⁶But before the boy knows enough to reject the

wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

Guilt inherited or “passed down” is unbiblical:
Ezekiel 18:14-20

Joseph and Mary's job as parents of Jesus:
Proverbs 13:24, 19:18, 22:15, 23:13, 29:17

Jesus experienced temptation, yet did not sin
Luke 4:1-2a
Hebrews 4:15
1 Peter 2:22



Jesus, the Student
Luke 2:41-52

The story of the boy Jesus at the Temple is often depicted with Jesus instructing the elders and the surrounding crowd. This is not what is written. Luke tells us that Jesus was “*sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.*” As any inquisitive student does among a group of teachers the young Jesus was listening and questioning. What amazed his hearers was his “*understanding and his answers*”, not his sermons or his parables. He amazed them not by his unique insight but by his rapid ability to comprehend the scriptures and the accuracy of his answers when questioned. Some years later Jesus would again astonish and amaze the crowds with his teaching in these very same temple courts. For now, he was the student.

Of all of the memories of Jesus’ childhood, why was this one so etched in Mary’s mind? Certainly for a mother the mere anguish of losing a child not just for a few minutes or hours but three plus days must have been close to unbearable. The indescribable fear, concern, and internal panic Jesus’ parents must have felt during those seemingly eternal days would forever leave an ache in Mary’s soul when she recounted this story.

Perhaps the more intriguing question is why out of all the four Gospels is this the one and only story of Jesus’ pre-pubescence that the Holy Spirit inspired and moved our dear brother Luke to pen into his account? What is God trying to teach us by revealing to us this snapshot of Jesus’ boyhood? From an author’s perspective, Luke illustrates a boy and soon-to-be young man realizing his relationship with God the Father and maybe even his ultimate destiny on earth.

Perhaps deeper conclusions can be drawn. If we are to assume that Jesus at the age of twelve could have a profound understanding of the scriptures and godly principles – even his relationship to the Father – then perhaps the Bible is giving us some idea of that age of accountability written about in the previous segment of this commentary. This is not to say that twelve years old is the precise age that holds true for all young people. That would be stretching it based on this

scripture and common sense tells us otherwise. Not all young persons mature at the same rate. Some even in their early teen years do not yet display the kind of maturity required to make a life-long decision to surrender their lives to Christ, nor can they be expected to understand their God-given destiny. However, it is safe to assume that some boys and girls – perhaps as young as twelve or thirteen – can have a genuine faith in the scriptures, get a clear grasp of God’s purpose for their lives, and be able to choose for themselves to make Jesus their Lord and embrace that calling.

Jesus learned

John 15:15

Hebrews 5:8



John's Baptism

Luke 3:1-6

Again we see Luke employing the popular technique of dating the events in his narrative by citing the specific year of the reign of Caesar. Luke also includes the names of the other Roman government officials around the region that would be influential in the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Pontius Pilate is introduced here and will certainly come into play in the events surrounding Jesus’ death. Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, will also play a key role in the life and ministry of Jesus. He will have John the Baptist killed and issue threats to Jesus’ life. In addition to these government agents Luke also includes Annas and Caiaphas who served jointly as high priests during the ministries of John and Jesus. Upon Jesus’ arrest Annas would be the first to question him before sending him to Caiaphas. Caiaphas, a Sadducee and Son-in-law to Annas, probably reserved more of the usual powers assigned to the high priest. The beginning of John’s ministry then is dated during the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (14 AD to 37 AD), which would put us around 29 AD. However, some have pointed out that Tiberius was given sole authority of his provinces under the title Emperor in 11 AD, which may suggest 26 AD as a better fit for the year in question⁹.

John began his public ministry with the intention of preparing Israel for the coming of their Messiah. As previously mentioned John’s message would consist of three essential components: repentance, baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and a charge to believe in the one that was coming after him. The Christian world remains fairly unified with regards to the necessity of belief in Jesus and the turning away from your sinful life. But it is remarkable and sad to see how much division there is among various factions regarding the purpose of water baptism – both the baptism taught by John and the baptism later instituted by Jesus (**Matt. 28:19**, **Mark 16:16**) and carried out by the apostles (**Acts 2:38**).

⁹ *New Testament History – ACTS*; Gareth L. Reese, College Press, 1976, pg v

The crux of the debate is focussed on the Greek word **eis** (pronounced “ice”), which is rendered “for” by English translations of the scriptures. An unbiased reading of these translations in their present form would lead us to conclude that water baptism during the Messianic Age and the Church Age was instituted as a ceremony wherein the forgiveness of sins is granted by God. If this is true, it means that water baptism is both necessary and essential for perfect redemption.

Let’s look at **Luke 3:3** and **Acts 2:38** as rendered in some of the English translations of the Bible (the translation of **eis** has been bolded):

New International Version

Luke 3:3

*He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance **for** the forgiveness of sins.*

Acts 2:38

*Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

King James Version

Luke 3:3

*And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance **for** the remission of sins;*

Acts 2:38

*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

New King James Version

Luke 3:3

*And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance **for** the remission of sins,*

Acts 2:38

*Then Peter said to them, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

New American Standard

Luke 3:3

*And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance **for** the forgiveness of sins;*

Acts 2:38

*And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Revised Standard Version

Luke 3:3

*and he went into all the region about the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance **for** the forgiveness of sins.*

Acts 2:38

*And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

New Revised Standard Version

Luke 3:3

*He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance **for** the forgiveness of sins,*

Acts 2:38

*Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **so that** your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

American Standard Version

Luke 3:3

*And he came into all the region round about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance **unto** remission of sins;*

Acts 2:38

*And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **unto** the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

God's Word

Luke 3:3

*John traveled throughout the region around the Jordan River. He told people about a baptism of repentance **for** the forgiveness of sins.*

Acts 2:38

*Peter answered them, "All of you must turn to God and change the way you think and act, and each of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ **so that** your sins will be forgiven. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift.*

Darby Translation**Luke 3:3**

*And he came into all the district round the Jordan, preaching [the] baptism of repentance **for** [the] remission of sins,*

Acts 2:38

*And Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptised, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, **for** remission of sins, and ye will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Many within Christendom strongly oppose the necessity of water baptism and claim that the English translations of the New Testament have almost unanimously translated the word **eis** incorrectly in these passages. They claim the correct wording should be “because of”. In other words, you should be baptized because you have already been forgiven of your sins. Thus, they claim that baptism is not required for salvation but is simply an “outward sign of an inward grace” – an expression never used in scripture to describe baptism. According to their stance, baptism is simply public confirmation of an inward regeneration that has already occurred.

However, the English translations have unanimously chosen not to use this rendering for the word **eis**. Most of these translations have been completed by committees whose members span a variety of doctrinal positions. These bodies were chosen and commissioned to provide the most pure, accurate, and unbiased Greek to English (or Latin to English – KJV) translations possible from the available New Testament manuscripts. These passages from Luke and Acts shown here are English translations spanning from 1611 AD to the present day. Still, the translations remain in agreement.

A simple look at some of the most frequent English renderings of this word will show that these translations comply with the nature of the original Greek text.

eis; a primary preposition; *to* or *into* (indicating the point reached or entered), for [intent, purpose], to the intent that.¹⁰

Substituting these definitions gives us the identical meaning used in this passage of Luke:

Luke 3:3 ...preaching a baptism of repentance [*into*] the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3 ...preaching a baptism of repentance [*for*] the forgiveness of sins.

Luke 3:3 ...preaching a baptism of repentance [*for the intent of*] the

¹⁰ Greek 1519; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

forgiveness of sins.
Luke 3:3 ...preaching a baptism of repentance [for the purpose of] the
forgiveness of sins.

The same can be done for **Acts 2:38**.

We must conclude that the purpose of water baptism as it is presented in scripture is forever and inseparably tied to the washing away of sins for each repentant believer who partakes in it. Baptism by immersion in water was initiated by John, practiced and commanded by Christ, and bound throughout the Church Age by the apostles. The water baptism practiced by the church was administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (or more simply, in the name of Jesus – who was the fullness of the Three). Since Pentecost those being baptized received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit in addition to the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38-41**). As we attempt to script the plan of salvation that corresponds to the whole of New Testament scripture, we must certainly include the entire three-pronged message as it was revealed to the world through John and then by Christ and the apostles. This message rests on the unwavering faith in Jesus as the Son of God, genuine repentance, and water baptism for the remission of sins and receipt of the Holy Spirit.



Produce Fruit

Luke 3:7-14

Certainly there were those who came to John that did not fully understand his new message of salvation. As stated previously, the purpose of John's baptism was for the forgiveness of sins. However, without a genuine and complete repentance having occurred the physical act of baptism alone would not be valid. This is true for the Church Age as well. According to **1 Peter 3:21** our responsibility at baptism is to present ourselves before God with a good conscience – i.e. a changed heart and mind, fully repentant and resolved to place Jesus as Lord over our entire lives. God's promise granted to us at baptism is the remission of sins through the resurrection of Christ.

Of course the majority of John's preaching was not focused on doctrinal positioning regarding baptism but instead on the inward man. He stressed the importance of resolution and the continual transformation that each person must undergo as they enter into a right relationship with their Father in heaven. Both John and Jesus asserted that the fruit of a person's life would ultimately show whether or not this change has taken place.

Luke 3:8-9

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹The ax is already at the root of

the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

Matthew 7:16-20

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

The cultures that comprise the region known today as the Middle East have throughout the years placed an enormous weight on their ancestry. A person's heritage defines who they are and thus religion is not so much a matter of personal preference or of individual choice as it is a part of one's culture and family history. With very few exceptions you were simply born a Jew – you didn't become one. Although the Bible does mention converts to Judaism, this segment comprised but a small percentage of those holding to the Mosaic laws. They were distinctly called "converts" so as to distinguish them from the true Jews – the overconfident descendants of Abraham. John was smashing this false sense of security held by the Jews who prided themselves in their heritage yet placed too little weight on their actions and their love for God.

The ax was now at the root of the tree – the physical ancestral tree of Abraham to be exact. Although the Jews would receive the first opportunity to receive this new salvation, there would ultimately be a host of branches from Jewish descent that would be cut off by God so that the Gentiles might be grafted in. From now on, the true children of God would be those who lived with the faith of Abraham rather than those who shared in his bloodline.

Paul expounds on this topic in the book of Romans
Romans 2:13, 2:28-29a, 4:16, 11:19-21



He Must Become Greater
Luke 3:15-18

For a long time John would be the only person who recognized the divinity of Jesus. Before Jesus' ministry became public John fulfilled his purpose to clear out a path for the coming king. Often as kings would travel through unblazen countryside, servants would be sent far ahead of the caravan to clear a straight path, smooth out the rough edges, and level the terrain as much as possible. This was the role prophesied for John before he was born and he embraced it forcefully, yet humbly (ref. ***Luke 3:4-6***).

Some people began to hope and speculate that John might even be the Christ. However, it was time for the people to turn their attention to the true

Messiah. As Jesus began to draw men to him, John (prior to his imprisonment) willingly yielded to the growing popularity of his Lord. Jesus would become greater and John would become less. It was now Jesus who would become the teacher and the proclaimer of good news. As prophesied here by John, Jesus' ministry would bring about a sifting of hearts, a separation of the wheat and the chaff. He would harvest those who would be humble and useful to God and shed those who were stubborn and unbelieving.

Read John 3:26-30

John distinguished between the baptism he was able to administer from the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism with fire that would both come from the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (**vs. 16**). The baptism of the Holy Spirit would not be an act of obedience by men but an act of God. This baptism was poured out twice in the New Testament – first to the apostles on Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-4**) and second to the Gentile household of Cornelius (**Acts 10:44-46**). The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred both times for a specific purpose – to usher in the Church Age. It came first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

There are some definite similarities in both occurrences of the Holy Spirit baptism. Neither group of recipients was expecting its coming at the very moment it did nor were they commanded to do anything to receive this baptism; it simply came upon them without warning. In both cases, the Spirit manifested itself outwardly in the form of tongues upon its arrival in **Acts 2:1-4** and **Acts 10:44-46**, unlike any other baptism listed in the New Testament. The recipients of this baptism (those in the upper room at Pentecost and the household of Cornelius) were never commanded to teach or administer this baptism upon anyone else. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is simply not required for salvation nor was it meant to be experienced by every believer, lest we overstate its importance. It was however God's way of validating the ministry of the apostles and the ministry of the Gospel to the Gentiles, lest we understate its importance. Lastly, this baptism should not be confused with the act of being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, a water baptism commanded to all for the specific purpose of the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38**).

In **Luke 3:16-17** John foretells of another baptism – a baptism by fire. John is almost certainly not referring to the tongues of fire in **Acts 2:1-4** but rather the eventual judgment fire that will test the saints and consume the enemies of God. Again we see Jesus being described with the very same character and function as the God of the scriptures. Jehovah God is seen in **Jeremiah 15:7** as a God who would take his threshing instrument and sift through the ungodly among Israel and Judah. Now this winnowing fork has been passed to Jesus who shall reserve judgment over all mankind and sift through the righteous and the wicked with his judgment fire. John tells us that Jesus will administer both the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism by fire. We are thus given additional proof that Jesus decisively fulfills the role of the one true God of the ages and that this God was now dwelling in the flesh with his creation for a period of time. Jesus would usher in God's new and final covenant with mankind by issuing the baptism of the

Holy Spirit and he shall also sit in judgment of the living and the dead and administer his justice at the last day. These are seats reserved for God alone and they were filled by Jesus Christ.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

[Acts 2:1-4](#)

[Acts 10:44-46a](#)

The Baptism with Fire

[Matthew 13:40-42](#)

[Mark 9:49](#)

[1 Cor. 3:12-15](#)

[Hebrews 10:26-27](#)

[2 Peter 3:7, 10-12](#)

[Rev. 20:13-15](#)



Deep Convictions

[Luke 3:19-20](#)

Luke records here that John the Baptist rebuked Herod Antipas not only because of his immoral relationship with his sister-in-law but for a mountain of ungodly and corrupt acts. To be sure, this was not a face-to-face rebuke. However, it seems likely that John in the midst of his preaching denounced or rebuked the conduct of Herod and the wickedness that he represented. Thus we are in need of a messenger, someone in the midst of John's hearing who deliberately relayed his words to Herod in hopes that this offshoot ministry might be shut down. A likely candidate would be the Pharisees who admittedly rejected John the Baptist and his message ([Luke 7:30](#)). The Pharisees appeared to have some communication ties with Herod during the ministry of Jesus as well (ref. [Luke 13:31](#)).

It seems that the Pharisees had a love-hate relationship with the Roman authorities. When they wanted the opposition snuffed out they pledged allegiance to Roman sovereignty. But in their hearts they despised the Romans and longed for Jewish dominion. However it happened, the ministry of John came to an abrupt end as Herod sent a detachment of soldiers to arrest him. He was then brought to Herod and locked up in prison. This series of events served to solidify John's status as a prophet in the minds of the general Jewish populace for he had preached against the wickedness of Rome and was willing to suffer imprisonment for his convictions.

God sent his prophets primarily to call his own people back to their covenant with him. However, many were commissioned to preach against the immorality and idolatry of kings, rulers, and governments of many nations including but not exclusively Israel and Judah. As was the case with John these confrontations often led to imprisonment, persecution, and sometimes martyrdom. Those who corrupted themselves in the acquisition of wealth and power seldom welcomed God's words (and this still holds true). Yet God's messengers continually confronted those who governed with harshness, pride, and dishonesty.

Through the years the radical convictions of the prophets posed a threat to those who sat in authority but chose to ignore justice and righteousness.

Read [Mark 6:17-20](#), an excerpt that includes the account of John's arrest. It is interesting to note that Herod, although hard-hearted and contemptible, was still intrigued by John's message. He seemed to be impressed by John's boldness and deep convictions. Herod was no doubt given a chance by God to repent of his wickedness upon hearing the preaching of John. Unfortunately he was so consumed by his desire to please people that he eventually had John executed instead of humbling himself and doing what was right.

Not all the prophets' sermons to the kings and rulers fell on deaf ears however. The Bible records several instances where their message cut to the hearts of even the worst offenders of God's commands. Kings and even nations have been known to repent fully at the preaching of God's messengers and were even spared from the destruction decreed for them. Surely this can still happen today if we would but raise our voices, for the Lord does not change.

[1 Kings 21:20-29](#)

[2 Chron. 33:9-13](#)

[Daniel 4:29-34](#)

[Jonah 1:1-2, 3:4-10](#)



Jesus is Baptized

[Luke 3:21-22](#)

Prior to John's imprisonment he spent his public ministry preaching at the Jordan River, most likely just a few miles north of the Dead Sea. The location was approximately 20 miles due east of Jerusalem, a good day's walk. The people from Jerusalem and the surrounding region came out to hear him preach. His ministry was quite successful among the less traditional Jews, the tax collectors, and the soldiers – a segment of Jewish populace all but ignored by the elders and teachers of the law.

During those days Jesus of Nazareth ventured to the Jordan to partake in John's ministry by being baptized in water. Although John expressed his reservations about baptizing Jesus – his relative and his Lord – he complied and baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.

The real question is: Why was Jesus baptized? We can be sure that the Savior of the world did not need to be saved, nor does the one who forgives sin need to be forgiven. For some of our questions a concrete answer may or may not exist. However, we are still obligated to have complete faith in God. In some cases we must be satisfied simply knowing and believing that an event did happen as recorded in the scriptures without fully understanding how or even why. (One of those questions that we can ask God when we get to heaven.) Perhaps this is just such a situation. On the other hand, I have listed some possible reasons why Jesus was baptized by John and have listed some scriptural references.

1. Obedience

Jesus is described in several scriptures to have willingly lowered himself to the role of servant. A servant obeys orders, he does not give them. For Jesus to take on this role he would have to obey the commands of God in the same way that all are expected to obey. Baptism in water is a command of God given first to the Israelites through John and eventually commanded to all by Jesus himself. Perhaps it is this reason that Jesus humbles himself and obeys – obedience not for the sake of salvation, but purely for the sake of obedience.

Romans 5:19

Philip. 2:5-8

Hebrews 5:8-9

2. Example

Christ was to become the cornerstone of the Church that would emerge following his ministry. Consequently, it is essential for those who come after Jesus to be able to follow him and imitate him in every possible way. A Christian simply strives to follow in the footsteps of Christ. The fact that Jesus was baptized should only solidify our need to share also in this rite. If the one who was sinless was immersed how much more we who are steeped in sin! Jesus set the complete example of how to live in order to please God. Part of setting that example for us was humbling himself before men and before God at his baptism. Should we not do the same?

Ephes. 2:20-22

John 12:26

John 13:15

1 Peter 2:21

3. Fulfillment

Throughout Jesus' lifetime circumstances would present themselves to Jesus and require his participation for the sole purpose of fulfilling specific prophecies written about him. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on a colt was written about in **Zechariah 9:9**. He made his home in Capernaum to fulfill **Isaiah 9:1-2** as recorded in Matthew. And we shall see many more instances where Jesus carries out the preordained plan for his life as foretold in centuries past by God's prophets. Again, Jesus partaking in this baptism was not necessary for the remission of sins but rather (in his own words to John) it was "*proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness*".

Matthew 3:13-15

Luke 24:44

Prophecies fulfilled:

Psalm 2:7

Isaiah 42:1

John 1:33

4. Anointing

For those of us living in the Church Age our baptism is the time that signifies both our *union* with God and our *sonship* to him. We become unified with God as the indwelling of his Spirit is given us at that time. We also become sons and daughters of God at the time of our baptism as we are then adopted as heirs to the promises made to Abraham centuries ago (ref. **Gal. 3:26-29**). It seems accurate then to depict Jesus' baptism as the time where his Sonship to God became official. He was once and for all filled with the full measure of God's spirit and was given his anointing to preach with all the authority of God the Father. All of the elements of the Godhead came together for this anointing: Jesus the Son humbly found in the appearance of man, God the Father expressing loudly his delight from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descending on him in the form of a dove.

Galatians 3:26-29

John 1:32-34

Psalm 2:7

Isaiah 42:1



Jesus Begins His Ministry

Luke 3:23-38

The normal age for the Levites to begin serving at the tent of meeting or the temple was thirty years old. This age was significant for other Biblical figures as well including David who was thirty when he was anointed King of Israel in Hebron. The Christ, who was required by prophecy to be a descendant of David, began his ministry likewise at about age thirty. A popular historical date for this time is 29 AD, although 26 or 27 AD (as proposed earlier when talking about the inauguration of John's ministry) might be more accurate.

Read Numbers 4:3

1 Chron. 23:3

Genesis 41:46

1 Samuel 13:1

2 Samuel 5:4

Luke makes sure to trace the genealogy of Christ all the way back to Adam, the first man and thus the father of all mankind (Jew and Gentile alike). Matthew goes back only as far as Abraham, the first patriarch of the Israelite nation. Luke intended to show that Jesus was the source of salvation for every man and woman; he was not only the Messiah to the Jews. Other major differences exist between the genealogy listed here in Luke from the one listed in the first chapter of Matthew. A few proposals to explain this have been offered.

It is possible that Luke was tracing the ancestry of Mary rather than Joseph, showing that she too was a descendant of King David. Another possibility is that Luke recorded the actual line of Joseph, son of Heli. That would mean that Jacob (recorded in Matthew as father of Joseph) would have been a relative of Joseph who perhaps died childless. Thus, the closest living relative would be required by Jewish Law to take over the family line, which happened to be the royal line in which all the Kings of Judah are traced.

Other proposals have been offered yet all continue to have some difficulties. One problem is that both genealogies converge at Zerubbabel and Shealtiel and then branch off again. Are these the same persons or are they two sets of entirely different men who shared the same names? If they are the same persons, this presents a physical impossibility (you can't have two fathers) but not a major Biblical hurdle.

Luke 3:27

*the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa,
the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,
the son of Neri,*

Matthew 1:12-13

*After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
Abiud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,*

One possible explanation of this illogical concurrence exists when you consider that it takes place right around the time of the exiles' return from Babylon. During the destruction of their homeland and the seventy years of exile many of the Jews had lost all family records. Upon their return to Jerusalem accurate records for some were still available while others remained unaccounted for. It is likely that some Jews attempted to recover their heritage by acquiring the family name of other documented survivors. It is also reasonable to assume that more than a few children were adopted by their closest living relatives or friends after losing their parents during the devastation of Israel and Judah. This appears to be the case of Esther, who lost both father and mother and was raised by her Uncle Mordecai. For the Jews it would become difficult to accurately track one's family tree during this period of history.

Another possible explanation is that due to the hundreds of thousands of Israelites who died during the Babylonian invasion several ancestral trees converged around those who were willing to offer themselves as kinsmen redeemers. This practice would have encouraged the chronicled Jews to take over and sustain a family line in danger of being lost forever. Even the books of Ezra and Nehemiah list apparent discrepancies in the family records regarding the number of exiles who returned. This should not make us question the reliability

of the scriptures. On the contrary, we are able to see how important it was to the Jews to keep an accurate family history. Amazingly, these meticulous records survived even the destruction of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem and outlasted the generations of Jews who lived and died in exile.

Read Ezra 2:59-62

Redeeming a family line

Deut. 25:5-10

The story of Ruth and Boaz is an example of this

Ruth 4:9-10



Testing, Satan, and the Spiritual Battle

Luke 4:1-2

Jesus left the low valley of the Jordan and was led by the Spirit to a location somewhere in the Judean wilderness though the precise location is only speculation. He would spend the next forty days and nights wandering in the wilderness, led by the Spirit, and tempted by Satan.

The number forty is certainly a familiar biblical number and is specifically mentioned by all three Gospel writers that include this period of testing in their accounts (John being the exception). We can certainly make the comparison between Jesus' forty-day experience here and the nation of Israel's forty years of wandering and testing in the wilderness. God saved his people from the oppression of Egypt and led them through waters of the Red Sea on dry ground. He then allowed them to experience hunger and cry out to him. Then he fed them with manna. God was trying to teach his people to depend on him completely. This is much the same as Jesus who was saved from the tyranny of Herod as a child and afterwards he was led out of Egypt. He had just passed through the baptismal waters at the Jordan and was now left hungry after his time of fasting. Jesus too was learning how to rely on the gentle leading of God's spirit during those forty days. Just as God was present in a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day throughout Israel's forty years of wandering, God's presence never left Jesus.

God revealed through the prophet Hosea that although Israel was his chosen son they failed to remain faithful to him during their period of testing (**Hosea 11:1-2a**). Now Jesus, who was also called the Son of God Most High, was experiencing a similar calling and time of testing in the wilderness. It is remarkable to witness God in the flesh experiencing first hand the very same challenges that he had allowed his chosen people to endure. He allowed himself to hunger, to be tempted, to be refined, and to confront the evil one. Unlike Israel however, Jesus would emerge totally faithful and completely blameless. He would be God's chosen Son and would remain faithful and united with God throughout his lifetime.

Hosea 11:1-2a

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

*²But the more I called Israel,
the further they went from me.*

Matthew 2:14-15

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

As the forty days of testing came to a close, Jesus would face and overcome Satan. Three times he would refer to the book of Deuteronomy to rise above the temptations thrust at him by the Evil One. Quite appropriately, these are the very passages of scripture that record Moses' farewell address to the nation of Israel at the close of their forty years of wandering. Joshua was about to lead the nation of Israel into the land of Canaan to drive out the existing nations and the false gods that were present. Moses reminded the new generation of Israelites all that God had done to provide for them, to lead them, and to teach them during their wanderings in the desert. What a powerful parallel we are given here in Luke as centuries later we see Jesus (Hebrew *Joshua*) gaining strength from reciting these same words just prior to launching his ministry throughout Canaan, now Palestine. God had provided him with strength and had upheld him during his forty days of testing. And just as the Israelites advanced and crushed their enemies Jesus would now proceed by smashing hundreds of years of tradition and would oppose those who worshipped God in vain.

It should not surprise us how quickly Satan steps onto the scene. Jesus had been anointed to preach and was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was now prepared to begin his ministry. And it was now that the devil – the accuser, the slanderer (Greek – **diabolos**¹¹) – showed up to oppose him. Satan's purpose as described by Jesus in **John 10:10** is to steal, kill, and destroy. All of these qualities are completely opposite to the many descriptions of God in the scriptures. God purchases men at a high price. Satan steals them for nothing. God is always granting new life, new hope, and eternal salvation. Satan kills life, kills hope, and offers eternal damnation. God is a creator and his works are displayed for all to see and be in awe. Satan attempts to destroy the work of God and wants us to be in awe of the power of men. The devil's singular mission has always been to oppose the work of God.

The battle between God and Satan's army as recorded in the scriptures is at its peak during the few years of Jesus' earthly ministry. After that he continued to actively make war on the body of Christ, the church. Simply observe the number of times the Bible (NIV translation used) denotes any form of the words "Satan", "devil", "evil one" and "demon" in the four Gospels during the earthly ministry of Jesus (spanning approximately three years) compared to the number

¹¹ Greek 1228; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

of times they are used in the Old Testament (spanning perhaps four thousand years) and rest of the New Testament (spanning around seventy years).

SATAN

Old Testament: appears 18 times in only 3 of 39 books
 New Test. (minus Gospels): appears 20 times, 7 in Revelation
 Four Gospels: appears 16 times

DEVIL

Old Testament: not used at all
 New Test. (minus Gospels): appears 21 times, 5 in Revelation
 Four Gospels: appears 15 times

EVIL ONE

Old Testament: not used at all
 New Test. (minus Gospels): appears 7 times
 Four Gospels: appears 5 times

DEMON

Old Testament: appears 2 times
 New Test. (minus Gospels): appears 11 times
 Four Gospels: appears 69 times

COMBINED TIMES THESE WORDS ARE USED

Old Testament: total of 20 times
 New Test. (minus Gospels): total of 59 times
 Four Gospels: total of 105 times



Comfort

Luke 4:3-4

Satan tempted Jesus in the areas of comfort, compromise, and confidence. He appealed first to Jesus to consider his personal need of food and in doing so to prove that he was the Son of God. According to **Hebrews 4:15** Jesus was “*tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.*” As discussed previously, God had made his dwelling with men in a tabernacle of flesh and was now experiencing the whole of human struggle. A forty-day fast would have put Jesus in a serious state of physical exhaustion and malnutrition. Though the Spirit kept him going (and perhaps kept him alive) his flesh cried out for comfort. Nevertheless, Jesus was determined to completely master his flesh prior to his public ministry. He was resolved to put his body and mind in check and place complete dependence on God and the Spirit. And throughout his ministry when the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others cried out for his assistance he would place them as first priority over his own desires for comfort, for food, for rest, and for physical contentment.

One of Satan's most effective tools is trying to get us disciples focused on the things that will make our lives easier and more comfortable – whether it is time, money, sleep, relationships, control, etc. Satan preys on our selfish nature that we might become absorbed in the fulfillment of our own needs. He tempts us to look at the sacrifices we are making for the kingdom of God with regret and bitterness. We begin thinking of all that we've given up rather than everything we have to gain. The physical comforts that the world has to offer can become our greatest distraction to our spiritual growth. If Satan convinces us to set our own needs above the needs of others he has been successful. With Jesus Satan failed miserably. Never do you see Jesus placing his own need for food, rest, or comfort above the needs of the people he is serving. Satan would always show up to justify the selfish way out yet he would never once succeed in enticing Jesus to take that path. Jesus would fully master the flesh in which he dwelt.

Near the end of his earthly ministry he revealed to his disciples the very lesson he learned during his forty days of fasting. He tells them as recorded in [Mark 14:38](#), *“The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”* And even dying on the cross when a mild painkiller was at the tip of his tongue he would refuse to comfort his tortured body. He completely defeated Satan once and for all.

[Mark 1:32-35](#)

[Mark 6:31-34](#)

[Matthew 14:12-20](#)

[Matthew 27:34](#)



Compromise

[Luke 4:5-8](#)

Satan consistently provided “spiritual” justifications in his attempts to lure Jesus into sin. He first tempted Jesus to satisfy his hunger and provided the rationalization for such an act: proving that he was God's son. All three temptations are cloaked with warped spiritual reasoning such as this.

He then led Jesus up to a high place and Luke records explicitly that all the existing kingdoms of the world appeared before their eyes – a supernatural occurrence but something allowed to Satan. The devil looked as if he was assisting Jesus in fulfilling his mission of saving the lost world albeit through compromise and humanistic means, for that is Satan's way. According to the deceiver, if Jesus wanted to reach the masses he could ensure that success. If Jesus was willing to compromise, he could simply preach a message that was more acceptable to the populations at large. After all, wouldn't more people have become followers of Christ if only his message had not been so radical, so hard-line, and so costly? If only God's word was more acceptable and palatable to kings, rulers, and the religious authorities worldwide then converts would have come to Jesus by the tens of thousands rather than by the dozens.

Again, Satan failed to manipulate the Lord into a bargain. When Jesus' earthly ministry comes to a close the number of faithful disciples in Jerusalem

was a mere 120, though more believers likely existed throughout Judea and Galilee. Based solely on the numbers one might consider his mission a failure. Couldn't he have done better? The answer is yes – by accepting the offer that Satan now placed before him. By bowing down in the form of compromise and humanistic methods he could have certainly recruited tens of thousands more.

Yet Jesus lived and preached a life without compromise. This he instilled into but a handful of followers. And because these disciples were likewise trained to forsake compromise the Gospel reached the known world at a blazing pace. That is God's way – one person at a time, no compromise, no humanistic gimmicks, and no apologies for the high cost of followship.

Even today Satan is tempting us to make the message of discipleship more and more politically correct and attractive at the price of compromise. He is persuading us to lasso the masses rather than changing the hearts of each individual person, one soul at a time. Satan wants us to implement the gimmick-ministries and substitute humanistic wisdom for prayer and fasting and a simple trust in God and his Word. Satan will even give us all of the spiritual justifications we need to water down the truth to which we have been called. When we compromise the radical call of following Christ we are falling prey to Satan's ever-elusive schemes.

Jesus refused to compromise

[Matthew 19:21-23](#)

[John 6:66-67](#)

[Luke 14:25-27](#)

[Mark 8:31-35](#)

Jesus' followers refused to compromise

[Acts 4:13](#)

[Acts 4:18-20](#)

[Acts 5:28-33](#)

[Acts 5:40-42](#)



Confidence

[Luke 4:9-13](#)

The devil led Jesus into Jerusalem and they made their way up to the temple's highest point. The temple and its courts would prove to be a key location in Jesus' earthly ministry. As they looked down at the activities below Satan tried to cause Jesus to question or perhaps just entertain the doubt as to whether or not God was truly with him. He simply asked Jesus to prove to himself and to others that he was in fact walking in the full measure of the Spirit and with the full approval of God. He was tempting the Lord to base his confidence on something tangible – something that could be seen and proven – rather than walking by faith.

In the same way Satan tempts us and causes us to doubt whether God is actually with us or is working in our lives. We test him in our prayers and our requests instead of pleasing him with our faith. We feel confident when we see God working miraculously in our lives, but we begin to second-guess him during a period of pruning and discipline. Where does our confidence lie? Are we walking faithfully before God or do we rely on the blessings and the obvious miracles as proof of his approval? If we depend entirely on the visible and the tangible our faith and our security will soar and plummet with each passing day. We must be rooted in our faith more deeply so that whether we are in times of plenty or amid seasons of drought we remain secure with God.

Throughout his ministry Satan would show up at opportune times and attempt to persuade Jesus to prove himself to the people. If Jesus was from God, why not just demonstrate this to the people in dramatic, miraculous fashion? In fact, Jesus did prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was with him and in him. In his own time and his own way Jesus gave ample evidence of his divinity while still leaving room for the people to exercise their own faith, which is required to truly please God (**Heb. 11:6**). He demonstrated his authority over the laws of nature by calming the storm and feeding the five thousand. With the touch of his hand or words from his mouth he confirmed his Lordship over sickness, physical deformity, and even death. Jesus would establish himself far superior to all those dwelling in the spiritual realms by casting aside a legion of demons with a single rebuke. After all this the vast majority of people would still struggle to believe in him. Would a leap off the temple provide greater proof than these countless miracles?

You can still hear the very words of Satan tempting Jesus during his dying hour on the cross. Satan would beg Jesus one last time to prove that he was God's son, that God was pleased with him, and to once and for all show the world that he was all-powerful. The voice of the Devil can still be heard in the mocking of the crowd in **Matthew 27:40-43**. The onlookers provoked Jesus much the same as Lucifer did during this first testing in the Judean wilderness. *"You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'* " *"You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!"*

Luke 4:9

Matthew 12:38

John 2:18

John 8:53

John 14:8

Where does our confidence rest?

2 Cor. 4:18

2 Cor. 5:6-7
Ephes. 3:12
Philip. 3:3



The Synagogue
Luke 4:14-15

Having mastered his flesh and temporarily defeated Satan Jesus set out from the Judean wilderness and regained his strength. He began what was to be at least a three-year public ministry completely reliant on the Holy Spirit and filled with the full measure of God's power. In a timeline forthcoming in this book we shall discuss the events that most likely took place immediately after this period of fasting and temptation. In essence, the events described in **John 2-4** followed Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness. Thus, we may have jumped a few months and perhaps an entire year into Jesus' ministry by the time Jesus preaches in Galilee and then returns to Nazareth as recorded here in Luke.

One of Jesus' early trademarks was his desire to speak publicly to the Jews at the synagogue. Travelers and guest Rabbis were usually welcome to share news from their homeland and to teach from the Old Testament scrolls kept in each synagogue. As his ministry began, Jesus often used each town's local synagogue to gather an audience to teach the scriptures and interpret the prophecies. This strategy would later be imitated by his disciples and especially by Paul the apostle. Jesus' message, his vision, and his passion were met with an initial period of praise and favor from the people, as would be the case with the early church following his ascension. Soon however, Jesus' opportunities to stand before the synagogue would be gone as widespread controversy began to surround him and the priests and teachers of the law united against his teaching.

Initial period of favor; Jesus and the early church

Luke 4:22
Acts 2:43
Acts 2:47

Use of the Synagogue to advance the Gospel by Jesus and the apostles

Luke 4:16 **Mark 3:1**
Luke 4:44 **Mark 6:2a**
Mark 1:21
Acts 13:14-15, 14:1, 17:1-2, 17:10, 18:4, 18:19, 19:8



Freedom for the Oppressed

Luke 4:16-22

Jesus left Galilee, which would soon become the center of his new ministry, and he returned to his hometown. Best estimates depict Nazareth as a town of around 1,500 to 2,000 residents during the lifetime of Jesus. This would be the first of Jesus' two speaking engagements at the local synagogue in Nazareth as recorded in the Gospels. The second time (see **Matthew 13:53-58**, **Mark 6:1-6**) he would be in the company of his own disciples. In both cases, the townspeople of Nazareth would initially be astonished at his preaching only to reject him moments later.

Jesus' ministry would closely reflect the specific prophecy from **Isaiah 61:1-2** that he read at this first appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth. This passage can perhaps be considered the theme of Jesus' earthly ministry. It was this same passage of scripture that Jesus paraphrased to John the Baptist's disciples when the imprisoned prophet needed reassuring that the ministry of Christ had in fact come (ref. **Luke 7:22**).

From the onset of his ministry, Jesus had come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, a time that was intended to be like the year of Jubilee for all Israel. It was a period of freedom for the land and its inhabitants and rest for the weary souls. Thus we see in the nature of God a longing to summon his people once again and to fulfill their physical and spiritual needs. This year of the Lord's favor arrived as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses (for Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but instead fulfill it). **Hebrews 10:1** states, "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves." The Year of Jubilee as recorded in the book of Leviticus was another foreshadowing of the spiritual reality that would be revealed in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The following is an excerpt from the Holman Bible Dictionary¹² that will help us get a picture of the Year of Jubilee as it was intended for God's people. Keep in mind that Jesus' ministry was just beginning and the rest that God intended for his people was soon to be unveiled.

YEAR OF JUBILEE The fiftieth year after seven cycles of seven years (Leviticus 25:10) in which Israel's land and people gained freedom. It was begun with a blast from a ram's horn on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9). During this year of joy and liberation, the law stipulated three respects in which the land and people were to be sanctified: (1) It was to be a time of rest for the soil as well as people (Leviticus 25:11). The unattended growth of the field was for the poor to glean and for the beasts of the field (Exodus 23:11). (2) All land was to revert back to the original owner (Leviticus 25:10-34; Leviticus 27:16-24). The original distribution of land was to remain intact. All property which the original owner had been obligated to sell (and had not yet been redeemed) was to revert (without payment) to the original owner or his lawful heirs. Some exceptions to this pattern are noted in Leviticus 25:29-30; Leviticus 27:17-21. (3) Every Israelite who had sold himself—either to his

¹² Selection taken from the Holman Bible Dictionary corresponding to YEAR OF JUBILEE, taken from NavPress' WORDsearch5 CD-ROM

fellow countryman or to a foreigner settled in the land—because of poverty and remained unredeemed was to be freed along with his children (Leviticus 25:39-46).

The Year of Jubilee prevented the Israelites from oppression of one another (Leviticus 25:17). It had a leveling effect of Israel's culture by giving everyone a chance for a new start. It discouraged excessive, permanent accumulations of wealth and the deprivation of an Israelite of his inheritance in the land. Families and tribes were preserved by the return of freed bondservants to their own families. Permanent slavery in Israel was rendered impossible.

This year was a constant reminder of God's interest in economic freedom (Ezekiel 46:17). Purchase of property was actually tantamount to assuming a lease for a maximum of forty-nine years, and the seller always retained the right to cancel the purchase by settling with the buyer on the amount of money that was still payable, taking into account the number of years that the buyer had made use of the property. If the seller was either incapable or not desirous of making use of this right of redemption, the property nevertheless returned to his possession automatically in the next Year of Jubilee. So the sale of a house, for example, was equivalent to renting it for a specified period of time (Leviticus 25:29-34). This made it difficult to accumulate vast permanent holdings of wealth (compare Isaiah 5:8; Micah 2:2). God's designed arrangement was against both large estates and pauperism. The Israelites were repeatedly given the opportunity to begin anew, and the impoverished were enabled to maintain themselves in society.

This year also reflected God's provision for the soil's conservation (Leviticus 25:11-12; Leviticus 25:18-21). During the Year of Jubilee, the Israelites were once again taught that they were to live in faith that the Lord would satisfy their needs (compare Exodus 16:17-18).

Although Jesus healed many and performed countless miracles, it was the hearts of men and women and their eternal destiny that gripped him most. Throughout his ministry the hungry would be fed, the lame would walk, the blind would receive their sight, and poor would be given back their self-worth. But to limit Jesus' impact to these tangibles would be to miss the point of his ministry entirely. Jesus would instill in his disciples the need to look beyond physical blindness to see the deeper problem of spiritual blindness. He would instruct his followers to open the ears of those that were once deaf to God's message to hear and understand the truth. Those who hungered for righteousness would be satisfied. He would bring a spiritual revolution that would liberate those held prisoner to the Law and those oppressed by Satan's dominion. Those who were poor in spirit would be lifted up by the good news of God, who once again opened up his arms and offered salvation to his people. And in this figurative year of Jubilee Jesus would cancel the debts of many through the forgiveness of sins, thus returning the souls of men and women back to their original owner – God the Father.

Jesus had an intense focus on his purpose to redeem humanity from the beginning of his ministry to the end. He had not come to simply teach morality, justice, and sound principles to live by. His words were meant to save those whom Satan had bound with sin and spiritual darkness. Jesus' message would capture the attention of people from every category. He would reach the poor, the lame, the demon-possessed, the lonely, and the rejected and proclaim a message of freedom. He would also reach the wealthy, the accomplished, and the learned and appeal to them to grasp on to deeper spiritual matters. Jesus would humble and win over the self-righteous, the religious, and the pious and open their eyes to the true meaning of the scriptures. His words would stir the Jews, the Gentiles, the Samaritans, and the government officials – dividing some and enlightening others.

[Matthew 11:2-5](#)

[Matthew 13:13-15](#)

[Psalm 107:4-6](#)

[Psalm 107:10-16](#)



Jesus, the Prophet

[Luke 4:23-30](#)

Jesus' initial words were filled with grace and were met with amazement and acceptance. However, when he began to speak the truth more directly the townspeople of Nazareth had heard enough. [John 1:14](#) declares that Jesus was the Word of God in the flesh and that while dwelling among mankind he was full of grace and truth. So as long as Jesus' message was full of grace the people eagerly received it. But the moment he laid out some hard-line truths they became divided. And thus began Jesus' relentless preaching directed at his own people, the nation of Israel. Armed only with the sword of truth Jesus consistently opposed the pride within the Jewish leaders. At the same time he extended an enormous amount of grace towards even the worst of sinners within the Jewish community who humbled themselves and responded to the truth.

This also marked the first of many times that Jesus purposely used the Gentiles as examples of someone pleasing to God. Jesus explained that the widow in Zarephath and Naaman were the objects of God's mercy and favor while Israel remained without a comforter. Jesus would also hold up the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites as eager recipients to God's chosen messengers while reminding the Jews that Israel and Judah had a well-known history of rejecting the prophets ([Luke 11:31-32](#)). Luke the Gentile was sure to include any legitimate mention of God's love and salvation to his fellow Gentiles to assist the church as they extended the Gospel message to the non-Jewish world.

Jesus' own neighbors now rushed to put an end to this nonsense. Nazareth is partly surrounded by a hill with a ridge to the west of the village. Apparently the mob had proclaimed a verdict upon Jesus and capital punishment was the sentence. Miraculously, Jesus walked right through them, for his time had not yet

come. One wonders why Jesus even attempted another visit to Nazareth. Certainly God is merciful, giving even the hardest of hearts many opportunities to repent.

John 1:10-11
Isaiah 53:3-4



Jesus, the Holy One of God

Luke 4:31-37

Jesus was not like any teacher the town of Capernaum had ever seen. People were filled with wonder as he taught with deep conviction and passion and performed extraordinary miracles. Within the spiritual realms he was already well known and easily recognizable. The demons were quite aware of who they were dealing with. In **Luke 4:34** Jesus is called the “Holy One of God” and in **vs. 41** he is called the “Son of God”. In both cases these proclamations came from demons that possessed a human host. Based on what is written in the Gospels these titles were assigned to Jesus by the demons, by his followers, and by his accusers much more often than he claimed them about himself.

Jesus traveled with the title of Rabbi (or teacher). He seemed determined to embrace the role of a servant while on earth and thus he would consistently suppress his God-given titles like the Son of God, the Holy One of Israel, the Son of David, and the Christ. He modeled this servant leadership throughout his life and on the eve of his death he calls his disciples to imitate this example of servitude in **John 13:13-17**. Some exceptions did occur. Jesus did identify himself with the prophecies regarding the coming of Israel’s king upon his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem a week prior to his death. And within the final hours of his life he did identify himself both as the Son of God and the king of the Jews in the midst of those who wished to kill him because of these claims.

Let us point out again the number of times in Luke that Jesus is subtly equated with the one true God of the Bible. The Gospels record many instances where evil spirits called Jesus names found in the prophets and the Psalms as references to Jehovah God. We are given ample scriptural evidence of the oneness of God the Father and Jesus the Son of God. This evidence shows that Jesus in the flesh was in fact the Immanuel (literal – “With us (is) God”). The Savior of the world is also the Creator of the world. The Father and the Son are one; Jesus and God are one; Jesus is God.

Jesus called "Holy One" and "Son of God"

Matthew 14:33

Luke 4:34

Mark 1:24

John 1:49

Mark 3:11

John 6:69

Luke 1:35

The God of the Bible referred to as the Holy One

Psalm 22:3
Psalm 71:22

Isaiah 47:4
Isaiah 54:5

Jesus shall be the Holy One as predicted nearly 1,000
 years prior

Psalm 16:10



Jesus' Early Ministry – A Timeline

Luke 4:38 - 5:11

The first time Luke introduces Simon (Peter) we are left to assume that Jesus was acquainted with him and his relatives and that between them there already existed some type of relationship. So when did they meet? Jesus has not even officially called Simon to drop his nets and follow him as of yet. What events transpired before this time that Luke does not record in his narrative? This we shall now try to piece together.

As stated twice in the book of John and applied to Matthew, Mark, and Luke the Gospels are admittedly and necessarily incomplete (**John 20:30, John 21:25**). Although this should not affect our faith in the least it is somewhat challenging to put all of the Gospels together to construct the most complete and accurate timeline of the events of Jesus' ministry. Some of the Gospel writers (as is the case with some of the Old Testament writers) do not adhere to a rigid chronological pattern in their writing. They may group together several events in one or two pages of writing that occurred at various times during Jesus' estimated three plus years of ministry.

A careful reading of **John** chapters **1-4** puts these passages before the well-known calling of the first disciples at the Sea of Galilee and their subsequent decision to leave their nets and follow Jesus. That calling occurred after John the Baptist was put in prison. The first four chapters of John presumably occur before this imprisonment. Based on those events, the first year of Jesus' ministry would include the first of his many miracles (water into wine), a good deal of time with some of John's disciples in and around the region of Galilee, and a trip to Jerusalem for the Passover with his mother and those same disciples of John whom Jesus would later designate as his apostles. This trip to Jerusalem would find Jesus clearing the Temple for the first of two times (he would do this again during the week prior to his crucifixion). After some time in the Judean countryside baptizing he eventually left the disciples in Galilee and returned to his hometown of Nazareth. There he was rejected, as we've just read. Next, Jesus traveled back to Capernaum, this time to call the disciples to leave everything and follow him full-time. He then proceeded to travel around the Galilean villages preaching, healing, and driving out demons.

Following this paragraph is a timeline which may best describe the order of the events describing Jesus' early ministry starting with his baptism and continuing until the calling of Simon and Andrew, James and John. It is a best

guess only but seems to fit within the parameters set by the four Gospels. The timeline is as follows:

TIMELINE of JESUS' EARLY MINISTRY

Jesus is baptized: Jesus came to John in the region of the Jordan and was baptized. The Holy Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and a voice from heaven was heard.

[Matthew 3:13-17](#)

[Mark 1:9-11](#)

[Luke 3:21-22](#)

The Temptation of Jesus: Jesus was led at once into the wilderness where he fasted and prayed for forty days. Satan appeared either during or after the forty days and he and Jesus exchanged discourse. At one point they ventured privately into Jerusalem together and stood atop the temple. After Satan's departure the angels attended to Jesus and he regained his physical strength.

[Matthew 4:1-11](#)

[Mark 1:12-13](#)

[Luke 4:1-13](#)

Jesus arrived in Bethany: John the Baptist had withdrawn from his usual location along the Jordan River and was spending time with his disciples in the town of Bethany. It is here that the Pharisees caught up with John and questioned him ([John 1:24-28](#)). The day after the Pharisees questioned him, Jesus arrived in Bethany and was seen by John. It is not clear how much time had passed since his baptism. The span of time would have included Jesus' forty days of fasting, his temptation, and the angels' attending of him. We can assume that Jesus' arrival in Bethany was soon thereafter and perhaps next in chronological order. Thus, it had been at least a month and a half or two months since John the Baptist had last seen Jesus. Upon Jesus' arrival in Bethany, John again pointed him out to his own followers as the man who would succeed his ministry.

As you read carefully [John 1:28-34](#) you discover that this is not a narrative of Jesus' baptism, but rather John's eye witness account or testimony of the baptism as he tells it to his disciples.

[John 1:28-34](#)

The Day after Jesus' arrival in Bethany: John saw Jesus the next day and again directed his disciples' attention to the man he now called the Lamb of God. Two of John's disciples began to follow Jesus and they ended up spending the day together with him. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist mentioned in [John 1:35](#). The other was most likely John son of Zebedee, who often fails to name himself throughout his own Gospel. Jesus first met Simon on this day and called him Cephas (Greek – *Petros*, or Peter).

John 1:35-42

The Next Day (Arrival in Bethany plus two): Jesus left that region and headed for a wedding in Cana (most likely stopped first at Nazareth to join his mother). He asked that some of John's disciples come with him. Philip, Nathaniel, most likely Andrew and Simon Peter, and we can assume James and John as well now traveled with Jesus.

John 1:43-50

The Next Day (Arrival in Bethany plus three): Jesus, Mary, Jesus' brothers, and the disciples attend a wedding in Cana. Jesus performed his first recorded miracle by changing water into wine. The disciples witnessed the miracle and began to put their faith in Jesus. The fact that Joseph is not mentioned here with Jesus' family is perhaps an indication that he died prior to Jesus' public ministry. This might even suggest that Jesus was indeed a carpenter at some point, for he was the eldest son and would have been expected to help provide for their family.

John 2:1-11

From Cana to Capernaum: After spending at least one day (perhaps more) in Cana for the wedding, Jesus, Mary, Jesus' brothers, and the disciples traveled back to Capernaum and stayed for a few days.

John 2:12

Jesus' first trip to Jerusalem with the disciples: Although Jesus and his family had been to Jerusalem many times growing up, this was the first time since his baptism that Jesus would travel to Jerusalem to commemorate the Passover. He was accompanied by his new followers and his physical family.

John 2:13

Jesus cleansed the temple courts: As they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus confronted the moneychangers in the temple courts. He had made a whip to drive out the animals being sold and offered as sacrifices. Clearly this was not the same event as described in **Luke 19:45-46**, which occurred during Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem. This first cleansing of the temple area came as a surprise to the Jews. Being relatively unfamiliar with Jesus they questioned his authority to perform such an act. Upon the second cleansing during Passover week three years later they offered no rebuttal but plotted secretly to kill him.

John 2:14-22

Passover Week in Jerusalem: Jesus, his new followers, and his family remained in Jerusalem for a few days in order to observe the traditions of the Passover week. Jesus performed several miracles but was cautious in calling men to follow him at this time.

John 2:23-25

Jesus met with Nicodemus in Jerusalem: It seems as if the Pharisees at this time had not yet formed a concrete opinion about Jesus. Perhaps Nicodemus was sent on behalf of the Pharisees to inquire of his background, his formal education, and scriptural training. It is safe to assume that the audience for these very well known words of Jesus in the third chapter of John included only Nicodemus, the early handful of disciples from Galilee, and perhaps Jesus' mother and brothers. This meeting occurred sometime during Jesus' stay in Jerusalem for the Passover.

John 3:1-21

Jesus and John both baptizing in Judea: Jesus and his physical family now parted ways for a while. We can assume that his mother and brothers returned to Nazareth while he and the disciples headed out to the Judean countryside to call other disciples and to baptize. It is likely that these first baptisms came from a group of people who had witnessed his miracles and heard his teaching during the Passover week in Jerusalem. They would have had to post-pone their return home to travel with Jesus for a while. Here, John the Baptist realized that his work was nearly completed and that the ministry of Jesus was building momentum.

John 3:22-36

Jesus began to travel back to Galilee: Although Jesus had been very successful in multiplying disciples and training his followers to teach and to baptize, he decided to return again to the region surrounding the Sea of Galilee. At some point John was thrown into prison. If we place his imprisonment at this juncture, then it is possible that Jesus' decision to return to Galilee was a result of Herod's arrest of John. Perhaps Jesus left the region intentionally to prevent his own probable imprisonment before the appropriate time.

Mathew 4:12

Mark 1:14-15

John 4:1-3

Two days spent in Samaria: Rather than avoiding Samaria as most Jews did, Jesus and the disciples headed north through this region and even stopped to buy food at a town called Sychar. Jesus talked with a woman at Jacob's well and she wondered whether he might in fact be the Christ. Jesus remained with the Samaritans for two days, which was surely an awkward experience for his Galilean followers. After these two days Jesus continued to head north towards Galilee leaving behind him many believers and future converts that would be harvested by Philip the Evangelist some years later (**Acts 8:4-25**).

John 4:4-42

Jesus continued on to Galilee: Perhaps the disciples expected Jesus to return to his family at this time. But rather than going to Nazareth, Jesus explained to them that his ministry must take root somewhere other than his hometown. It appears that this conversation occurred before his rejection in Nazareth, which means that Jesus was already anticipating a critical reaction from his hometown and purposely avoided going there at this time. Thus, he returned to Galilee where

those who had earlier witnessed his power in Jerusalem during Passover Week now welcomed him. He roamed throughout the towns and villages of Galilee and taught in their synagogues.

Luke 4:14-15

John 4:43-45

The disciples returned to their families: The disciples parted ways with Jesus at some point and returned to their hometown of Bethsaida and Capernaum. They had traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem, had spent time in the Judean countryside baptizing, passed through Samaria, and now were close to their homes. After being away now for quite some time they likely felt the need to return to their fishing profession. There is no mention of the disciples being with him after Samaria. Perhaps they do stay on for the visit through the Galilean towns and then part ways after the upcoming visit to Cana. Either way, there was a time during Jesus early ministry where he left the disciples in Bethsaida (or they left him) and they returned to their families and to their fishing.

Jesus visited Cana again: Jesus was visiting several towns in the region of Galilee and next came to the town of Cana, the place where he had performed his first recorded miracle several months earlier. Apparently Jesus had not yet traveled to Capernaum on this trip. While he was in Cana, a man whose son lay sick in Capernaum arrived to beg Jesus to come with him there. Instead of leaving with the man Jesus healed the boy with a simple command of his mouth. This is not the second miracle of Jesus, which a casual reading of **John 4:54** might lead one to conclude. Remember all the miracles he performed in Jerusalem during the Passover week – enough in fact to ruffle the Pharisees and inspire a meeting with Nicodemus. The reading of this passage is meant to show either that this was the second miracle of Jesus since his recent return from Judea or that it was the second miraculous sign performed by Jesus in the town of Cana – the first being the water into wine conversion.

John 4:46-54

From **John 4:54** to the next verse, **John 5:1**, there is a gap. John writes, “*Some time later...*” to denote that a good amount of time has now passed. John has taken us through some of the early stages of Jesus ministry that the other Gospel writers did not include. Let’s keep on the timeline until we reach the defining call for Simon, Andrew, James and John to leave their nets, their homes, and their families to follow Jesus.

Jesus visited Nazareth: After a successful period of time in the region of Galilee, Jesus headed for his boyhood home of Nazareth. It appears as if Jesus made this venture by himself, leaving his disciples in Galilee. This visit could have lasted anywhere from a week to several weeks. We only know that it ended abruptly as Jesus began preaching on a particular Sabbath.

Luke does not record any attempt by Jesus to perform miracles during this present visit to Nazareth (**Luke 4**). Instead, he simply assumed the role of guest

speaker in the synagogue. He referred to Israel's unwillingness to receive God's comfort and portrayed the Gentiles as the objects of God's favor. As a result, the people of Nazareth attempted to throw him off of a cliff. He eluded the crowd and left them empty-handed. He would return again after some time accompanied by his disciples as recorded in [Matthew 13:53-58](#) and [Mark 6:1-6](#). During this second visit he would heal some sick people and would display some of his miraculous power, although the people of Nazareth lacked faith and they limited the extent of Jesus' power shown to them.

[Luke 4:16-30](#)

Jesus returned to Galilee: Shaking the dust off his feet Jesus left Nazareth and returned to Galilee where his message and his ministry had been previously praised and welcomed. In essence, he adopted Capernaum as a home base for his ministry. Here he would have been reunited with the disciples that had traveled with him the previous Passover.

[Matthew 4:13-17](#)

Jesus taught on the shore of the Sea of Galilee: Upon Jesus' return to Galilee the people began to crowd around him. They were unwilling to wait until the Sabbath to hear his captivating words. So Jesus began to preach about the kingdom of God. As the crowd increased in size Jesus got into a fishing boat belonging to Simon. They put out a short distance from shore and continued teaching them from the boat. Simon was most likely sitting in the boat with Jesus and listening with fear and wonderment.

[Luke 5:1-3](#)

A miraculous catch of fish: As Jesus finished teaching people the word of God, he and Simon remained in the boat and set out for deeper waters. Andrew, Simon's brother and fishing partner, was now with them as well. Although these fishermen had just spent a fruitless and sleepless night at sea they let down their nets once again at Jesus' command. As the nets filled with fish the men attempted to haul them into the boat – probably with Jesus' assistance. As the boat began to fill with fish and water, it started to submerge. Simon signaled for James and John to join them and help. Afterwards, Simon realized that Jesus was no ordinary man – he was a man of God who exercised authority over nature. Simon's fear overcame his curiosity and he tried to push away from this holy and powerful prophet, overwhelmed by his own inadequacy.

[Luke 5:4-10b](#)

Jesus called the disciples to follow him: Jesus calmed the fears of Simon and stilled the unspoken anxiety of Andrew, James, and John as well. He explained to them that their new purpose should be to follow him more closely and be trained by him to catch men. Something in his voice must have filled them with a confidence that they now lacked within themselves. They would indeed forfeit their security and the life they had established in their nets and their boats. These men were witnesses to the ministry of John the Baptist. They had traveled with

Jesus to Jerusalem and baptized with him in Judea. Now these four fishermen needed no more convincing that God has chosen them for something greater than the lives they were leaving behind.

Matthew 4:18-22

Mark 1:16-20

Luke 5:10b-11

Jesus at the synagogue in Capernaum: **Mark 1:21** tells us that after Jesus called the disciples they went to Capernaum. We might assume that at least a day or two had passed, for fishing on the Sabbath day would have been out of the question. We must also conclude that when Jesus called them they were fishing at some location other than off the shores of Capernaum. Perhaps their fishing business was established in Bethsaida. Either way, the four fishermen now joined Jesus as they walked but a few miles to Capernaum. Jesus again took center stage in the synagogue and the people were amazed at his teaching and his tremendous confidence.

Mark 1:21-22

Luke 4:31-32

Jesus healed a man with an unclean spirit: While teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum Jesus was confronted by a man possessed by an evil (or unclean) spirit. The demonic world knew very well that Jesus was more than just a man. He was the true Deity in bodily form, the Holy One of God. Jesus again displayed his amazing authority which reached even into the spiritual realms. He rebuked the spirit and the people were left awestruck again. The news about Jesus began to spread quickly. However, you can be sure that the news of his miraculous powers swept the region more rapidly than his message of good news.

Mark 1:23-28

Luke 4:33-37

Jesus went to the home of Simon: That same day, Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon, which is either in Capernaum or in Bethsaida. **John 1:44** records that Simon and Andrew were originally from the town of Bethsaida, just a few miles directly east of Capernaum. However, we might just as well assume that Simon has made his own home with his wife, her family, and his brother Andrew in Capernaum. They still lived close enough to where they were brought up and where their own family probably still lived. In fact, it is likely that Simon's home was in Capernaum, because a walk from the synagogue in Capernaum to the town of Bethsaida even though it was but a few miles would be somewhat uncustomary on the Sabbath day.

Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law and they shared a meal together at Simon's house. News about Jesus spread so rapidly in fact that by early evening people had rounded up all the sick and demon-possessed of the nearby towns and brought them to Simon's house. There was not one suffering person that was not healed that night. Jesus personally touched each sick person brought to him and each one was cured. Jesus was interrupted several times with shouting from

someone bound with an evil spirit. How awkward this must have been for everyone witnessing these miracles. Yet Jesus sternly rebuked the demons, silenced them, and drove them out of their tormented human hosts.

[Matthew 8:14-17](#)

[Mark 1:29-34](#)

[Luke 4:38-41](#)

Jesus spent the next morning in prayer: After a late night giving to the needy and healing the sick you would think that Jesus might need some rest. Instead he left the house early in the morning while it was still dark to spend some time with God in prayer. As the others awoke they searched for Jesus and were eventually able to locate him. Jesus was refreshed in spirit and resolved to leave Capernaum. He and his disciples began to travel to the nearby towns and villages to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

[Mark 1:35-38](#)

[Luke 4:42-43](#)

The journey continued: Jesus and a handful of disciples set off from Capernaum. He began to preach in the region of Galilee. As word began to spread far and wide, the people traveled from miles around to listen to this new teacher and witness his wondrous power.

[Matthew 4:23-24](#)

[Mark 1:39](#)

[Luke 4:44](#)



I Am Willing

[Luke 5:12-15](#)

Jesus attached no strings, no promises, and no expectations to the sick and the lame as he healed them. He just gave of himself. And what a gift he offered. To the blind: sight. To the mute: speech. To the deaf: hearing. To the crippled: strength. To the lepers: flesh. To the demon-possessed: peace. Those who were ceremoniously unclean had come to the very source of life and purity. Jesus was not made unclean as he contacted those he healed. Instead they were restored and cleansed by his wondrous touch.

It was neither for show nor for widespread popularity that he healed. He often instructed those he healed to give their praise to God and honor God's present covenant – the Law of Moses. He did not command them to run off and boast about his power, but to simply tell others – including the priests – their testimony about him so that they might believe. Remember [Philippians 2:5-8](#). Although Jesus was God in the flesh he had taken the role of servant and at this time he was not staking claim to his equality with God. Even as he displayed such awesome power in his miracles Jesus desired that his followers stand in awe of God, not of him. He was for us a model of humility and taught us that we mustn't feed off of praise from others nor should we seek it.

The miracles and well-known healings that Jesus performed supplied evidence to the fact that he was the Son of God. The healing of a leper was monumental, an event recorded only twice in the scriptures prior to this (Miriam in **Numbers 12:15** and Naaman in **2 Kings 5:13-14**), not counting God's demonstration to Moses in **Exodus 4:6-7**. Jesus did not just send this cleansed man to the priests to show reverence to God's present covenant. He had another purpose as stated in **vs. 14**. Jesus was sending the ex-leper as a testimony to them. The priests would hear firsthand about the miraculous power and compassion offered by this Jesus of Nazareth.

For the world to accept that he was the Messiah Jesus needed more than his own testimony to validate his ministry. By sending those he healed to the priests he was giving the religious leaders ample opportunity to accept him and put their faith in him. When the broad rejection of his ministry begins later in the book of Luke it appears to be these same religious leaders who initiate it. Thus, they will have no excuse for their lack of belief when they stand before God and receive judgment. It is likely that they received the testimonies of dozens of transformed men and women throughout Judea and still they suppressed and rejected the truth.

God has given every disciple the power to live an extraordinary life in the presence of the lost world. It is important that we remain humble and direct the praise and honor that we receive towards God. It is glorious to be a chosen servant of God but it is God who deserves the credit for the changes in our lives. Those individuals whose lives we touch must see in us a reverence towards God that will inspire them to fear and honor his commands. In time, Jesus does accept the praise and worship of his followers. And in due time God will also bestow upon us glory and honor. The true test is whether or not we remain humble and are mature enough to accept it.

Philip. 2:5-11

Psalm 115:1

Proverbs 27:2

Proverbs 27:21

Psalm 3:3

Psalm 8:4-5

John 8:50

John 8:54

John 17:4-5



A Place to Pray

Luke 5:16

From the scriptures we understand Jesus' prayers not as silent meditation but as audible and sometimes loud, passionate cries to God the Father. Thus, Jesus located prayer spots that allow him the freedom and the privacy to lift up his voice to the heavens without distraction. Often he chose high places that enabled him to view the neighboring towns and cities. Jesus frequently prayed while surrounding himself with nature. His soul must have longed to ingest the sights and smells of creation. During these times Jesus no doubt poured out his heart,

refreshed his spirit, and prepared to give of himself and minister to all those in need.

Do we imitate Jesus in our choice of prayer sites? Although Jesus spoke of praying secretly behind closed doors (**Matthew 6:6**), we may conclude from his personal example that the point of this charge might only be the secretive and private nature of a proper place of prayer. From time to time our souls simply need to be replenished. We must make the effort to cry out to God while surrounded by his creation. The beach, a mountainside, a riverbed, an open field, a grove of trees, or a quiet park all serve as prayer get-aways that we ought to frequent. This may not be possible on a daily basis, depending on our situation. However, these times of personal revival with God in a special place are a must. It can make all the difference in our faith, our example, and our capacity to give of ourselves

Matthew 14:23

Matthew 26:36

Mark 6:46

Luke 5:16

Luke 6:12

Luke 9:28

Luke 21:37

John 7:53-8:1

Hebrews 5:7



Your Sins are Forgiven

Luke 5:17-26

With his fascinating new ministry and message Jesus was drawing a rather significant audience. The most prominent religious leaders among the Jews had come to sit at the feet of this teacher. Luke records that the Pharisees and teachers of the law had come from every village of Galilee, from Judea, and even from Jerusalem. One wonders if men like Gamaliel or his student Saul might have at some point been in the presence of Jesus during his ministry or even at this healing. Luke, a traveling companion of the Pharisee-convert Paul during his ministry to the Gentiles, would have certainly included any of Paul's eyewitness testimony of Jesus (if available). There would be no need for Luke to make mention of Paul's presence (as he did in **Acts 8:1** at the stoning of Stephen) because he played no part in the ministry of Jesus. Thus, it is possible that Saul, a Pharisee in training and a student of one of Jerusalem's most prominent teachers of the law, could have been sent to find out about Jesus and was present at the healing of the paralytic.

"Who is this fellow?" was the question on minds of these Pharisees and Rabbis as they all descend on the small Galilean villages. Jesus made the most of this opportunity and he began to reveal himself to the world. He was more than just a man who healed the sick and the lame. He was more than just a prophet and a teacher. Although he was a man full of God's spirit, he was more than just a man. He possessed the authority during his earthly ministry to forgive sins. As the Pharisees and teachers of the law were quick to point out, this is a quality

unique to God alone. Luke constantly weaves evidence into his account that Jesus was and is completely one with the Almighty God.

Jesus knew the hearts of his listeners. It appears that he may have purposely delayed the healing of this paralytic so that he might audibly grant him salvation in front of everyone. Jesus seemed to initiate a confrontation to test the humility of the Jewish leaders. In an effort to perhaps soften their hearts Jesus performed an astonishing miracle to validate the authority he possessed to forgive sins. Healing a completely paralyzed man – one who had been confined to a mat and carried around his entire life – was a monumental act of God. There was no scriptural precedent of this type of ability to heal. Everyone was amazed. Still, the Jewish community and their leaders would become divided on whether Jesus was indeed a great teacher who had come from God or a great deceiver wielding the powers of Satan.

Psalm 130:3-4



The Calling of Matthew

Luke 5:27-35

Levi (or Matthew) and other tax collectors were all but excluded from the mainstream religious Jewish community. They were Jews who collaborated with the Roman government to facilitate revenue generation from their own people. It is worthy of mention that Jesus did not include any of the Pharisees or the teachers of the law within his inner circle of followers. Yet in front of them all he called a tax gatherer into his fold, one whom the Jewish leaders discarded as unclean and a sinner. It would appear again as if Jesus was purposely and publicly announcing his opposition to the status quo hypocritical spiritual leadership. In doing so he offered new hope to those once excluded. Jesus seemed to devise ways of confronting the intense pride bound deep in the hearts of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. He would not let up on them until they repented. And only a few of them did.

Surely the Pharisees would have located themselves at least a short distance around the perimeter of the banquet crowd. Perhaps they even stood outside and watched through the doors and windows as Jesus communed with these diverse guests. Although the Pharisees' complaints about Jesus were made privately to the disciples, they somehow reached Jesus. He in turn exposed their concerns and dealt with them out in the open. Perhaps Jesus slipped away from the gathering and addressed these complaints in a confidential session just with his disciples and with the Pharisees. However, the reoccurring trend in the Gospels puts Jesus engaged in public disputes with the Jewish leaders within earshot of the surrounding crowds. This routine maddened the Pharisees and the teachers of the law because they had become accustomed to the praise and respect of the Jewish commoners. Thus, we might just as well assume that this confrontation (**Luke 5:31-39**) took place while Jesus continued to recline among the assembly of "sinners" in which he was the guest of honor.

Imagine the impact of this discourse if Jesus heard of the complaints lodged against him, quieted down the banquet, and addresses the Pharisees publicly in view of his own disciples, the Pharisees and their disciples, and Matthew's motley assortment of guests. How awkward and yet pleasant it must have been for those who were once cast out of the religious community to be reinstated by the Teacher himself. How motivating and powerful is grace to those who need it most!

The scriptures clearly depict the sin of pride as one in which God personally steps in to oppose. God opposes pride because pride opposes God. No other sin blinds those who are in need of the Gospel more than pride. Jesus was not declaring the Pharisees righteous in [Luke 5:31](#). Instead, he just recognized that they were confident of their own righteousness but blind to their need of spiritual healing. They failed to recognize the Spirit of God dwelling richly in Jesus and they certainly didn't see their need to conform to his teachings. On the contrary, the Pharisees held on to their legalism – even separatism – concerning those they deemed as unclean or as sinners. You seldom get the sense that they extended much mercy to the downtrodden to somehow draw them in and instruct them in God's law. Rather, they turned their backs on them just as their forefathers had done as revealed by the prophet Ezekiel (ref. [Ezekiel 34:1-6](#)).

According to the scribes and Pharisees Jesus and his disciples were ignoring the more spiritual things of God like prayer and fasting. They had noticed the disciples of John the Baptist observing the customary fasts and prayers. Yet the ministry of Jesus was different. He seemed less concerned with the widely accepted standards of piety as defined by the religious elite and more concerned with his dealings with the people. He was gaining momentum and loyalty at the grass roots level throughout Galilee yet he seemed unconcerned with the approval of Jerusalem – the hub of Judaism. The pride of the scribes and Pharisees flared and they began to discount his message, his affection for people, and eventually even his miracles.

Their contempt for Jesus only grew as confrontation after confrontation left them huddled in heated debate with each other. While spewing out their incessant attempts to justify themselves they would argue about what should be done with Jesus. They deflected all arguments that exposed their own sin and swerved from taking any responsibility for the issues on which Jesus had confronted them. All of these characteristics are symptoms of pride – the deadliest of all sins. These initial sparks of pride would ultimately ignite a flame of evil that would unite the enemies of Jesus together against him. We see in [vs. 35](#) that Jesus was already able to foresee the conclusion of his ministry, a time in which the bridegroom would be taken away from the earth.

A comparison between pride and humility

[Psalm 138:6](#)

[Proverbs 3:34, 11:2, 16:19, 18:12, 29:23](#)

[James 4:6](#)



The New Wine

Luke 5:36-39

Based on his first few encounters with the Jewish leaders Jesus seemed to form some conclusions about the direction of his ministry going forward. He now summarized these convictions by using a parable. I have attempted to paraphrase a possible explanation of these declarations.

vs. 36 *“He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.”* Jesus had not come to repair or reform the status quo religious leadership. Nor was his plan to train his disciples to replace the established set of priests and teachers of the law. By observation, the two would simply not mix. The Pharisees would not accept his disciples and Jesus would not accept the current state of those who were supposed to be the shepherds of God’s people. Each camp would remain at odds with the other based on irreconcilable differences in doctrine, lifestyle, and faith. There would be no compromise on Jesus’ part. He would accept nothing less than total repentance on behalf of the Jewish leaders. The new wine of Jesus’ teachings and the establishment of his church would not bow to a society built on the wisdom and traditions of men. There would be no favoritism given to the Jewish leaders in this ministry or in the church that would follow.

vs. 37 *“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.”* Jesus had purposely avoided building the foundation of his ministry by recruiting the Pharisee’s and teachers of the law. They had become almost inflexible towards change, intolerant of a different perspective, and incapable of the kind of compassion and humility that was required to carry a cross and die to self for the sake of others. They would always have an open door to humble themselves and follow Jesus, yet they would receive no special treatment nor would Jesus compromise his message at any cost.

vs. 38 *“No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.”* Instead, Jesus had selected the most unassuming men to establish the foundation of his ministry and later institute his church. For the most part Jesus selected men without an extensive history in the Law or major role in the synagogue. They were not tied to a rigid dogma that blurred their vision towards the mystery and newness of Jesus’ teachings. Their loyalty was to Jesus not the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They would not cower under the threat of expulsion from the synagogue, as Christ’s followers would eventually face. Although one of the Twelve might have been a member of the Zealots (a radical branch of Judaism that believed in Jewish nationalism), Simon would have most likely viewed the status quo religious leaders as soft and stationary and would not have been vying for their approval anyways.

vs. 39 “*And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'*” Jesus predicted here that most of the Jewish leaders would never accept his new covenant. The fear of being put out of the synagogue would quench the curiosity of many others who straddled the fence. The prominent oral and written traditions were enough to satisfy most Jews; they liked things the way they were, minus the Roman oppression. The Jews were waiting for their earthly king, the successor to the throne of David, to deal with the Romans. They were looking for more than spiritual liberation. However, Jesus would wear a cross and not a crown and he would call his followers to do the same. Jesus’ new wine would eventually require him to take up his life and lay it down for others. It would also mean the same for his disciples. Truly, for those who wish to preserve their life rather than lose it for Christ, “*The old is better.*”

The Jewish leaders reject Jesus

John 1:10-11

John 9:22

John 12:42

Matthew 21:42

Mark 8:31



Jesus and David

Luke 6:1-5

Luke has grouped together a series of confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees and teachers of the law to clearly depict the distinctions between the two ministries. One ministry was rooted in legalism, the other in love. One looked intently at the letter of the law; the other was focused on the Spirit of God within the law. One was a ministry of bondage, the other a ministry of liberation. One was built on stiff-necked men, the other on broken men. One regarded their own traditions and private interpretation of the law as scripture; the other had a passion to fulfill the scriptures. One had lost sight of the people; the other was reaching the masses.

As Jesus and his disciples walked through the grainfield and ate they were making a statement more profound than the Pharisees and perhaps even the disciples fully understood. The law made provisions for travelers to glean a meal from the field of a fellow Israelite.

Deut. 23:24-25

If you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. ²⁵If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.

Jesus now identified himself and his followers as strangers or travelers. They had truly forsaken the concept of “home” and had left all they had to journey from town to town in pursuit of Jesus’ vision.

The Pharisees challenged Jesus on their actions and Jesus answered by referring to a particular occasion in David’s life recorded in **1 Samuel 21:1-6**. A very interesting comparison can be made here between Jesus and David. When David appeared before the priest of Nob in search of food he was a wanted man. Although he had already received his anointing as the next king of Israel by the prophet Samuel, he had not yet ascended to his rightful throne. David was God’s choice to succeed as king due to his intense heart for the Lord and his love for God’s word. Saul was still the recognized king although the Lord had already rejected him and the Spirit of God had long since departed from him. Saul’s jealousy of David fueled his anger and he became consumed with the preservation of his own position of authority. As his heart hardened he sought to destroy David and became interested in little else.

Remarkably, Jesus was in a situation that closely resembled David’s. In his flesh Jesus was a descendant of David and was sent by God to forever secure David’s throne of as prophesied. Jesus had already been anointed by God and was full of the Spirit without measure. He was the true King of kings. However, he has not yet ascended to his rightful and eternal throne. Thus, the reigning high priests, the Pharisees, elders, the teachers of the law, and those that comprised the Sanhedrin all were still the recognized religious authorities for the Jews. However, God has rejected them and the Spirit of God no longer validated their ministries. Unmistakably like Saul their jealousy towards Jesus became their downfall as they sought to discredit him and preserve their own positions of influence. As their hearts grew harder they became consumed by their own evil desires and plotted to destroy Jesus altogether.

Old Testament prophecies concerning the throne of David

Psalm 89:35-37

Jeremiah 23:5

Isaiah 9:6-7

Ezekiel 37:24-25

Isaiah 16:5

Hosea 3:5

Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophesied descendant of David who shall sit on his throne forever

Matthew 12:23

John 7:42

Matthew 21:9

Acts 2:29-32

Matthew 22:42

2 Tim. 2:8

Luke 1:27

Rev. 5:5

Luke 1:31-33

Rev. 22:16

Luke 2:4



Doing Good

Luke 6:6-11

Another major difference between Jesus' ministry and that of the Pharisees was the importance Jesus placed on the good we must do for others. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were much more interested in what a person was NOT permitted to do and what actions constituted a violation of the law. Not breaking the law in their eyes was the essential ingredient for righteousness. Jesus warned his followers that this form of devoutness was not what God desired. His disciples were called to a much higher standard.

Matthew 5:20

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

The law was able to identify what was wrong and sinful for God's people. However, Jesus turned their attention to the goodness and the generosity that was missing from their lives. Rather than shackle a person with rules and regulations Jesus intended to free his followers from the yoke of sin and slavery. He turned their attention away from the emptiness of legalism by revealing the unlimited opportunities to please God by doing what is right and just. Doing good shall be one of the dominant themes in Jesus' forthcoming sermon found in the remainder of the sixth chapter of Luke. In fact, not doing the good we ought to do by Jesus' standards seems to be viewed as a greater trespass than any violation of the Mosaic Law. James, the brother of Jesus, would later pen this concept into his letter to the scattered Jewish Christians. He captured the essence of Jesus' expectation for us to do good when we have the opportunity to do so. A disciple of Jesus is not simply a person who tries not to sin. We are called to a much higher criterion – to do the good we ought.

James 2:14-19

James 4:17

Galatians 6:10

Ephes. 2:10

1 Tim. 6:18

Hebrews 13:16

Let us take one last look at the story of the man with a shriveled hand. Jesus restored the man's hand in full view of everyone. This was a clear demonstration of Jesus' power and authority. One might even assume that he felt a sense of satisfaction as he triumphed over the continual hassling of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. However, a reading of this incident as recorded in the Gospel of Mark dissolves that theory altogether. **Mark 3:5** states, "*He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.*" There was no feeling of vindication in the heart of our Lord. In contrast, sin simply saddens and angers God and thus affected Jesus in the same way. He felt no sense of victory as he confirmed his Lordship over the Sabbath and his authority over evil in full view of the onlookers and the hard-hearted religious leaders. It pained him to see so much pride and darkness in the world, not to mention the physical suffering of the sick and the poor. Moreover, it

angered and distressed him to see such stubbornness in the hearts of those who were supposed to be the leaders of God's people.

Sin causes God to grieve

Genesis 6:6

1 Samuel 15:11a

Ezekiel 6:9a



The Twelve

Luke 6:12-16

As the following grew in numbers Jesus selected a dozen men within the fellowship of disciples to designate as *apostles*.

apostolos, *ap-os'-tol-os*; from Greek (apostello); a *delegate*; specially an *ambassador* of the Gospel; officially a *commissioner* of Christ [*“apostle”*] (with miraculous powers) :- apostle, messenger, **he that is sent**.¹³

These men would receive personal training and attention from Jesus above and beyond what was given the multitudes. Jesus had chosen to invest himself in these men and to reproduce his love, his life, his conviction, his passion, and his heart in them. He would send them out to preach. He would give them authority to heal the sick and to drive out demons. They were now distinguished. They were chosen. Up until this time they had been quite ordinary. Now, because they were called to sit at the very feet of the Teacher, they would become extraordinary.

Prior to appointing the Twelve Jesus spent the night on his mountainside in prayer. I have often assumed that he was wrestling in prayer and making his decision concerning which disciples to choose. I now see it quite differently. Jesus was God in the flesh and continually demonstrated his foreknowledge regarding the precise details of his life, death, and resurrection. Was not the selection of the Twelve another crucial facet of his ministry about which Jesus had complete awareness? We can be sure that God the Father knew of these twelve men even before time began, much less on the eve of their appointment. **Psalm 139:16** says of God, *“Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”*

Further proof of the Twelve's pre-ordination is given as we witness Peter in **Acts 1:15-20** pointing out that Judas' betrayal of Jesus was written about in the Psalms at least a thousand years before it came to pass. Thus, I am certain that Jesus knew which twelve men would receive their designation that next morning. He knowingly, willingly, and lovingly chose the Twelve – including his betrayer – out of the group of faithful disciples. He lifted these men up in front of the believers and appointed them as apostles.

¹³ Greek 652; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

So if Jesus was not deciding which men to choose, why did he spend the night in prayer? I now believe that he spent these hours in supplication for them. He prayed for these twelve men to be spiritually focused, to be unconcerned with the things of this world. He prayed for them to be valiant yet humble, to be forceful yet meek, to be tough and yet soft hearted. Knowing that they would be in the spotlight, he could have prayed that they might seek to please God the Father alone. He knew that they would be tempted to cherish praise from men, and perhaps he brought this before God as well. He no doubt prayed for their boldness and their courage, knowing full well that this movement was growing more and more controversial. He prayed for them to love God and to love people – and even to love one another.

Perhaps Jesus even prayed for those who would not be chosen. This appointment would create a clear distinction among Jesus' disciples. However, that did not mean that Jesus loved his other followers any less. He would also use their lives to glorify God in powerful ways. Jesus still needed a base of loyal followers that was not limited to the Twelve. Those who would not be chosen as apostles would still play a critical role as the kingdom of God was ushered into the world. Jesus surely knew that there would be some disappointment with the announcement made that day. Perhaps he prayed for their faith and their loyalty – that it would not rest in the title they received but in God alone. We find out in [Acts 1:21-26](#) that Justus and Matthias were among Jesus' committed disciples at this time, yet they were not originally chosen as apostles. Still, we learn that both men remained loyal followers of Christ (and before that disciples of John the Baptist). They proved to be strong and reliable throughout Jesus' ministry, so much so that the eleven remaining apostles considered them equally qualified to serve as apostles. Thus, Jesus surely prayed for men such as these – for the ones who would not be given a title but would still be called to carry their cross faithfully.

And lastly, as he later tells Peter in [Luke 22:31-32](#), I believe that Jesus prayed through each of the twelve apostles by name in order that their faith might stand firm. In other words, he prayed for them just to make it to heaven. Jesus knew that placing these men in such a position of leadership made them a primary target for Satan, who would surely unleash on them the sum of his fury and hatred towards God's movement. They would be sifted and tested with every weapon present in the demonic realm. Thus, Jesus now interceded for their protection from on high. Perhaps that night's prayer was similar to Jesus' prayer near the end of his ministry as recorded in [John 17:9-19](#).

THE ORIGINAL TWELVE APOSTLES:

Simon son of Jonah; a.k.a. Peter, a.k.a. Cephas, a.k.a. Simon Peter

- Previous occupation: Fisherman, business partner with James and John
- Hometown: Native of Bethsaida, resided in Capernaum
- Author of 1 & 2 Peter and most likely helped dictate the Gospel of Mark

Andrew son of Jonah; brother of Peter

- Previous occupation: Fisherman, business partner with James and John

- Hometown: Native of Bethsaida, resided in Capernaum

James son of Zebedee and Salome, a.k.a. Boanerges, a.k.a. Son of Thunder

- Previous occupation: Fisherman, business partner with Simon and Andrew
- Hometown: Bethsaida
- Brother of John
- He would be the first apostle martyred; 44 AD

John son of Zebedee and Salome; a.k.a. Boanerges, a.k.a. Son of Thunder

- Previous occupation: Fisherman, business partner with Simon and Andrew
- Hometown: Bethsaida
- Brother of James
- Author of the Gospel of John, 1, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation

Philip

- Hometown: Bethsaida
- Brother of Nathanael
- Probably a fisherman

Bartholomew; his name literally means “son of Talmi,”

- Bartholomew is often presumed to be Nathanael, brother of Philip
- Made his home in Cana of Galilee (by inference, [John 21:2](#))

Matthew son of Alphaeus; a.k.a. Levi

- Previous occupation: Tax collector
- Matthew’s booth was located on the main road between Damascus and the Jordan Valley (towards Capernaum).
- Presumably the half brother of James, son of Alphaeus
- Author of the Gospel of Matthew

Thomas; also called Didymus

- Speculation: Thomas was also a son of Alphaeus and brother of Matthew and James.

James son of Alphaeus; a.k.a. James the Lesser, a.k.a. James the Younger

- Presumably the half brother of Levi (Matthew)
- May have been short in stature

Thaddaeus; a.k.a. Lebbaeus (KJV – [Matt. 10:3](#))

- Most likely known also as Judas son of James
- The name Thaddaeus does not appear in the Gospels of Matthew or Mark.

Simon; a.k.a. Simon the Zealot, a.k.a. the Zealot

- Perhaps a member of a nationalistic Jewish faction known as the Zealots.
- “Zealot” could also be just a nick-name because of his disposition.

Judas son of Simon Iscariot; a.k.a. Judas Iscariot

- a.k.a. the Betrayer, a.k.a. the Traitor
- “Iscariot” likely equates to “from Kerioth,” which is a town in Judea.
- Judas was the only apostle not from the Galilean region.



He Carried our Infirmities

Luke 6:17-19

As Jesus stood with his disciples and those he had now designated as apostles a larger crowd began to gather. The ensemble consisted of Jews from throughout Judea and Jerusalem and most likely a mixture of Jews and Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon (now Lebanon). Some had come to hear the marvelous words of this widely talked about teacher. Others had come accompanied by their sick or unclean friends and relatives in hopes that his healing touch would extend towards their beloved. Some of the sick and diseased came alone. As outcasts in their community they had no friends or family to escort them in search of the great Healer who ministered throughout Galilee.

What is amazing about Jesus is that he always took enough time to heal all of those present. He did not get to only those brought to him within a certain window of time. He did not just heal a few and then move on to more pressing matters. He did not begin to preach until all of the sick were healed, all of those with diseases were cured, and all those tormented by evil spirits were restored. Only when the pushing and pressing of the crowd was finished and they were able to completely focus on his words did he begin to teach and address the spiritual condition of the group.

Isaiah 42:1-3

Isaiah 53:4a

Ezekiel 34:15-16



The Sermon

Luke 6:20-26

Shall we assume that this sermon in **Luke 6** is the famous Sermon on the Mount recorded in **Matthew 5-7**? Luke specifically records Jesus healing the crowds from a level place while Matthew records Jesus going up onto the mountainside. It would be easy to harmonize the two accounts if we assume that Jesus first spent time healing the sick and then moved from the level place to the foot of a nearby mountain. He then sat down (**Matthew 5:1**) and continued to amaze the people with his gracious and powerful words.

On the other hand, we are not harmed in any way by supposing that these two accounts are describing different events. As Jesus traveled from town to

town he would have certainly repeated many of the same teachings, parables, and analogies that he used in previous sermons. I am convinced that through this repetition the disciples were able to retain and recite by memory many of the precise details of Jesus' messages. They would soon be sent out to preach themselves and would have to impart the context of these sermons to hundreds of listeners. And several years after Jesus' ascension his teachings still stood fresh in their memory as they penned the Gospels.

The two sermons recorded here in Luke and in Matthew are similar enough to convince most that this was the same event. Yet there are enough differences to at least present the possibility that these were similar but separate occasions of which the Gospel writers had dozens of examples to choose from. Jesus began this sermon with four blessings and four woes. This is quite different than the famed Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, which opens with nine blessings and no woes. Either way, we are grateful for the time both writers took to preserve significant portions of Jesus' sermons, for these are the very words of life

As he began this lesson Jesus was describing what a true disciple of his teachings would face in their lifetime. They would be the prophets of their day. Their message would not be widely received. They would not be rich or live in comfort. The religious community would exclude them because they were sold out for a new movement of God – a movement they would soon deem as heretical. Their reward did not lie on earth but in heaven. Thus, they would become familiar with sacrifice, hunger, tears, and rejection. Yet they would possess an inner joy and an indescribable peace. They would derive their confidence by adhering to the words of Christ. And their reward would far surpass anything this earth had to offer.

Paul describes perfectly the heart behind Luke 6:20-26

1 Cor. 4:10-13

2 Cor. 4:8-12

2 Cor. 6:4-10



Love Your Enemies

Luke 6:27-35

Jesus was giving his disciples an avenue to be like God. He did not simply utter commands; he also set them an example that they might imitate him. He taught them love by loving the unlovable. He taught forgiveness by forgiving the unforgivable. He blessed those who cursed him. He gave of himself to those who asked him without expecting anything in return. For Jesus, setting an example for others wasn't just an issue of practicing what he preached. Rather, as **John 1:14** states, Jesus was the word of God in the flesh. The commands of God simply flowed from his very being and were displayed in his every action.

Jesus instructed his hearers to love their enemies, a quality of God that was personified in the person Christ. God continues to love and offer second

chances to those who befriend the world and show disdain for his laws. Christ loved us even though we all were enemies to God at some point through our evil behavior and wicked thinking. Jesus then commanded his followers to restrain from defending themselves even from physical persecution knowing he would endure brutal punishment from wicked men. As they crucified him and mocked his kingship he would intercede for them and beg God for their forgiveness.

I think many of us tend to place the “love your enemies” line of thinking within the boundaries of the New Covenant and reserve the “eye for an eye” philosophy of justice for the Old Testament. We might even assume that Jesus is the portion of the Godhead full of mercy and grace while God the Father is the portion full of wrath and judgement. These presumptions are not correct. The Lord does not change. Nor does any dimension of the Trinity possess a different nature or character from the other. The instruction that Jesus gave his disciples in this passage is a common perspective throughout the Old Testament as well as the New. Even as Moses drafted the book of Deuteronomy (and demonstrated several times before that point in history), God commanded his people not to seek retaliation or justice when wronged and sinned against.

It is a fundamental principle of life that equality, fairness, and justice are not guaranteed nor are these circumstances that we can always control. Uprightness does not always produce an immediate harvest of blessing just as evil does not bring about immediate destruction. From of old God has wanted mankind to be less concerned with equal treatment and more concerned with personal righteousness. We ought to be less concerned with fairness and more concerned with our own innocence or guilt. God is just and fair and will bring about judgement for the wicked and justice for the righteous. However, this justice may or may not be pronounced during one’s lifetime. All tolled a man will reap what he sows, usually during his lifetime but certainly in the afterlife. Neither the righteous nor the wicked will be forgotten even if they escaped their due on earth.

Our eternal destiny is of first importance and must drive those who seek to please God to deny their impulse to retaliate when evil is brought against them. A disciple must suppress their expectation of fairness and reserve in their hearts a commitment to walk before God blamelessly. We cannot control how others treat us, only how we treat others. It is not our place to ensure that justice has been fully executed – that is God’s arena. We do have the opportunity to manage our own decisions and actions and we must choose to live in a way that is pleasing to God regardless of the outcome.

We were at one time enemies of God, yet he still loved us

Romans 5:10

Philip. 3:18

Col. 1:21-22

Old Testament references to doing good to your enemies

Exodus 23:5

Deut. 32:35-36

Proverbs 16:7, 24:17-20, 25:21-22

Even as Paul expounds on this theme, he refers back to the Old Testament scriptures

Romans 12:17-21



Action = Reaction

Luke 6:36-38

Jesus then addressed another fundamental principle of life and human nature. Very often people react to us depending on how we treat them. Although we cannot always control how we are treated, people will tend to respond to us based on our observed behavior. Jesus taught that love is the best weapon in anyone's arsenal and when properly expressed towards others it will bring us tremendous success in relationships. For those who paid close attention to his words Jesus was unveiling the secrets of building friendships and winning souls. Failure to master these principles of conduct will result in isolation, loneliness, and emptiness as nature run its course.

Even in science this immutable law is present and was described by Newton in the words: *For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.* If you are merciful, people will be more willing to extend mercy towards you. Action = Reaction. If you are a faultfinder and use harshness or sarcasm, you will alienate yourself from close fellowship and produce in others a critical eye when it comes to your shortcomings. Action = Reaction. If you are able to completely forgive others and communicate a genuine leniency to those who have either intentionally or unintentionally hurt you, you will never stop multiplying friends. However, if you are overly sensitive and insecure, you begin to imagine any wrong done to you stemmed from malicious intent. You take personal even the unintentional mistakes that fall in your direction and you carry around a grudge towards anyone who did not extend you an appropriate apology. This person wonders why nobody seems too interested in seeking his or her friendship. Action = Reaction. If we are always willing to share with others and to give of ourselves – be it time, money, possessions, love, etc. – we will richly receive. The return may be the blessing of a good conscience or the gratitude and love of others. Or God may in fact ensure that they receive a financial or material return, which will enable that person's generosity to continue. Action = Reaction.

Again, these principles were birthed in scripture prior to Jesus' ministry but they were being grossly neglected. They were being drowned out by legalistic observance of the Law as taught by the scribes and Pharisees.

Hosea 6:6

Micah 6:8

Matthew 5:7

Proverbs 12:16, 19:11, 20:3, 11:24, 11:25, 19:6, 21:26, 22:9, 28:27

2 Cor. 9:10-11



Take Responsibility

Luke 6:39-42

Jesus pointed out that a man or woman of God must examine himself or herself first before assuming the right to lead or confront others on their iniquity. He was not dismissing the need for leadership or the necessity of confronting sin. However, it is human nature to point the finger at others while ignoring the flaws in our own lives. Someone who is blind to his or her faults is not a good candidate to lead or teach others, nor is it reasonable for them to challenge the sin in those around them. God had become weary of the leaders who failed to take responsibility for their own iniquity. They refused to demonstrate true godliness with genuine displays of repentance and humility. In the end, they ended up wandering away from the truth and caused the people to stray.

The need of the hour (then and now) is to be like Jesus; that is true godliness. Jesus had taken on a group of students to build their character and to train their inner being. He would not send them out to preach until they began to deal with their own hearts, their own sin, and their own character deficiencies. It is not sufficient to simply deliver the word of God to others. These students must first become like their teacher. Even God's word can be discounted in the hearts and minds of its listeners if the messenger's life is not compliant. Both the Old and New Testament admonish the leaders and teachers of God's people as they will be judged more strictly. Thus, Jesus commanded his students to first take responsibility for their own life and concentrate on true righteousness before they assumed a leadership role dealing with the lives of others.

Isaiah 3:14

Jeremiah 3:15

Jeremiah 23:1-2

Ezekiel 34:10

Zech. 10:3

1 Tim. 1:7

Hebrews 13:7

Hebrews 13:17a

James 3:1



The Finished Product

Luke 6:43-49

Jesus was not simply passing out a new list of commands to follow. He was attempting to transform the internal man or woman. He was not focusing on specific matters of the Law, but was dealing with the individual – their sinful

nature and the weaknesses of their flesh. For those whose hearts were soft Jesus reached into the core of their being and taught them not just what to do but who to be. He was instructing them on how to think, how to react, and how to conform to the nature of God. Those with a hard heart may have been able to feign revival for a while, but they would be soon be detected as the evidence of true repentance failed to appear. Jesus' words were not just meant to compliment a person's life; they were intended to revolutionize it. The end result was not just a surface level change but instead a complete regeneration of the inward man or woman that would be outwardly recognizable, as a tree is recognized by its fruit.

Jesus then described the ways that this change would be demonstrated throughout the person's life. The one who earnestly puts Jesus' teachings into practice will transform their whole character to become stable, steadfast, deep-rooted, and fruitful. Their life should be a demonstration of goodness, consistency, and generosity. Their sincere joy should ultimately attract the attention of others. Even during the stormy periods of life, times of drought and darkness, a disciple of Jesus remains strong, faithful, hopeful, and productive. Their light continues to shine despite their circumstances. Others will be drawn to their light, their strength, and their faith. God uses them to multiply the heart of Jesus in the lives of those around them. They are his messengers of salvation to a lost world.

Those who merely listen to the words of Christ but fail to put them into practice may not be swept away immediately, but over time the stormy periods are sure to come and the uncertainty of life will test their sturdiness. Since they have not allowed themselves to dig deep and build a solid foundation for their life on godly principles, they will eventually go down. Time reveals all. While those who build with no foundation seem to have taken the easy road and may appear quite content, they will surely end up on hard times. It may not be a financial disaster but rather an emotional one – a hardening of the heart, a bitterness of the soul, a series of shallow and unfulfilling relationships, or a collapse of the many false securities upon which they had trusted. Building your life on any foundation that substitutes the eternal words of Christ for contemporary wisdom and human will is sure to crumble in time.

Proverbs 11:30

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Jeremiah 23:3-5

Matthew 12:33-34

Jude 1:12

THE TEACHER

BREAKFAST WITH LUKE CHAPTERS 7 - 12

In the seventh chapter of Luke we see miracles of heightened proportions performed by the Teacher from Nazareth. Jesus is recorded healing a Roman centurion's servant without even being physically present; the servant was healed with the inherent power of Jesus' word. This revealed another remarkable and divine aspect of his authority on earth. Next, we behold Jesus raising a widow's son from the dead. He would reassure the disciples of John the Baptist that his ability to do these miracles – to heal the sick, restore the blind and the lame, cure the leprous, and even to raise the dead – proved conclusively that he was indeed the Messiah. The chapter ends as Jesus again demonstrates his authority to forgive sins. Thus, the entire seventh chapter of Luke powerfully illustrates the deity of Jesus, that he is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and the Christ who was to come.

Recall that Luke wrote his Gospel from a Gentile perspective and had intended his book primarily for a Gentile audience. He had set his sights on converting the lost Gentile world, bringing them into full assurance of faith in Jesus, and showing them the fullness of God in Christ. Matthew's Gospel often refers to the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament to give the Jews ample reason to accept Jesus as the Christ. Luke's account relies more heavily on Jesus' message and on his miracles. A Gentile would be less interested in predictions founded in the writings of the Jewish prophets and more inclined to believe based on Jesus' inexplicable power, his capacity to love, and the timeless wisdom and authority contained in his words.

Prior to Luke's travels with Paul he is thought to have planted the church in Troas. He then traveled for a time with Paul and then spent about five years ministering to the Gentile church in Philippi. The two rejoined at the end of this period. The dates of Luke's five year stint with the Philippians, from 52 AD until 57 or 58 AD, leads us to believe that Christians from both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds most certainly used the Gospel of Matthew (released around 50 AD) during these years. Perhaps it was during this time that Luke began to see the need for another account of the life of Christ that would be more geared towards reaching and converting the Gentiles. Without delay he likely began on the task of penning his narrative during the two years that followed his stay in Philippi – during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea from 58-60 AD (a date by which most scholars concur).

Certain of What is Unseen

Luke 7:1-10

The healing of the centurion's servant is significant for several reasons. Firstly, we see that Jesus was willing to respond to the request of a Roman military official. The Roman establishment may have attempted to tolerate the obvious cultural differences with the Jews and other territories they conquered, but they inherently despised the Jewish people as a whole. This centurion was an

exception to the norm. He may have been the highest-ranking Roman commander delegated to the town of Capernaum and he had a heart for the Jewish people (or perhaps he had simply concluded that his authority would be best exercised by assisting the Jews in this region). For the centurion to erect a synagogue in Capernaum is unusual indeed. Whether he put forth the money for its construction or took on the project as his personal endeavor is not clear. He nevertheless provided the Jews with a most significant gift. The synagogue was vital to the post-exilic Jewish people. It was used primarily as an assembly hall for prayer, scripture readings, and scripture lessons by Rabbis. They were sometimes used for local court proceedings and public schools. The synagogues helped to preserve the Jewish culture and kept alive their hopes that the consolation of Israel would someday come to them.

Although he was a friend to the Jews the centurion seemed unsure if Jesus would comply with his current request. Jesus was by far the most famous Rabbi in all of Galilee at this point. Thus, he sent the Jewish elders whom he had befriended in his stead. Right away Jesus submitted to his request, but en route to his house the procession was stopped. For whatever reason, the centurion now felt unworthy of having Jesus come into his home. It is possible that Jesus' immediate willingness to come caught him by surprise and he didn't feel prepared to offer Jesus the hospitality that he felt this man of God deserved. Or perhaps as Jesus neared he became fearful. Luke records only that the centurion had "*heard of Jesus*" but had perhaps never witnessed his ministry first-hand. He had certainly heard of Jesus' remarkable ability to heal the sick, but he was apparently unfamiliar with Jesus' incredible love, his forbearance, and his kindness. It is conceivable that his ignorance of these qualities caused him to become anxious as Jesus neared.

In any event, the centurion's faith impressed Jesus because he had believed in a feat that had not been widely seen up to this point (once in Cana as recorded in [John 4:50-52](#)). He reckoned that Jesus could heal just by giving the word. It had become customary for people to bring the sick, the blind, the lame, and the unclean to Jesus so that he might touch them. All those whom Jesus had touched had been healed. From the stories he had heard, the centurion had apparently come to the conclusion that Jesus possessed not simply the healing touch but an overall authority within the physical realms to heal. He believed in something that very few up to this point had witnessed. This, Jesus exclaimed, was great faith.

The normal trend witnessed up to this point:

[Matthew 8:15](#)

[Mark 3:10](#)

[Mark 6:56](#)

[Luke 6:19](#)

The faith of the centurion

[Matthew 8:8](#)

[Luke 7:7](#)

Hebrews 11:1
2 Cor. 5:7



Authority over Death

Luke 7:11-17

Luke is the only Gospel writer to include the raising of the widow's dead son in the town of Nain. We are given a moving portrayal of Jesus' astonishing power mixed with his intense love and heart for the people. He was deeply moved by the pain of this devastated woman. In his compassion he was determined to end her tears and her mourning. So that no one would confuse this event with the many people Jesus healed from sickness and disease, Luke intentionally used the Greek word "**nekros**" in **vs. 15** to describe the severity of her son's condition. The word can be translated either as "dead man" or even "corpse" from the root "**nekus**". The Greek definition is as follows:

nekros, nek-ros'; from an apparently primary **nekus** (a *corpse*); *dead* (literal or figurative; also as noun) :- dead.¹⁴

This was not someone who was sick, diseased, or near death. This was a funeral procession for a woman's lifeless son – a corpse lying motionless in a coffin. In the midst of this crowd of mourners the unimaginable was about to happen. Jesus commanded the soul and spirit of this young man back into his body and he sat up and began to speak. Gasps of disbelief must have immediately filled the air as the procession came to a halt. The boy's mother must have rushed to embrace her son as tears of joy and amazement now replaced her tears of bereavement.

This miracle made such an impact on the crowd that they were actually filled with fear. The New American Standard (NASB) for **Luke 7:16** reads: "*And fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!'*" Not only did this Teacher possess the power to heal, he was sovereign even over death. Thus, they made the connection between the man Jesus and Jehovah their God. Based on what they had just witnessed the townspeople of Nain not only recognized that a glorious Prophet had arisen, they were convinced that God himself had come to relieve his people. And another wave of news resounded throughout Judea.

Psalm 68:19-20

*Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior,
 who daily bears our burdens.*

Selah

²⁰*Our God is a God who saves;
 from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.*

¹⁴ Greek 3498; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Isaiah 25:8

*he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears
from all faces;
he will remove the disgrace of his people
from all the earth.*

The LORD has spoken.

For those of us today that read through this miracle recorded in Luke's narrative, what is the proper response to Jesus? Should it not be the same as those who were in attendance? Are we struck with a similar measure of awe, fear, reverence, comfort, relief, and adoration? Although Luke's readers (the Gentiles) were not present in Nain when Jesus raised this young man from the dead, it does not reduce the magnitude of the event. By recording this heartwarming miracle Luke intended to show believers everywhere that Jesus Christ was and is the Sovereign Lord of all and his heart is soft towards those who live on earth and experience suffering. This knowledge should likewise stir us to have a healthy fear and reverence towards Jesus mixed with hope, comfort, and awe. His sovereignty over death and his eagerness to bestow grace must motivate us to willingly offer up our lives to carry out the plan he designed for us on this earth. Anything less and Luke's countless hours of research – not to mention the nearly two thousand years of laborious preservation of his account – have been in vain.

Psalm 111:10

Proverbs 9:10

Proverbs 19:23

2 Cor. 5:11

**The Disciples of John the Baptist**

Luke 7:18-23

By this time John the Baptist had been put in prison. He maintained some loyal followers who informed him about the glorious ministry of his cousin from Nazareth. It is likely that some traveling amid the crowd that followed Jesus still identified themselves as disciples of John. Why they had not given their allegiance over to Jesus yet is not clear. Perhaps they simply remained loyal to John during his lonely stay in prison. Or could it be that John's present reservations about Jesus kept his few remaining disciples from fully giving themselves over to the Lord? At one point John was more than willing to allow the ministry of Christ to rise above his own (**John 3:30**). Yet for some reason he now voiced some quiet reservations to Jesus through his messengers while he sat locked away in prison, held there by Herod.

Was John really unsure about whether Jesus was the expected one? Wasn't this the same prophet who once pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God to his disciples? Didn't he in fact hear the voice of God from heaven and see the Holy Spirit descend on Christ in the form of a dove? Did he now doubt the divinity of Christ or was there another motive hidden deep within the request of his messengers? Maybe this was simply the cry of a lonely prophet knowing each passing day might be his last. Perhaps John asked this question in hopes that Jesus might alter his course and pay him a visit in prison. After all, John had marvelously fulfilled his assignment to prepare a way for the Lord. Maybe somewhere deep in the recesses of his heart he now wanted some encouragement, recognition, or remembrance from Jesus.

As the days crept by John may have held out hope that the Lord would someday arrive and validate his ministry or simply attend his side during these final hours in prison. And certainly Jesus would have been mutually encouraged to see his cousin John, for he was the only person alive who really understood the purpose behind his coming to earth. Yet Jesus' own ministry had already become rather controversial. Between the two men Jesus had obviously been given the weightier commission. To visit John and risk a premature imprisonment at this point would have been unwise, and certainly John knew that as well. **Mark 6:20** records that Herod held John in prison despite knowing that he was a righteous and holy man. Herod liked to listen to John. He would have been equally intrigued to have an audience with Jesus and would try to see him at one point (**Luke 9:9**). Perhaps this risk is one reason that Jesus kept his distance from John.

Whatever the rationale, the time had come for John to believe that Jesus was the Christ based on the scriptures and testimony given him by others. Jesus sent the two disciples of John back to their teacher with a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy concerning the Christ (**Isaiah 61:1-2**). John asked whether Jesus was the "Expected One". The reason to expect that someone was coming to the Jews originated out of the many outstanding prophecies waiting to be fulfilled by God's chosen servant. Because of these prophecies the Jews were awaiting their Messiah, their king. Jesus confirmed to these messengers and to the surrounding crowd that he was indeed the one that the world should be expecting based both on the evidence of the miracles and the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Isaiah 61:1-2

John 14:11

Luke 24:44



Jesus Validates John the Baptist

Luke 7:24-28

After sending John's disciples away with a charge to believe in him, Jesus took the time out to commend this radical servant of God. Jesus noted that John was a man of deep conviction. He wasn't swayed by the masses; instead he

influenced and turned the m. He did not live in comfort or royalty nor did he dress like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Still, thousands from all around Judea gathered to hear him preach. Jesus confirmed that John was not only a prophet but was the one prophesied about in [Malachi 3:1](#), the messenger who was to prepare the way for the Lord to come into his temple. Lastly, Jesus stated that there was no one born of women greater than John. In other words, John was the greatest man to have ever lived.

If it was encouragement that John needed, you couldn't find more uplifting words to be said about you (especially considering the source – God in the flesh). Yet Jesus purposely waited until John's messengers had departed to hold up John and validate his ministry before the onlookers. Why hadn't Jesus sent these messengers back to John with both the fulfillment of [Isaiah 61:1-2](#) and the personal endorsement of his ministry that followed? Wouldn't John as he sat day after day in prison have been comforted just to know that Jesus recognized the importance of his contribution to the kingdom of God? Wouldn't he also have been flattered to hear that Jesus stated before the crowd that he, John, was the greatest man to have ever been born? Wouldn't you feel humbled and encouraged to hear these same kinds of things said about you by the Lord? Can you imagine the confidence it would bring just knowing for sure how Jesus felt?

Be that as it may, Jesus deliberately withheld these words from John's messengers. Obviously Jesus was able to distinguish between needs and wants. John now faced his own martyrdom. He was engaged in the heat of the spiritual battle. Perhaps what he thought he needed to strengthen him was a visit from Jesus or some encouragement from him. Whether John even realized it or not, he may have just wanted Jesus to recognize his sacrifice and validate the contribution he had made to God's new movement. After all, a good percentage of Jesus' inner circle of apostles was first groomed and trained by John. Surely Jesus hadn't forgotten this?

John had made every effort to fulfill the destiny that God marked out for him. It seems that Jesus was now calling John to rest secure in that knowledge, even without the pat on the back he may have desired. Or perhaps Jesus was deliberately leaving room for John to draw strength entirely from his relationship with the ever-present God as the prophets of long ago were forced to do. And soon enough the apostles and thousands of Christians would be called to put their hope and faith in the Lord at their dying hour. They too would be summoned to defend their faith in an invisible and yet all-powerful God. Their security would rest in both the efforts they put forth to obey the teachings of Christ and in the grace of God that atoned for their iniquities. John would have to place his trust in God completely for he had lived a prophet's life and would soon receive a prophet's death.

As discussed previously in this commentary, we may not always see an immediate return from a life devoted to righteousness and obedience to the scriptures. Our sacrifices for God may seem to go unnoticed. Often we crave that instantaneous sign of approval from God and the encouragement that we believe he could give us. We envision a way that the Lord could validate our ministry and recognize the effort we've put forth to build up his kingdom. He could grant

us the blessing of bearing fruit, a victory at work, an opportunity to be raised up in our leadership, the recognition or acknowledgement that we feel we have earned, or even a thorn in the side of our persecutors. We begin to pray for some sign to encourage us. We watch for it. We want it. Eventually, we begin to think we need it.

When we don't immediately see God move to our satisfaction we can become plagued with insecurity, doubt, and frustration. Forgotten is the encouragement we have received from God in the past. Discarded are all the former ways we have witnessed the Spirit lead us and blatantly orchestrate the events in our lives. No longer are we living by faith. Rather, our spiritual dependence has been placed on something we can see and touch. And when such a narrow parameter for God to move has been set, we are rendered blind to the subtle ways that he is already moving to accomplish his purposes and build up our faith.

As disciples, we need to concern ourselves less with the encouragement and/or validation we receive (or don't receive) from others. Although the Bible directs us to encourage one another we can sometimes mislabel this encouragement as God's stamp of approval. Are we fueled by the praise of men or by our relationship with God? Are we satisfied with a pat on the back from a peer or do we strive to please God? I believe that God is most interested in our faith during the times when we feel alone, unrecognized, and unappreciated. Do we do what is right regardless of the praise and recognition, or do we secretly crave thanks? If you are living for tangible rewards and praise from men then earth is where you will receive our reward.

Let us instead place our hope in the approaching day when God will raise us up and acknowledge that we indeed made a contribution to his eternal kingdom. That hope would have to suffice for John. And his day came. God would raise him up and he would be given the white robe worn by the martyrs, the crown of eternal life, and a generous welcome into the heavenly realms. What will you receive?

Rev. 2:10

Rev. 6:9-11

Philip. 4:11-13

2 Cor. 1:3-4

1 Cor. 10:13

1 Peter 4:19



Predestination and Free Will

Luke 7:29-35

We learn here that God had a purpose and destiny for each of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. However, few had the courage and humility to embrace it. Those that did cross over to follow Christ paid a high price: rejection, dismissal from the synagogue, imprisonment, and sometimes death. Nicodemus was one of the few Pharisees during Jesus' lifetime willing to risk disfellowship. He assisted Joseph of Arimathea with Jesus' burial and was thereafter known to

have lived as a disciple of Jesus. There is even an apocryphal Gospel attributed to him. Saul, also a member of the Pharisees, would eventually forsake the broad road and pay the ultimate price to fulfill the destiny that God has planned for him. Nevertheless, these were exceptions to the norm.

As a whole the Jewish leaders unanimously opposed both Jesus and John the Baptist. Jesus described this rejection in the parable here in [Luke 7:31-34](#), illustrating that neither he nor John performed in a way that was acceptable to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. He did not conform to the preconceived Messiah that these Jewish leaders were anticipating. Thus, as [Luke 7:30](#) details, they rejected John as a Prophet and Jesus as the Christ. In doing so they ultimately rejected the destiny that was chosen for them by God. We see a practical example of God employing his predetermined plan for mankind while granting each person the opportunity to accept or reject his or her individual and God-given destiny.

One of the most debated areas of study in the scriptures and religion in general is the concept of *predestination*. Are we in control of our own decisions, our fate? Or do we simply entertain the illusion of freewill when in truth our every move has been preordained by God? Are we going to be called to account for our actions and our decisions or are some simply destined to burn while others are chosen to inherit eternal life? Does God not possess the foreknowledge of our every word and every action prior to its existence, thus pointing us logically towards the doctrine of a predetermined path? By observation, the scriptures seem to lend support of both positions.

In this next segment I am in no way attempting to summarize or encompass the complexity of either standpoint – supporting or opposing predestination. Instead, I want to demonstrate as simply as possible that the solution to this mystery is most likely a combination of the two seemingly opposing points of view. Essentially, I believe that [Luke 7:30](#) is a prime example of this functional paradox.

Verses that seem to support predestination

Psalm 139:16	Ephes. 1:4-5
Acts 13:48	Ephes. 1:11-12
Romans 8:29-30	1 Peter 1:1-2

Verses that seem to oppose predestination

Deut. 30:19-20	Ezekiel 33:18-20
Jeremiah 17:10	Romans 2:6-11
Jeremiah 32:19	Rev. 20:12-13
Ezekiel 18:30-32	

If the scriptures offer support to both of these contrasting theories, how can we combine them to develop a plausible explanation that remains Biblical? Visualize an outline of the critical events throughout recorded history. Suppose that these events were beyond our control or influence – events that were predestined to occur. It is obvious from the scriptures that God has had a

predetermined blueprint for the world and for mankind since before time as we know it began. The integral part of his predestined will which touches every moment in time was Jesus' duty to die on the cross for the sins of all of humanity and to raise from the dead, swallowing up death in victory. This act was never God's backup plan or a last ditch effort to grab the attention of fallen man. It was in fact the entire purpose for which the earth and all life were created. The end result of that resurrection and the culmination of God's design, as **Ephesians 1:1-14** teaches us, is that through the love of Christ our adoption as sons and daughters of God will be possible. God has destined all men and women to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ, the firstborn over all creation.

We see clearly that God in perfect foreknowledge has always had a specific design that surrounds the entirety of his creation. Throughout the centuries he revealed this plan to prophets who pointed out in detail what was to come. Through the rising and falling of nations, kings, and kingdoms, God demonstrated his ability to direct the course of human events. And through Jesus God has fulfilled his ultimate destiny as he extends salvation to mankind. To be sure, it is God's desire, will, and destiny for all men and women to be saved through Christ, as it is written:

1 Tim. 2:3-6

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time.

Perhaps the "missing link" that joins the theories of predestination and free will is the apparent ability given to men and women to act upon their own desire and will – ultimately, the ability to choose. Let us remember that the concept of choice itself was part of God's preordained plan since Adam and Eve. Included within the Garden of Eden scenario was the opportunity to obey or to disobey the commands of God. This choice has always been a component within man's struggle to walk in agreement to God.

Throughout the world that God created for mankind, both before the fall of man and afterwards, there existed the broad and narrow roads. The narrow road is God's predetermined path of righteousness and eternal salvation. The broad road is the opportunity presented to all people to reject the narrow path and choose the road that leads to destruction. Beginning with Adam and Eve, God introduced consequences for rejecting his commands and merit for obedience to them. A system was established by God to judge a person according to what their deeds deserve.

Imagine now the souls of each individual person standing at the crossroads. Before them lies the narrow road – the fulfillment of God's specific and marvelous destiny for their lives. This destiny was given them before time began and now awaits. Setting foot on that road is contingent upon each person's willingness to accept this destiny – a process which involves humbling

themselves, crucifying their own desires and will, and upholding God's will above all else. This humbling process and death to self is already enough to detour most of these souls from the narrow path and they head impulsively down the broad road, which also sits directly in front of them. Most are eager to experiment with the power given them to dictate their own future. So they take the gifts God has given them – the gift of life, the capacity to exercise their own free will, and the talents and abilities that were meant to glorify God – and off they go. The lure of the broad road is intense and few even hesitate with the decision. There is no initial price to be paid, no self-sacrifice required. Only after they are well down that path does the yoke of sin, emptiness, and selfishness begin to take its toll.

Despite their rejection of God's destiny for their lives, those along the broad road are offered chance after chance to rejoin their preordained path of life – the narrow road of truth. In view of God's mercy and sacrifice many are willing to now pay the personal price, set foot down this narrow road, and accept the destiny that God has chosen for them. On this road are the meek – men and women with a quiet wisdom, enduring strength, good character, and tested perseverance. They are broken before God and led by him. Progress down that road is made by adhering to God's commands and walking faithfully before him. At any point each soul is free to break the gentle yoke of God that guides them along their predestined path. They are at liberty to leave the narrow road, rejoin the masses, and go it alone. Once again they grope along in the darkness, guided only by their stubborn will and selfish desires. But those that stand firm and reach the end have fulfilled their destiny. God has prepared an eternal home for them.

Verses that support the idea of God exercising a predestined will and purpose, yet allowing and accounting for the decisions and actions of mankind.

Jeremiah 18:3-10

1 Kings 21:27-29

1 Samuel 13:13-14

Luke 7:29-30



Sin Exposed

Luke 7:36-50

Luke has already gone to great lengths in this chapter to make evident the deity of Christ. Now (presumably for the benefit of the Gentiles) he demonstrates the vast array of persons who may receive the salvation offered through this Jesus. The Jewish culture differed vastly from the non-Jewish world due mainly to the existence of the Mosaic Law and the regulations observed by most Jews. The Gentiles that Luke and Paul would encounter on their missionary journeys could relate much more to the unquestionable sins associated with the outcasts of the Jewish community (the tax collectors and the prostitutes) than they could with the pious segment, whose sins were just as numerous but less visible. This parable of the canceled debts and the comparison between Simon the Pharisee and the

woman who had lived an immoral life would forever inspire sinners of every degree to fall prostrate, confess Jesus as Lord, and partake in the washing of new birth.

This entire scene is a collection of unusual and awkward events beginning with Simon's unusual disregard for the customary treatment of a dinner guest in his home. Regardless of whether or not he believed Jesus to be a prophet, his negligence in hospitality was insulting and it immediately put Jesus in an awkward situation. Then somehow an immoral woman managed to slip into the house and her very presence was uncomfortable for everyone in the room. She was obviously determined to reach out to Jesus. Her many sins had already broken her pride, swindled away her dignity, and destroyed her self-esteem. She became an object of disgust in the eyes of Simon and his guests as she wept and kissed the unwashed feet of Jesus and covered them with perfume that was ordinarily used to attract her many lovers.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we were, and yet he did not sin. So perhaps even Jesus was tempted to pull back from this woman due to personal embarrassment and the unspoken ridicule he was receiving in the hearts of those present. Wouldn't you be tempted to save face? Yet his love for this woman and his compassion on her triumphed over any flare-ups of personal pride – a sin that would have certainly conquered us. Jesus did not sin, nor did he fear the contempt of others. Like always, his perfect love drove away all of his temptations and fears. Love covers over a multitude of sins and drives away a multitude of temptations.

Time and time again Jesus showed that he was the master of unpredictable situations. Rather than condemning the woman – identifying her obvious sins and discarding her as the Pharisees so easily did – he pointed the finger of judgement towards the host of the dinner party and exposed Simon's sins before his own friends and guests. It was now Simon the Pharisee who was put in an awkward position. The parable of the moneylender revealed the Pharisee's lack of gratitude, his lack of love, and ultimately his lack of faith. His contemptuous treatment of Jesus may have gone unnoticed by some. However, Jesus now brought it into the light before them all. And as he explained the meaning of the parable he returned to the woman her self-worth and her dignity. Because she had humbled herself, Jesus lifted her up in front of them all as an example of gratitude, love, and faith.

God loves to pour out his great mercy upon those who openly confess their sins and humbly expose themselves. Those who conceal their sin or because of pride are blind to their wickedness God shall expose their deeds and provide them an opportunity get humble and repent. This is a frequent and crucial Biblical theme. Those who walk in darkness will have their deeds brought into the light while those who walk in the light will receive compassion and salvation.

The issue then becomes whether or not we are willing to deal with our sin openly. Are we willing to expose our darkest sins, our most painful secrets, and our embarrassing weaknesses? Or does our pride cause us to protect ourselves at all costs – concealing our sin and defending our image? Are we

humble enough to open our lives up before God and godly people? Or do we fear the judgement of men more than we fear the judgement of God? Among brothers and sisters in Christ there must be a transparency when it comes to sin. Unconfessed sin, bad attitudes, and critical thoughts leave avenues for Satan to enter into the fellowship to divide and devour.

Some claim that confession of sin to others is not necessary once you have been open before God. However, an unwillingness to expose your flaws before others displays both a serious lack of vulnerability and a shallow understanding of human nature. For the battle against sin is not uncommon to anyone. It rages against us all in very similar ways. Even those we might regard as exceedingly spiritual frequently fall headlong into Satan's many traps. It is imperative that we humble ourselves and choose to be open before a trusted brother or sister in the Lord or before a few peers. Otherwise, we may oblige God to take a crack at our pride and embarrassingly expose us before the multitudes.

Genesis 4:7

Proverbs 26:24-26

Proverbs 28:13

Isaiah 29:15

Lament. 2:14

Habakkuk 2:16

Luke 8:17

John 3:19-21

1 Cor. 4:5

Ephes. 5:11-14a

1 John 1:5-10

Rev. 16:15



The Act of Receiving

Luke 8:1-3

As uncommon as it is today in most cultures to allow a group of men to acquire a livelihood from the support given them by a group of women, imagine first century Palestine. Simply having these women traveling along with Jesus and his followers, receiving instruction from the Teacher, and included as students or disciples was nothing less than scandalous at that time. Jesus and the Twelve would have been sharply criticized for the inclusion of these women as followers – especially for receiving their monetary offering if it was widely known.

So why would Jesus allow this door of reproach to be opened against his ministry? There are several likely reasons. For one, the women whose lives Jesus had touched loved him deeply. Their devotion to Jesus and their faith in him was an example even for the Twelve. It is likely that this reason by itself earned them a place among Jesus' close followers. Their financial offering was one that simply welled up out of their gratefulness for all that Jesus had done for them. To deny someone the opportunity to give is to deny them a blessing from God. Jesus taught us the Golden Rule: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (**Acts 20:35**). A footnote could be added to this rule that states: *It is more humbling to receive than to give!*

Jesus had done much more than heal these women; he had given them worth, dignity, inner freedom, and security. This certainly humbled them. To then refuse their expressions of gratitude would have refused them a basic human need to return the love that was given them. A refusal would have also denied them the happiness that would be theirs in seeing their Lord accept their gift. Jesus could have taken the high road, refused the offering, and remained the sole giver in these relationships. The women would then remain the lesser, those who had been given to, and those who were constantly indebted to him. Yet for the sake of others Jesus often took the humble road and allowed people to express their gratitude for the love he showed them. Jesus perfected the act of giving and despite the contempt he would receive from men he also humbly demonstrated the act of receiving.

Proverbs 11:25

Proverbs 18:16



The Parable of the Sower

Luke 8:4-15

By this time the disciples had heard Jesus use dozens of parables and analogies in his teaching. The disciples asked Jesus for the meaning of the parable of the sower. As revealed in another Gospel, they also asked him to explain why he spoke in parables in the first place (**Matthew 13:10**). Jesus explained to them that for some the parables were able to unlock the **musteria** – (Greek¹⁵) mysteries (translated “secrets”) – of the kingdom of God. For others the meaning of the parables was hidden. They could not perceive or understand the glory of God’s kingdom as revealed by Jesus in these parables and thus remained in darkness.

This is the very nature of God’s word. The same passages of scripture can generate vastly different reactions from various people. Many hear the word of God and their entire life is revolutionized. They are broken by the truth and the Spirit is allowed to soften their hearts and penetrate their minds. For others, their eyes may pass over the same verses many times and their ears absorb their sound for years. Still, they will remain unfazed, untroubled, and unrepentant. They are rendered blind to the mysteries of God’s kingdom on earth and deaf to the very words that could lead to their eternal salvation.

Jesus illustrated these various reactions to the word in the parable of the sower. The seed sown along the path represents those who will never allow the word to penetrate their heart. It may rattle around in their intellect for some time but will not touch their inner person or sink in and be able to bring about a changed life. Those on the rock are men and women whose shallow character and unfamiliarity with perseverance and toughness will allow Satan to easily uproot the word that once grew within their hearts. They are never firmly established in

¹⁵ Greek 3466; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

the word of God nor will they be able to remain anchored in their commitment to Christ. They will give up all too quickly once the challenges of the Christian life surface and the requirement of self-discipline becomes too heavy a burden.

Others will stay strong during this initial period of testing, but they will eventually succumb to Satan's distractions and will be unable to spiritually mature. They will begin to compromise the commitment they made to follow Christ. Submission to the will of God eventually feels bothersome to them and they slowly begin to reclaim their own stubborn will. Satan is able to incrementally choke the effect of God's word in our lives if allowed to do so. Falling away from God does not have to be a sudden procedure. It can be a slow, subtle process. Its gradual pull deceives both the victim and those in the fellowship all around them. This gentle backslide can totally devour a one time faithful and zealous believer – every aspect of their once spiritual life will be consumed with distractions rooted no deeper than just plain selfishness. Thus is the word sown on thorny soil.

Finally, there shall always remain a few hearers of God's word whose hearts Jesus described as noble and good. They not only give audience to God's word, they retain it. Planted deep within their hearts and minds the scriptures are able to mold them, direct them, and supersede their own desire and will. The fruit of their life will be evident. In [Matthew 13:8](#) Jesus stated that a good heart will reproduce itself a hundred, sixty, or thirty times over. According to Jesus this harvest will be a result of perseverance. Thus, a person who is transformed by the words of Jesus and remains faithful throughout their lifetime, resistant to Satan's constant barrage, will be welcomed into heaven. What is more, they will see dozens if not hundreds of other souls saved as a direct result of God using them to scatter and plant his word in the hearts of men and women all over the world.

[Proverbs 11:30](#)

[John 15:5-8](#)

[John 15:16](#)

[Col. 1:6b](#)



[Listen Carefully](#)

Luke 8:16-18

Jesus concluded his teaching here by using an analogy that stressed the need to listen and respond appropriately to his words. The secrets of the kingdom would no longer remain hidden but would be revealed to those whose hearts were seeking after the wisdom of God. Those who retained and obeyed his word would become the light of a dark world. They would be entrusted with knowledge more valuable than great riches and they could not conceal it or keep it to themselves. Rather, they should imitate Jesus and make this message known to those around them. Those whose hearts and minds remained eager to learn the teachings of Christ and desired to walk in their light would consistently be given

more knowledge, more truth, and more insight. Those who were inflexible to change and thus hardened their hearts towards the word of God would be refused understanding regarding the vast mysteries and the life giving power they possess.

Luke admonished his fellow Gentiles here not to brush aside the good news of God too quickly. He urged them to cautiously examine the scriptures and the testimony with an open mind and an open heart. It is up to each individual to consider carefully how they listen. They will be held accountable for whether or not they took heed to Jesus' words.

James 1:22-25



The Family of God

Luke 8:19-21

Mary the mother of Jesus came in pursuit of her now famed son. Jesus' physical family had no doubt been barraged by reports of his roaming ministry. Perhaps they had even begun to suffer contempt from within their community. Jesus' physical brothers (in all likelihood the other sons of Joseph and Mary) had been traveling with their mother and they had finally caught up to him. It appears that Jesus' family had rallied together to take control of him or at least try to reason with him. In their estimation his movement had gone overboard. No longer was Jesus a traveling Rabbi speaking favorably in the synagogues. He had now taken on many disciples who had themselves forsaken their homes and families. Several women of highly questionable backgrounds traveled from place to place with the rest of the group. And at times the crowds grew so vast in number *"that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'"* **Mark 3:20b-21.**

One thing we notice here is that Mary and Jesus' brothers were not traveling with Jesus and his disciples. It seems as if Jesus' immediate family remained in Nazareth, far removed from the growing controversy that encircled his ministry. If Joseph did in fact die or was not present during Jesus' adulthood (as his absence in scripture here and elsewhere seems to imply), this would leave the eldest son as the default head of the household. Since Jesus was their firstborn son, the very fact that he left his mother and brothers to travel around Galilee could have been viewed as dishonorable. His departure seems to have brought him disrepute from the town of Nazareth and perhaps tempted his own brothers with resentment. We certainly see a lack of faith even amongst his siblings. Sadly it appears as if Mary herself was struggling to put her trust and faith in Jesus her son.

Nevertheless, Jesus was on a mission that eclipsed the importance even of the needs of his own physical family. And since he was about thirty when he began his ministry we might easily assume that his brothers were then old enough to care for the family. This would have freed up Jesus to head out on his

missionary journeys from a purely logistical standpoint, but may have still been inwardly torn by his love of his beloved mother and siblings and his desire to cater to the needs.

Jesus knew that the Gospel he preached had the power to unite families but also had the power to divide them as well (**Matt. 10:34-37**). Presently, he would feel the sword of division. He would feel its sting where it hurt the most – within the immediate family. This is also where countless of his disciples would be tested. Jesus refused to compromise his convictions in order to better accommodate their appeals. He would instead fulfill the commission God set out for him and in doing so he would eventually win over his family. Following his ascension, the group of faithful disciples that are left included his mother Mary and Jesus' brothers (**Acts 1:14**).

Back to the present scene: a house overflowing with Jesus' followers and his indignant family calling to him from outside the house. Jesus unabashedly declared that he considered anyone who heard the word of God and put it into practice his mother and brother. Instead of heeding immediately to his family's presence Jesus remained in the house amongst his followers. This may have taken the crowd by surprise and probably seemed dishonorable to some. It certainly communicated his unwavering seriousness to his present mission.

With this declaration Jesus was also defining the nature of the relationships within the coming kingdom of God. Under the Mosaic Law God's chosen people who were not blood related referred to one another as a neighbor or a fellow Israelite. The larger groups were known as a community. The closeness that Jesus and his followers had for one another far surpassed that. They would eventually refer to one another as brother or sister and the whole would be known as a family or a fellowship. The older men and women in the fellowship would serve as spiritual fathers and mothers to those younger in the Lord. The same love, concern, patience, forgiveness, and loyalty demonstrated between members of a close physical family would define the nature of the relationships seen within the coming church, the family of God.

Imagine the invitation that Jesus was giving here to the Gentile believers as it was recorded many years later by Luke and preached by Paul. Although once excluded from the community of God's people they would now be welcomed into the family of God. The Gentiles would become brothers and sisters in the Lord to their long time adversary, the Jews. They would finally be considered as fellow citizens with God's people. Despite their former status as aliens, they would now be accepted as members of God's household. They would become heirs to all of God's promises through their faith in Christ even though they were unable to share the physical lineage of Abraham. Through this same faith they would even become sons and daughters of Almighty God. These two peoples who were once unable to even eat in the same room together would now be able to enjoy sweet fellowship with one another.

Although the doctrine is clear, this degree of unity would not be easy for the Jewish Christians to embrace. Over a thousand years of separatism would prove to be a significant stumbling block for the Jews. They would soon face the fact that salvation had been forever offered to the Gentiles through faith in Christ.

Luke would write another book (The Acts of the Apostles) where he would describe in detail the struggle of Paul and the other apostles as they strained to resolve this very issue. Paul himself would exhaust many hours of written and oral debate with his fellow Jews surrounding this crucial topic that faced the early church. At the core of his argument was faith. The Gentiles had been grafted in to the remnant of God's people because of their faith in Jesus. This may seem like an obvious point to us now, but in the early church it would be a colossal problem with revolutionary consequences.

Paul writes to the Gentiles:

Romans 10:1-4 **Ephes. 2:11-13**
Romans 10:12-13 **Ephes. 2:19**
Romans 12:4-5 **Col. 3:11**
Galatians 3:26-29

Peter writes to the Gentiles:

1 Peter 2:9-10



The Overwhelming Power of Christ

Luke 8:22-25

In the remainder of the eighth chapter of Luke, Jesus is seen demonstrating his sovereign power in four miracles that are nothing less than astonishing. First, he will demonstrate his authority over the earth, the sea, and the skies. Jesus was able to command the very course of nature because he was its creator. **Colossians 1:15-16a** states: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,*”. Jesus will then heal a man who has been dwelling for a long time among the dead, hopelessly possessed by a legion of demons. He confirmed his authority over the demonic realm by completely restoring this man. His next miracle shall occur without his direct will or prior knowledge. An unclean woman will be healed as she touches the cloak of the Lord and she will be forever heralded as a champion of faith. The chapter closes with Jesus raising a second child from death per the request of a synagogue ruler. Remarkably, it appears that these four extraordinary events all occurred within just a couple days. What must it have been like to be able to witness our Lord day after day demonstrating the Spirit of God to the fullest measure? Simply miraculous!

The fact that Jesus was able to sleep on a boat during a horrendous storm is not miraculous, just proof of the fatigue accompanied with a life spent giving and serving others. After the disciples woke him up Jesus rebuked the storm and confirmed his authority over creation. At this, the disciples' fear of drowning subsided and their fear of Jesus swelled. His ability to wield the unlimited power of God simply at the sound of his voice took them by surprise. Up to this point

Jesus was to them their teacher, their leader, and their friend. They knew him to be a great prophet and held out high hopes that he was in fact the Messiah. But to envision that the God of the ages – the creator of heaven and earth – was now appearing in the flesh was perhaps more than their minds were able to process or even accept.

Throughout his ministry the disciples strained to grasp this reality: they were in the presence of God appearing as Jesus the Son of Man. It shall be their lack of faith even near the end of his ministry that would prompt Jesus to ask the question, *"Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"* ¹⁰*Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"* **John 14:9-10a.**

Jesus' miracles had allowed them to put their faith in him (**John 2:11**), but even this faith was noticeably incomplete. Jesus knew he only had a couple years with these men and then they would be asked to bring a lost world to the faith. Thus, Jesus was constantly challenging the apostles to have greater faith in God and in him. Upon calming the storm he rebuked their lack of faith because they still failed to see the big picture – that God himself had come to earth to heal, comfort, and save his people. No amount of turbulence in the physical or spiritual realms could thwart the completion of God's plan, the fulfillment of the ages. So if their faith suffered while in the daily presence of the Messiah, where would it be once Jesus was taken from them?

What must our response be to the overwhelming evidence that Jesus was in fact God in the flesh? For the apostles, even the hint of this realization brought on great reverence and fear. We have no doubt become accustomed to Jesus' incredible mercy and grace. But do we still see him as the Creator of the universe – the one who is able to control every aspect of life as we know it? Do we understand the magnitude of his power over the physical and spiritual realms? Not too far beneath our love and appreciation for Jesus must exist a healthy fear and respect for him. We must reserve a sober recognition of his jurisdiction to pronounce eternal judgement for every man and woman who has ever lived. This reverence for Christ must serve as a spiritual safety net when our love for God grows weak and we are tempted with an unhealthy love of the world.

Malachi 2:5

Malachi 4:2

Psalms 33:8

2 Cor. 7:1

Ephes. 5:21

Hebrews 12:28



Freedom for the Prisoners

Luke 8:26-39

We shall now witness Jesus' inexplicable healing powers displayed in three persons linked only by a common condition – each was beyond hope. The first of these was a demon-possessed man living on the eastern shores of the Sea

of Galilee. No one knew what to do with him and he eventually was left alone to live among the tombs. He was beyond hope and surely beyond reach. Likewise, the woman suffering from bleeding lived each day in a dungeon of loneliness as one deemed unclean and untouchable. A solution for her had altogether expired. Finally, the daughter of Jarius was terminally ill. A remedy for her no longer existed though certainly every doctor available had tried to assist her. By the time Jesus would arrive she had already expired her last breath. What little hope she had was permanently extinguished. Nevertheless, in each of these three situations Jesus brought hope to the hopeless, a solution to the unsolvable.

The man who lived among the tombs had become a prisoner to a whole host of evil spirits who stated their name as “Legion” to describe their quantity. A legion was the largest unit of the Roman army, varying from 3,000 to 6,000 soldiers at different times during the empire. The demons enabled him to demonstrate supernatural strength and he was able to break through chains that bound him. He was driven to self-mutilation that has throughout the years been associated with satanic worship and the occult. The townspeople had often tried to restrain and guard this wild man but they no longer had a solution for him. As a result he dwelt in the tombs and often cried out in pain, insanity, desperation, and loneliness.

Jesus and his disciples now landed on the southeastern shore of Galilee, which was a predominantly Gentile district known as Gerasenes – from the town of Gerasa, which was a good thirty miles offshore. Matthew calls this region Gadarenes, a name taken from another neighboring town called Gadara some eight miles from the Sea of Galilee. From the way the scriptures read, the man from the tombs came to meet Jesus before he and the disciples were able to venture towards either town. Most certainly the town they encountered was neither Gadara nor Gerasa but instead a lakeshore community whose livelihood was a combination of fishing and livestock.

Pig-herders were absolutely abhorrent to the Jews for the Law of Moses forbade pork. Thus, we can safely assume that this was another calculated visit by Jesus to a non-Jewish area, much like his journey through Samaria and his visit to Tyre and Sidon. It is probable that many of Jesus’ disciples had never set foot in this region though they lived less than twenty miles away on the northern shore of Galilee. We can be pretty sure that they unfamiliar with the Decapolis as well. It was a larger region encompassing ten smaller cities of mostly non-Jewish residents.

Whatever Jesus had in mind to reach out to this Gentile community, it was seemingly cut short by the immediate arrival of the demoniac from the tombs and the events that followed. The man came running at Jesus, shouting and carrying on like a crazy man. He was naked and visibly marred from his routine of self-loathing. Screaming at the top of his lungs the man proclaimed Jesus as the Son of the Most High God. Although Jesus had previously dealt with unclean spirits and cured numerous men and women possessed by demons, this particular incident was worthy of mention in three of the four Gospels. Perhaps the magnitude of the man’s demon possession and the means by which they were cast

out was what impressed the disciples. The memory still stood out many years later when their accounts were penned.

We are not told whether a crowd was there to witness this event or whether Jesus and his disciples alone confronted the man from the tombs. In any event, this literal army of satanic agents fled from the man with the simple command of Jesus' voice, restoring the man's mind and soul from this enduring hell. The demons entered a herd of pigs near the shore of the sea and they rushed headlong into the water and drown. This was an unsalvageable loss of revenue and those tending the pigs immediately reported it. Certainly they wanted to cover their own backs and they did not want to appear careless in their management of the herd. They emphatically cast the blame on Jesus and the well-known lunatic and as a result the townspeople gathered to see what happened.

By the time they congregated Jesus made sure the man was then cleaned up and dressed. He had dealt first with the inner turmoil and then continued to care for the man enough to polish up the exterior as well, restoring also his sense of dignity and humanity. A mysterious Jewish miracle-worker held no interest to these Gentile folk. They did not revere Jesus for his compassion and ability to transform this hopeless man. Instead they simply feared his power and were troubled by the commotion that had already accompanied his arrival. Jesus was given no stage to make known his message and he was immediately asked to leave their region.

As Jesus and the disciples conceded to their request and began to depart, the former demoniac was determined to stay with Jesus. He understandably wanted to remain in the company of followers that now surrounded this great teacher. What kind of life could have awaited him in this region? However, we are reminded of the publicly stated mission of Jesus, "*I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel*" (**Matt 15:24**). Jesus was already held in disrepute by allowing the outcasts within the Jewish community and even several Jewish women to travel with him and be trained by him. But as yet, the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law had no real basis to condemn Jesus for this based on scriptural grounds (though inwardly they discounted his ministry because of such actions). However, if Jesus were to allow this Gentile to travel with his ministry, it would have given his adversaries a wealth of charges to level against him and his ministry as a whole. In the grand scheme of things, Jesus still had a mission to complete and the salvation of the world was at stake.

Thus, Jesus found another use for this man. He was to be a messenger of the good news to the Decapolis. A man who previously had no purpose or hope in life was now handed the task of spreading hope to hundreds of men and women. He was preparing the hearts of these people for the eventual harvest once the church was revealed. The seed of the Gospel message and the testimony of the ex-demoniac would precede the church plantings here much the same that as the testimony of the woman by the well paved the way for the church in Samaria. Though Jesus' mission to the Jews was clear, his heart for hurting people and the Gentile world as a whole was undeniable.

Psalm 107:10-16

*Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom,
 prisoners suffering in iron chains,
¹¹for they had rebelled against the words of God
 and despised the counsel of the Most High.
¹²So he subjected them to bitter labor;
 they stumbled, and there was no one to help.
¹³Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
 and he saved them from their distress.
¹⁴He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom
 and broke away their chains.
¹⁵Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
 and his wonderful deeds for men,
¹⁶for he breaks down gates of bronze
 and cuts through bars of iron.*

We shall make a small detour here. A common misconception taught by many Christian denominations is that a simple acknowledgement or profession of their belief that Jesus is the Son of God is sufficient for one's eternal salvation. True, the first step towards our redemption is a sincere belief that Jesus is the Son of God, that he alone is the Lord and Savior. In fact, a good amount of New Testament scripture (especially the Gospels) is spent just trying to persuade all men and women of this fact.

"Son of the Most High God", the man from the tombs exclaimed. As usual, those who dwelt in the spiritual realms quickly recognized the Teacher from Nazareth. We may assume that the man was speaking under the control of the legion of demons that dominated his every action. Still, we can be sure that this man recognized the power and deity of Christ even more profoundly than did Jesus' own disciples at this point. Does this recognition of Jesus as the Son of God mean that the demon-possessed man was now a sanctified believer? Although he meets the doctrinal requirements of many Christian factions – professing Jesus as the Son of God – the complete Biblical plan of salvation involves another level of faith and obedience to God's commands.

There exists today a modified Calvinistic doctrine that is preached by many Christian denominations. Whereas Calvin preached "Faith Only" for salvation, today's version could best be dubbed "Belief Only". This concocted text (some call it the "Sinners Prayer") essentially guarantees salvation for any sincere individual who "accepts Jesus as their Lord and personal savior" or to those who "pray for Jesus to come and enter into their heart." Neither phrase is found anywhere in the Bible. Those who were personally trained by Jesus never allowed a simple prayer for salvation replace the higher calling of making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus taught them (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

Jesus never taught his disciples that salvation could be attained through prayer. Furthermore, God never promised that a person could receive their eternal salvation through prayer, no matter how sincere their plea. The Bible does teach

us to pray for people to be saved (**Romans 10:1**), but any doctrine that promises salvation and the remission of sins through a simple prayer is false. It is not rooted in scripture and there is no Biblical precedent for it in the New Testament. In other words, you cannot hold God to a promise he never made.

The “Faith Only” movement brought forth in the Restoration was rooted in sincere commitment to faith in Christ. They dared to forsake the wicked and unbiblical regulations that the Catholic and Orthodox churches had bound on their members for hundreds of years. Many paid the ultimate price for their convictions – they were labeled as heretics and killed. The history books reveal many men and women who spilled their blood as they radically defied the widespread corruption and false doctrines that spewed from the mouth of Papal Rome throughout the centuries.

Through recent years however, this pure devotion was replaced with a simple promise of salvation to any and every person who simply professes belief in Jesus. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote in his epistle that this mindset – relying solely on the belief in God (or for that matter, belief in Jesus as God’s Son) – is incomplete. As we’ve just seen, the host of demonic spirits dwelling in this man from the tombs has fulfilled this so-called plan of salvation. They fearfully acknowledged that the man standing before them was Jesus, Son of the Most High God. Their belief in his deity and their submission to him was recognizable. So has Jesus gone to prepare a place for them as well? Shall we expect to see these agents of Satan standing by our side in heaven? I should think not.

James 2:17-20

1 Cor. 15:2

1 John 2:3-6



The Healing Touch

Luke 8:40-48

Jesus returned to the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee where people were much more familiar with his ministry. A crowd was fact waiting for his return. He submitted to the request of Jarius the synagogue ruler and was on his way to Jarius’ house when he encountered another hopeless situation. The bleeding woman had spent whatever money she had on many doctors, but she remained afflicted. The nature of her illness – a steady discharge of blood – was well documented in the scriptures to be a source of uncleanness. Anyone she touched would also be declared unclean. Thus, she was traditionally required to keep her distance from all people and to announce her unclean state to close passers-by.

Leviticus 15:25-27

"When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time other than her monthly period or has a discharge

that continues beyond her period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the days of her period. ²⁶Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits on will be unclean, as during her period. ²⁷Whoever touches them will be unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

After twelve years of this, she had become accustomed to a life filled with loneliness, rejection, and tears. Beyond all hope the woman pressed her way through the moving crowd, making many of Jesus' followers ceremonially unclean. Upon her arrival at Jesus the internal battle between her hopes of being healed and her fears of another rejection no doubt reached a climax. In faith she touched the edge of his cloak and knew immediately that she had been healed. There was no doubt in her mind. After twelve years she had probably forgotten what it felt like to be healthy. Now she remembered. As she now watched Jesus stop the entire procession and begin to search for the one who touched him a new fear welled up within her. According to the Law she had just made this Rabbi unclean until evening, requiring him to distance himself from all others, to bathe, and to wash his clothes. Perhaps she was anticipating the scorn of Jesus and his many disciples for this interruption in the ministry of such a powerful and important teacher. Surely he would have to change his plans now and he would be unable to heal Jarius' sick daughter. Nevertheless, her fear of God outweighed her fear of the crowds. She had believed in Jesus' power to heal; now she hoped he would extend her sympathy as well. She trembled before Jesus and exposed the truth.

Though she may have feared a reprimand Jesus was simply looking for the opportunity to commend her for her faith. In all tenderness and compassion Jesus called this woman his daughter, adhering to the family reference that he introduced previously in this chapter. This woman had demonstrated great faith and so was proclaimed a descendant of the promises made to Abraham – even a daughter of God himself. Although Jesus was en route to the house of one of the town's most influential men, he stopped and extended his grace towards one of its most insignificant women. Having absolutely no life of any kind to return to, this woman likely became another traveling companion of Jesus and joined the company of devoted women followers.

Those who still kept a critical eye on Jesus now had another complaint against him. He apparently ignored the Levitical requirements regarding what would seem to be his present condition; he had been made ceremoniously unclean. Furthermore, he neglected to give the woman instructions to go and wash her clothes and make sacrifices per the regulations of the Law. Throughout his ministry Jesus still held to the commands of the Mosaic Law and time and again commanded others to do the same. Thus, we may conclude that Jesus was not disregarding the Law if we consider the following to be true: Jesus was not

simply a priest or a Rabbi but was in fact the Messiah. Consequently, he was not made automatically unclean by her touch. Instead, his contact with her made the woman automatically clean. This means that all of the spiritual and physical intentions of the prescribed washings written in the Law of Moses were instantaneously fulfilled. She had been made completely clean inside and out, making a ceremonial washing unnecessary at this point. It is exactly this type of dispute that would ignite the disdain of the Pharisees and teachers of the law and would justify (in their minds) their ultimate rejection of Jesus and his ministry.

Matthew 8:2-3

Matthew 15:18

John 15:3



The Emergence of the Three

Luke 8:49-56

The delay in getting to Jarius' house now seemed to have caught up with them. News of the sick girl's death reached Jesus and Jarius. Before Jarius swallowed this painful revelation Jesus reassured him and commanded him to believe in the impossible. Upon reaching the house, Jesus, Jarius, the wife of Jarius, and three of Jesus' apostles went in to a room filled with traditional mourners. The response of laughter to Jesus proclamation that the girl was simply sleeping exposed the shallowness present in their customary wailing for the dead. In point of fact, the scriptures and the New Testament writers refer to those who have passed from life to death as being in a state of sleep, not death. Jesus held the keys to death and would himself conquer its mortal sting. Thus, he was correct in saying that Jarius' daughter was simply asleep, for the Lord God himself was about to wake her up.

Jesus went into her room and restored her to perfect health before the astounded eyes of her parents. They then watched her eat, confirmation that she was not simply revived to a life of suffering and ongoing after-effects. She had recovered completely. Her parents must have cherished this memory, yet they would not be able to publicly proclaim what they had witnessed until after Jesus revealed himself as the Son of Man, the Messiah, and king of the Jews.

The scriptures frequently refer to the state of physical death as "sleep"

Job 3:11-13

Psalm 13:3

Daniel 12:2

Acts 7:59-60

1 Thes. 4:13-15

Even though Jesus had already handpicked twelve men who would receive a greater amount of his personal time and training, another group within this circle

of twelve had emerged. Upon their arrival at the house of Jarius, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, were personally selected by Jesus to accompany him and witness a dead girl being brought back to life. The other apostles waited outside with the rest of the crowd. The Lord had made a clear distinction. These three men would be given a handful of extraordinary memories that the other apostles would only hear about. This was not an act of favoritism on the part of Jesus. Rather, Jesus openly taught, “*he who has will be given more*” (**Matt. 13:12; 25:29, Mark 4:25, Luke 8:18**). Most likely, these three disciples had expressed an extra measure of zeal and hunger for knowledge and righteousness. They drew near to Jesus and secured a close discipling relationship with him that resulted in the additional responsibilities and opportunities given them. In life these three had worked together as business partners on the Sea of Galilee (**Luke 5:10**). Now as disciples they continued to have a special bond between them that sharpened their walk with the Lord and brought out the best in each other.

Naturally, their unofficial appointment as “the Three” resulted in an occasional flare up of pride, overconfidence, stepping out of line, and feelings of superiority. Peter would not hesitate to pull Jesus aside and begin to rebuke him, feeling he spoke for the rest of the apostles. Arguments would arise between the apostles as to who was or would become the greatest. These conflicts were perhaps a result of the awkward feelings from the other apostles regarding these distinctions. Peter, James, and John no doubt added to the occasional discord as they now battled with feelings of pride and self-importance that resulted from their close walk with the Teacher. James and John felt close enough to Jesus and so believed in by him that they asked for the highest positions of honor reserved in the heavenly realms. Such are the consequences of selecting a special few within a larger discipleship group.

It is interesting to see the manner in which Jesus dealt with their intermittent disputes. Rather than lashing out against the disciples and squelching their haughty spirit, Jesus used these times as opportunities to redirect their energy and refocus their selfish ambition towards spiritual aims. Without diffusing their spirits, we will see Jesus provide them with a good and right direction to channel their confidence.

Jesus was no doubt prepared to deal with the occasional riff between the Twelve and even his chosen three, knowing that their pride would get the best of them at times. Perhaps these confrontations could have been avoided altogether had he simply given equal focus and equal encouragement to each of the apostles. Yet Jesus did not apologize or explain to the others why he had chosen Peter, James, and John. He did not hold a special meeting to officially appoint the Three. Enough time had passed since he chose the Twelve to observe the strengths and weaknesses in their character. He then chose the three, those he wanted to walk even more closely to him. And most likely these three had already shown Jesus that they too eagerly desired this new depth of intimacy.

Often as leaders in the God’s kingdom (I am including myself), we tend to be sentimental and attempt to treat everyone with fairness and equality. If we are not careful, we can even end up giving most of our time and attention to disciples

who are struggling or who are weak in their spiritual character. We are sometimes apprehensive when it comes to practically applying the “he who has will be given more” principle. We fear the accusation of favoritism. And we even assume that the disciples who demonstrate the most zeal, strength, and spiritual ambition are capable of gritting it out on their own, given their inherent determination and walk with God.

In effect, we apply the “squeaky wheel gets the grease” principle. Yet this mentality can sometimes rob those who are most deserving of our time, attention, and training, while those who have drained so much of our quality time can remain ungrateful and unrepentant. If those who display the most fire and reliability are not given additional concentration and spiritual nourishment, they may start to feel used up and their fire may eventually burn out. Those who give of themselves the most ought to be encouraged with some unique responsibilities and special opportunities. It is essential for overseers in the kingdom to apply Biblical principles of discipleship to ensure a continual reproduction of capable and spiritual leaders who will then be qualified to teach and train others. This we see in the ministry of Jesus.

Matthew 25:28-29

Luke 6:40

Luke 8:18

Matthew 5:6

2 Tim. 2:2

2 Tim. 3:16

Ephes. 4:11-12



Sent Out

Luke 9:1-9

At last, those who had been designated as apostles (meaning *he that is sent, messenger*) shall fulfill the title given them. Based on the instructions presented them by Jesus, this was to be a somewhat brief mission to the surrounding towns and villages. They would not take a change of clothes, extra food or money, or even a small bag. They would experience first-hand the eternal principle of scripture found in **Deut. 8:3**, “*man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*” They were given specific instruction to perform two tasks: to preach about the kingdom and to heal those who needed healing. The authority to do both was given them by their teacher, the Messiah, who had come to restore the kingdom of God on earth. Although this first sending out might have been brief, it was successful enough to stir up a wave of reaction reaching even as high as Herod, the presiding Roman governor within the region of Galilee.

For a little while the students had become the teachers. The followers had been commissioned to lead and call others to follow them. Those who have spent a good deal of time as observers would now be observed by hundreds of their fellow Jews. Some would accept them and others would scoff. Surely this brief mission enabled the Twelve to appreciate and understand much more profoundly all that Jesus had said and done to train them. It is one thing

to learn and study passively as a student sitting at the feet of the teacher. But to be called to stand up before the class and demonstrate your mastery over the subject in question is a different matter entirely. The former may only result in a limited amount of retention, while the latter demands a thorough understanding of the subject comparable to the instructor's own scope of knowledge. By allowing the Twelve to head out on their own, Jesus had just increased their incentive to comprehend his teachings a hundred-fold.

Mark 6:7 tells us that Jesus sent them out in groups of two. The wisdom of pairing up the apostles is obvious. In many ways, this was their first time to step up to the plate. They would have to stand on their own and to do what they had seen Jesus do countless times before. As pairs, they would at least be able to provide the encouragement and fellowship needed to keep one another sharp, spiritual, and faithful. They would be able to give one another feedback and develop a peer-discipling relationship. These types of friendships would later be aptly dubbed “partners” in the Gospel.

Matthew 18:20

Eccles. 4:9-10

Proverbs 27:17

Philip. 1:4-5

2 Cor. 8:23a



Jesus Feeds the Thousands

Luke 9:10-17

The apostles returned to Jesus and gave an account of their first missionary journey. Jesus attempted to take the Twelve away to Bethsaida for some focussed time together. This would have been an excellent opportunity to rest a bit and perhaps discuss their experiences in greater detail. Jesus surely would have turned this time into a valuable training lesson for his men. But before they even reached their destination, his plan was thwarted by the massive crowds that had assembled. Based on **vs. 12**, this gathering was not composed of residents from the two nearby towns of Capernaum and Bethsaida. From the disciple's report we learn that these people had traveled a long enough distance to require both food and lodging. It appears that the apostle's recent tour of preaching and healing had been quite effective for the crowd gathered here had come to see Jesus in response to their testimony about him.

The Twelve no longer needed to account for what their ministry had produced; they were now surrounded by the results. The people gathered in search of the one who had given the apostles the message of the kingdom and the authority to heal. Instead of enjoying the “success” of their ministry, the apostles now worried about how they could meet the obvious needs of a crowd that easily surpassed ten thousand (including women and children). They urged Jesus to send them away. However, Jesus felt compassion for the people and he welcomed them. Their plans to spend some refreshing time

alone together had been momentarily superceded by the needs of a flock seeking its shepherd. The people now witnessed first-hand the healing touch of Jesus and heard the message of the kingdom from the Teacher himself. Everything the apostles had said about this man was true and those who had come in response to their preaching were not disappointed.

One question still remained: Was this Jesus indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world? Confirmation of that fact came in the only miracle performed by Jesus to be recorded in each of the four Gospels (not counting the resurrection). Jesus multiplied the five loaves and two fish supplied by a random boy and fed the entire crowd. The disciples were ordered to pick up the leftovers that filled exactly twelve baskets. One can just imagine each apostle holding a basket of food in his hands, amazed and humbled by the magnificent and generous power displayed by their Lord.

It is easy to see why people could have assumed that Jesus was one of the prophets who had come back to life. Elisha the prophet had performed a similar miracle when he fed a hundred men with twenty loaves of bread and had some left over ([2 Kings 4:42-44](#)). But the sheer magnitude of feeding around ten thousand people with five loaves is around four hundred times greater than the miracle performed by Elisha. Jesus proved that he was not simply another prophet or the reincarnation of one of the former prophets. As seen in [John 6:14-15](#), the people had concluded that Jesus was the Great Prophet that would fulfill the words of Moses in [Deut. 18:15, 18](#).

The people also began to recognize that the scriptures and the miracles clearly pointed to Jesus as their Savior and their Deliverer. Furthermore, the miraculous feeding of the crowd was convincing enough to inspire the people to crown Jesus as their king, hoping that he would rally the Jewish people and restore the kingdom of David to Israel. But a crown on earth was not a part of God's destiny for Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, he would soon dismiss the crowd – a process that could have taken quite a bit of time for certainly these awe-filled Jews had no desire to walk away after what they had just witnessed. He would eventually withdraw by himself to spend some time alone in prayer.



Jesus Reveals his Ultimate Mission

Luke 9:18-22

Although Jesus had tried his best up to this point to keep his identity somewhat of a mystery, he now discussed this very topic openly with the Twelve. He first tried to get a sense of what was being said about him by the masses. Due to the nature of his miracles many were willing to associate Jesus with some of the great prophets of old – including the now martyred John the Baptist. It would appear however that some, perhaps even most, were still hesitant to wholeheartedly believe that he was the Messiah.

Peter was willing to embrace this fact, although God himself had revealed this to him. Why had God chosen Peter? Perhaps we are seeing another instance

where the “whoever has will be given more” principle is being applied. Among the Twelve and even among the Three it appears that Peter was the disciple who wanted it the most. He was given more and more from God because he seemed to be the most eager to learn, to speak, and to act. Peter would still have to conquer some pretty major hurdles in his character. He would also have to rebound from a few significant failures before God was through with him. Yet his zeal for the Lord and eagerness to open his mouth would allow God to use his life in great ways.

Jesus now informed the Twelve for the first time about what must take place in order for the Son of Man to fulfill the scriptures. He spoke to them concerning his impending rejection, death, and resurrection. Jesus spoke in third person and made reference to himself as the Son of Man. We understand from the scriptures that the Son of Man and the Messiah (or Christ) are one and the same (ref. [Daniel 7:13-14](#)). However, the disciples seemed confused whenever Jesus used this manner of speech. When he referred to himself as the Son of Man, they seemed at a loss as to the true implications of his words.

In defense of the apostles, the prophecy in Daniel seems to portray a conquering Messiah, one who would wield more power than any earthly king or army. The Jews had thus concluded that the coming Son of Man was supposed to bring forth a conqueror, a champion, and one who would reign supreme over all the nations. If what Jesus had just explained to the Twelve was soon to happen – that he would remain meek and allow himself to be rejected and killed – this certainly did not conform to their image of the omnipotent successor to the throne of David. Nor did this agree with their expectations of the coming Son of Man or the establishment of an everlasting kingdom for God’s people. The Jews most likely did not associate their expected Messiah with the suffering servant in [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#). Certainly, a resurrected Messiah sitting upon the throne of God in heaven was something that neither the Jews nor the Twelve were anticipating.

A careful reading of the aforementioned prophecy in Daniel seems to clearly indicate that the Son of Man would ascend to his position of dominion within the heavenly realms. No reference to an earthly throne is given. Instead, Daniel’s vision seems to imply that the Son of Man would be given all power, authority, and glory upon being led into the presence of the Almighty God, the Ancient of Days.

Daniel 7:13-14

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus finally revealed to the disciples his ultimate destiny: rejection, suffering, and self-sacrifice. He would not rally the support of the Jewish leadership but would instead be condemned by them. He was not going to overthrow the Romans or establish a physical kingdom on earth. He would not provide conquest for his followers or prosperity for all those under him. In all likelihood, those who surrounded Jesus (including the Twelve) were waiting for the scepter of world domination to be placed in the hands of the Branch of David, as written in the prophets. Surely then there would be an everlasting era of prosperity on earth, no more suffering or second-class citizenship for the Jews.

Jeremiah 23:5

*"The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.*

Jesus all but dashed the widespread hopes of the Twelve and even the Jewish populace as news of this prediction began to spread. Again, this was the first anyone had heard about his suffering or his death. The disciples had a difficult time accepting this teaching. It seemed as if Jesus was conceding defeat in the midst of a most successful campaign; he was surrendering while his momentum grew stronger.

It was here that Peter (as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark) took Jesus aside and began to sharply contest him. Peter had surely concluded that his Teacher was throwing in the towel to quickly. How could Peter not be reminded of the many miracles he had already witnessed from this man? The wind and the waves had subsided as his command. A legion of demons groveled helplessly before him. Two children had been raised from the dead and given back to their families alive and fully restored. A crowd of ten thousand was fed from the rations of one boy. Could not this man who exercised such dominion over the spiritual and natural realms keep himself from falling into the hands of a few people who sought to kill him? Wasn't victory a sure bet at this point? Only if Jesus willingly laid down and allowed himself to be conquered was defeat even a possibility.

Although Peter's consistent zeal won him a spot of favor with Jesus, his lack of understanding now earned him one of the most famous rebukes in history. Jesus recognized in Peter the voice of Satan tempting him to bypass the crown of thorns and accept the crown of world dominion. What Peter and the other disciples could not possibly comprehend at this time was that Jesus' suffering and death would not amount to a defeat. On the contrary, it was only through his death on the cross and his resurrection that victory over death would be possible for mankind. Satan was trying once more to offer Jesus a compromise. It may have been difficult for Jesus to even enjoy the current success of his ministry knowing the betrayal, rejection, embarrassment, and torture that loomed on the horizon. However, the resurrection that followed would forever be known as the

greatest victory since time began and would spell out the greatest defeat for Satan and all of his agents of evil in the spiritual realms.

Isaiah 53:11-12

John 16:33

1 Cor. 15:54-57

Hebrews 12:2

1 John 5:3-5

Carry the Cross

Luke 9:23-27

After Jesus spoke of his own death and willingness to suffer, he then turned the spotlight on all those who would come after him and follow his teachings. The disciples were ushered into a new understanding about what it would mean to become like Jesus. Although they currently enjoyed the favor of the people, they were about to witness a turning of the tide focussed against their Lord and his ministry. Those who would come after him would be treated much the same way.

Jesus would not conform to the image most Jews had in their minds regarding their expected Savior-King. Instead, Jesus spoke about and exemplified humility, putting the needs of others above self, turning the other cheek, the meek inheriting the earth, and servant leadership. He possessed the willingness to suffer rejection, physical harm, and even death for his revolutionary convictions. Those who followed him would be called to imitate these qualities. His disciples would have to possess the strength of character to deny their self-serving and self-preserving nature. They would have to exercise self-control to rise above their emotions and feelings and channel their behavior in a manner that was pleasing to God. They must be able to deny their petty urges as they uphold the welfare of others. And many would likewise suffer and die for the cause. Someone who was not willing to completely relinquish his or her will and place the will of God above all else would not be considered as a candidate for discipleship.

Although this seems a high price to pay for accepting the Lordship of Christ, the secret of true inner fulfillment lies just on the other side of a total death to self. The result is a life absorbed with the plan of Jesus and the inner fulfillment that only results from living according to God's will. All the wealth and the pleasures of the world can never bestow the same level of completeness, satisfaction, and security that a life lost in the cause of spreading the Gospel offers. And the eternal reward will be greater still. For the day will come when Jesus shall return to earth to gather his faithful – those who have overcome the world by totally crucifying their love of its pleasures.

John 12:24-26

Philip. 2:3-4

James 3:16-17

1 Peter 2:21-23

Jesus concluded his discourse here by saying something that again left his disciples baffled. He declared that some of the men standing there listening to him would still be alive to see the kingdom of God come to power. Hadn't he just destroyed their hopes that he would be the one to usher in the kingdom? Didn't he just indicate that he would be rejected at the highest level of the Jewish leadership? He had just dismissed a crowd of more than ten thousand supporters after confirming his glory to them. If he had wanted to rally God's people together and lead them in triumphant procession, he just missed the opportunity of

a lifetime. How then would they be able to see the kingdom of God? Perhaps John the Baptist was right when he asked, “Should we expect someone else?”

At this time, the disciples couldn’t possibly foresee or understand what Jesus was speaking about. Jesus was pointing to a time following his resurrection where the apostles (minus Judas) would witness and participate in the establishment of his church, the body of Christ on earth ([Acts 2:1-47](#)). The church of Christ would serve as the kingdom of God on earth from that time on until Jesus’ return. It was not the earthly kingdom that many Jews were expecting. However, the institution of the church fulfilled the prophecies concerning the coming of the kingdom of God. Even the Gentiles would be welcomed into this kingdom if they received the Gospel and were baptized into the church ([1 Cor. 12:12-13](#)). It was to be a spiritual kingdom possessed by all those who shared in the Holy Spirit through the rebirth of the water and the Spirit. We shall discuss the coming of the kingdom more in the notes for [Luke 17:20-21](#).

[John 3:5-7](#)

[Luke 17:20-21](#)

[Acts 2:38-42](#)

[Acts 8:12](#)

[Col. 1:12-14](#)



The Transfiguration

Luke 9:28-36

Peter, James, and John were chosen to attend Jesus as he headed up a mountain to pray. Their journey probably started in Caesarea Philippi and ended at Mount Hermon, about 12 miles to the north at a bit more than 9,000 feet elevation at the summit. At a reasonable pace this would have constituted a good six to eight hours of walking and hiking. For the three apostles, their journey was exhausting. They left the praying to Jesus as they settled down for some rest. They would be awakened to a glimpse of their Lord transformed into what was to be his future glory. It would appear that Jesus had been transformed into a person very similar if not the same as the one John described in the first chapter of Revelation, penned some sixty years later. John would see Jesus “*dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace.*” ([Rev. 1:13b-15a](#)).

The presence of Moses and Elijah could certainly be taken to represent the fulfillment of the Law and the prophet was now present in this Jesus. It also confirmed that one greater than Moses and Elijah had come to earth. They spoke of Jesus’ departure, which was nearing. Peter’s reference to the building of shelters might be a reference to the Feast of Tabernacles, a tradition that is sometimes associated with the coming of the kingdom. However, his intention may have been to detain these two powerful men in hopes that the kingdom of

God might be restored to Israel upon their return. Imagine the Jews and their leadership body being able to witness a public endorsement of Jesus' ministry by Moses and Elijah! This would unquestionably secure his sovereignty as King of the Jews for all time.

Whatever Peter was thinking, his words came out embarrassingly misguided. He would later explain to the others that in truth he spoke without knowing quite what to say. A cloud then engulfed them (perhaps just Jesus, Moses, and Elijah) and again a voice from heaven resounded with approval for Jesus, the Son of God. Without a doubt, Jesus was the Anointed One of God. He was indeed the fulfillment of the ages, unquestionably the conqueror described in [Daniel 7:13-14](#). And these three men were able to witness his glory, a glimpse of the Son of Man in his triumphant form.

But when the cloud was lifted only Jesus of Nazareth remained. He had been given a brief reminder of the joy that lay before him. He longed to sit with God again and return to his heavenly glory. But for now he was to endure the shame and suffering assigned him.

Hebrews 12:2

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

[Hebrews 1:1-5](#)

[Hebrews 2:17-18](#)

[Hebrews 3:3-6](#)



Back to Earth

Luke 9:37-45

After a rejuvenating time with Moses and Elijah, Jesus and his inner circle of three disciples spent the night on Mount Hermon. We are not told as to whether they brought with them provisions of food or blankets. Jesus would soon caution his followers, "*the Son of Man has no place to rest his head*" ([Luke 9:58](#)). This claim would ring true throughout his ministry.

The next morning they descended from the mountain and rejoined the rest of his disciples. Jesus seemed to go through a brief but trying re-entry process into a world where even his own disciple's faith remained weak and ineffective. What a joy it had just been for the Lord to be with men who truly understood the glory and the importance of this hour, men who recognized the time in which God had become a man and made his dwelling on earth. This brief period of history known as the Messianic Age ranked far above any other era that already transpired and would surpass all others to come. Moses and Elijah understood the need for Jesus' upcoming betrayal and suffering. They knew that the scriptures

spoke of his future glory. They foresaw the resurrection of Christ and knew that this testament would be preached to all nations. Nevertheless, Moses and Elijah had returned to the spiritual realms while Jesus remained in the flesh. The people who surrounded him now remained ignorant to the plan of God and they struggled to believe that Jesus was the Christ.

As usual, the crowd was amazed and praised God when they beheld Jesus' great power to heal and help the people. Jesus often took advantage of these awe filled crowds and would proceed directly into a parable or lesson that would address their spiritual needs. This time, however, Jesus makes it clear to his disciples that they would soon witness a widespread rejection of his ministry.

During the murmur of the crowds, Jesus declared to his disciples that the Son of Man was soon to be betrayed. Again, they were unable to discern precisely what he meant or to whom he was referring. Perhaps it was Jesus' use of the third person when he talked about the Son of Man. It may be clear to us that he was speaking of himself but it must have been confusing for his disciples when he referenced himself in this way. Still, the disciples must have sensed the resolve and the seriousness in Jesus' voice, because they did not feel confident enough to approach him for an explanation as they usually did when they lacked understanding.

We must also wonder how this whole episode affected the relationships between Jesus' designated twelve. Peter, James, and John had just seen and heard undeniable proof that Jesus was God's chosen son. They witnessed his future glory. They beheld the endorsement of his ministry by Israel's greatest leader and her greatest prophet, yet they were commanded by the Lord not to disclose this experience with the others at that time. Meanwhile, the other nine apostles were just challenged by Jesus on their lack of faith as they failed to heal a sick boy, a task that they had already been given the authority to accomplish. It seems as if this type of distinction among Jesus' followers forced them to deal with their pride, their insecurities, and their desire to appear competent in the eyes of Jesus and the others. Wanting to justify themselves and save face, an argument would soon break out among the Twelve as to who was the greatest. Perhaps they didn't use those exact words – "I am the greatest because..." But to God, their attempts to rationalize their failures and defend their worthiness were simply unacceptable. We will discuss these shortcomings in the next segment.



The Apostles' Hall of Shame

Luke 9:46-56

Luke chose to highlight a number of inadequacies from Jesus' chosen twelve in this ninth chapter of his gospel. He already described their collective failure to demonstrate compassion and a heart for the crowds who had made a substantial pilgrimage to Bethsaida. They wanted to send them away, but instead Jesus drew them in and fed them. It was near this time that Peter was given the rebuke of his life, as Jesus compared his line of thinking with that of Satan's.

Then he fumbled to sound intelligent as he witnessed the Lord transfigured and standing alongside Moses and Elijah. We've just seen some of the apostles fail to heal a boy afflicted with epilepsy, which Jesus had recently given them the authority to do. Their continual failure to understand and trust Jesus as he talked with them about his upcoming betrayal and suffering was trying Jesus' patience. And now Luke added a few more lowlights in these verses.

Jesus caught the apostles arguing about which of them was the greatest and proceeded to correct their entire mindset. Then, some of the apostles had tried to stop someone who was apparently successful in driving out demons by the authority of the name of Jesus. The Lord corrected them again. Finally, after the Samaritan village rejected Jesus' intention to pass through on his way to Jerusalem, the two "Sons of Thunder" asked his permission to destroy the entire region of Samaria by catastrophic means not seen since Sodom and Gomorrah. They too got rebuked. Jesus' earthly ministry was now coming to a close, yet his closest followers were still so far from understanding the true heart and purpose behind his life and his upcoming death. Fortunately for the apostles, a good portion of their training remained. In fact, the time eventually came when Jesus supernaturally opened their minds to grant them some much needed understanding ([Luke 24:45](#)).

What a patient and merciful God we serve in Jesus. We are remarkably ignorant to the number of weaknesses God has had to overlook by grafting us into his eternal kingdom. How much greater is his forbearance displayed as he gives us responsibilities and authority within it. Even the best of us is at times a hopeless mess. We repeatedly fall short of grasping the eternal because we are blinded by the external. We worry about where we rank in the group rather than evaluating how much we serve the group. We pray for God to crush our enemies rather than praying for God to have mercy on them. We delight in airing our own opinions but remain amazingly deficient in our ability to listen to the convictions of others. We care about other people's opinion of us so much that we are unable to discern God's perspective and we become filled with insecurity. And to top it all off, we wonder why we have not been raised up and used by God to the degree that we believe we are qualified. Praise God for his unlimited patience and mercy!

Perhaps Paul even more so than the original twelve apostles truly understood the extent of God's grace on those of us who have been called to follow Jesus. His appreciation for God's patience with him and his modest view of himself is continually revealed in his letters. The following excerpts from Paul's writings show the proper balance between keeping our pride in check while maintaining a healthy desire to do great things for God.

[Romans 12:3](#)

[1 Cor. 1:26-31](#)

[2 Cor. 12:9-10](#)

[1 Tim. 1:12-16](#)



***SPECIAL NOTE:** Beginning in **Luke 9:51** and continuing until **Luke 19:27**, Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem for his final Passover celebration that shall culminate with his crucifixion. A majority of this section is comprised of material that is unique to the Gospel of Luke. During this journey, we shall see a sweeping rejection of Jesus' ministry by many Jews and the top religious leaders. We shall also see a great deal of teaching regarding the open invitation to the kingdom of God and the spiritual requirements for entering. Again, we would expect to find such instruction in Luke's Gospel. He was demonstrating to his own people that through faith and obedience to Jesus, the Gentiles were able to fulfill these conditions and enter into the new covenant of God.*



Total Commitment

Luke 9:57-62

Luke grouped together scenes of Jesus confronting some would-be disciples who had already placed some conditions on their decision to follow him. A good portion of Luke's Gospel was written to attract its readers to Jesus. We read many examples of Jesus' love for the lost world, his tremendous mercy on penitent sinners, his miraculous powers, and his patience with his followers. And yet we must never forget the cost of following Christ: *total commitment*. This passage serves as a warning to us all, lest we receive God's mercy in vain.

The call to follow Christ was and still is completely radical. It went against the religious and cultural norms in the first century, and in view of the watered down level of commitment that is so widely preached today, true Biblical discipleship is still branded as overboard and even cultic. According to Jesus, the message of the kingdom comes second to nothing in our lives. We do not find time for our service to Christ only when it is convenient. Rather, our entire lives – our family, our career, our money, our time, and our very self – should revolve around Christ and his kingdom. We are called to be sold out to the teachings of Jesus and to dedicate ourselves to the task of proclaiming the message of the Gospel. This is not just an ideal way to live or a good goal to strive for some far-off day. This is the biblical standard of following Jesus and living as his disciple.

The three men here in **vs. 57-62** (whose names we will never know) lacked the heart of surrender to the total-commitment lifestyle expected by Jesus. Whether or not their circumstances were valid, their attitude towards discipleship was seriously deficient. To them, following Jesus was something that they wanted to add to their lives without consuming their lives. Their perspective was very similar to many so-called Christians today who want to save themselves without losing self. Multitudes readily lay claim to the name "Christian", yet they systematically pardon themselves from a wholehearted effort to obey Jesus' commands. They have struck a bargain with God, not an

unconditional surrender. They desperately call on Jesus to be their Savior, but are burdened with the concept of making him their Lord. Believing that Jesus has accepted their compromised version of fellowship, they continue in their self-deceit. All the while, the word of God stands in judgement against them. At least these three men in Luke's Gospel had the benefit of knowing that Jesus would not accept their excuses for not being totally committed. How shocking it will be for those who have lived their lives in ignorance, feeling justified by their excuses and convinced that God has consented to their unbiblical compromise.

Luke 13:23-25

Matthew 7:21-23

Hebrews 4:11



Go!

Luke 10:1-12

Jesus now sent seventy-two (or seventy in some manuscripts) disciples ahead of him to the towns that he would pass through en-route to Jerusalem. It is possible and has been suggested that the six pairs of apostles each had a discipleship group consisting of twelve men under their charge, thus the seventy-two. The instructions and the authority given the seventy-two are very similar if not identical to those given the Twelve as they were sent out in the previous chapter. Luke was the only gospel to record this second and larger commission. It is not clear whether or not the apostles were again sent out to preach with the seventy-two or whether Jesus used this opportunity to perhaps spend some time alone with them. Either way, the message of the kingdom was being proclaimed throughout the land like never before. Although Jesus' ministry had been astonishing from its onset, it seemed to crescendo as the time drew near for his crucifixion. More and more ears were hearing the good news and witnessing the power of God working through more and more disciples.

Jesus emphasized the sheer numbers of people that were willing to respond to his message. However, they remained largely untouched due to the lack of workers in the harvest field. He instructed the disciples to ask God for more workers and then immediately retorted the obvious reply to such a supplication. Surrounding Jesus were men who had witnessed his powers and have signed on to his message. Yet these believers had yet to become workers. Indeed, these eager students would now put their faith to the test and become the teachers. Jesus instantly transformed seventy-two believers into seventy-two workers of the harvest field. He just multiplied the workforce just six-fold.

Jesus revolutionized the lives of these seventy-two disciples with one simple command, "GO!" Likewise, ordinary men and women throughout history have had their entire lives turn upside down with this simple and profound requirement of God: the command to GO!

Genesis 7:1	Jeremiah 1:7
Genesis 12:1	Ezekiel 3:11
Genesis 22:2	Jonah 1:2
Exodus 3:10	Matthew 28:19
Judges 6:14	Acts 8:29
1 Kings 18:1	Acts 9:15
Isaiah 6:8-9	Acts 22:21



The Day of Judgment

Luke 10:13-16

Jesus now began to feel the sting of rejection from the towns where his ministry was birthed and where he had invested so much of his time, his power, and his heart. Capernaum and Bethsaida were towns on the northern shore of Galilee where most of the twelve apostles grew up. Jesus himself adopted Capernaum as his home away from Nazareth. Korazin was just north of these two towns and Jesus had certainly healed and taught hundreds from there as well.

How had the people of these towns rejected Jesus? They did not attempt to throw him over a cliff as the people of Nazareth had done. They were not plotting his arrest like the Pharisees. No, their rejection of Jesus was much more subtle yet rendered a judgment all the more dreadful. On the whole, the people of Galilee had remained unwilling to leave everything and go after Jesus. They marveled at his power and wisdom, but they refused to make the radical commitment to follow him. As Jesus embarked for his final visit to Jerusalem, the number of faithful disciples seems only to include the recent seventy-two, the Twelve, a group of committed women, and perhaps a handful of others. This was a flock of just over a hundred truly reliable followers, whereas several thousand from those three towns alone bore witness to the Messiah. It was their neutrality, their half-heartedness, and their refusal to step out on faith and totally commit themselves to Jesus that would forever serve as their rejection of God's Son.

Should we expect anything less for the millions of people alive today who claim to believe in Jesus and his resurrection yet remain uncommitted, uncaring, unfaithful, unrepentant, and unwilling to sacrifice in any way to advance the cause of Christ? Will their meager effort and sporadic obedience secure them favor from a God who completely humbled himself and gave up everything for them? This indecisive type of rejection – the stubborn refusal to completely surrender to God's radical plan and the selfish disregard of many of God's commands – will carry a more severe judgment than the blatant sins of the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon.

For the first time in the gospel of Luke, Jesus referred to a time of judgment that lies somewhere in the future. The judgment spoken about by Jesus and by the New Testament writers was dissimilar in some ways from the type of judgment that the prophets spoke about and displayed by God in Old

Testament times. Often the prophets of old would announce a judgment on nations and/or individuals followed by God's imminent plan to execute that judgment against them. Judgment came in the form of wars, famine, sieges, or a visible punishment of some kind. This swift execution of judgment and demonstrations of God's wrath were commonplace in the Old Testament. Yet, Jesus and the New Testament writers began to talk about a specific "Day of Judgment" (a phrase found only in the NT) where the people of earth will stand before the throne of God and account for their lives. This Day of Judgment theme may have its roots in the Old Testament, but was revealed much more extensively and frequently in the New. Rather than a visible demonstration of wrath against the sin of the world, this judgment now finds God storing up wrath for an appointed time. Often, God's judgment on a nation was revealed prior to its execution leaving room for repentance, as was the case with the great city of Nineveh. However, the verdict given on this coming Day of Judgment shall be a final and eternal pronouncement. On that day, there will not be a second chance for those who have rejected God during their lifetime. Many will survive their entire lives without receiving just punishment for their wickedness. But no one will escape this final Day of Judgment.

God's swift execution of judgment – Old Testament

Exodus 12:12
2 Chron. 20:9
Ezekiel 11:10
Ezekiel 38:22
Jeremiah 25:31

The coming Day of Judgment – Old Testament roots

Eccles. 3:17
Eccles. 12:14
Daniel 12:1-2

The coming Day of Judgment – New Testament

Romans 2:5-8 **2 Peter 3:7**
2 Cor. 5:10 **1 John 4:17**
Hebrews 9:27-28 **Jude 1:6**



Written in Heaven

Luke 10:17-24

The seventy-two returned from their brief campaign with great zeal and excitement at the wonders they had performed by the authority given them. Jesus redirected this joy to what must become their true source of security and satisfaction. True, they had carried out Jesus' orders and had experienced some degree of success. But as Jesus explained, their overall joy must stem

from the knowledge that they would be in heaven for eternity. Jesus knew that their momentary victories or failures did not depend on themselves alone; it rested above all on the power and authority given them by Christ. Thus, their security should not be dependant on their success or failure either. We can be quite sure that Jesus would have been equally pleased with them whether their message was accepted or rejected – whether their mission was a triumph or a disappointment. In fact, he cautioned them to be prepared for either outcome before they were even sent out.

This is an excellent reminder for disciples today. As we set about accomplishing the will of God in our lives, are we basing our entire spiritual security on our momentary success or failure that we experience? Does our joy depend on whether or not we achieve the daily or weekly spiritual goals set before us? Setting out spiritual goals and new challenges can be an effective way to increase our faith and our dependence on God. However, they can also be destructive if our security with God is not rooted much deeper than our day to day performance. Goals can also be deceiving if our source of joy is so shallow as to rise and fall based on our victories and what we perceive to be our defeats. Let us remember to leave room for God to move, either through a blessing or through valuable discipline.

Why does it surprise us when we see disciples in the fellowship who seem to be so effective, confident, and fired up for God and then are suddenly discouraged and on the verge of shipwrecking their faith? Perhaps they were riding high on the wave of God's blessing but failed to anchor themselves deep enough in God's love and his eternal Word to withstand a time of testing. Surely we must strive to be our best for God and his church and embrace the radical call to follow Christ with all of our hearts. But let our joy and our zeal remain grounded in the eternal and spiritual things of God rather than the temporary things of this earth.

For the seventy-two, this was their first opportunity to be used by God to achieve a victory within the spiritual realms. Although Jesus has seen far greater victories (including Satan being cast out of the heavens), the almost child-like excitement and wonderment of the seventy-two warmed his heart. In the midst of what would be his final and most difficult days on earth, Jesus was for a moment filled with the fullest measure of joy – a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Jesus praised God for those whose hearts had been touched and transformed by the good news. He also pulled aside his closest disciples and shared this moment with them. What a glorious hour had now come to the earth – greater than all the previous generations in history had witnessed.

Jesus reminded his disciples how blessed they were to see this hour – the appearing of the Messiah, God in the flesh. All the great men in history whose lives and words pointed to this hour had been kept from seeing it. Yet this assorted group of fishermen, tax collectors, ex-prostitutes, and common townsfolk were blessed enough to witness history being made. Furthermore, they were chosen by God play a valuable part in this most critical hour.

Where is our joy rooted?

[Psalm 51:12](#)
[Psalm 126:3-6](#)
[Proverbs 14:13](#)
[Luke 8:13](#)

Joy in the midst of trouble and persecution

[Acts 13:51-52](#)
[2 Cor. 7:4](#)
[2 Cor. 8:2](#)
[Hebrews 12:2](#)
[James 1:2](#)



The Good Samaritan

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

Jesus consistently displayed a keen sense of wisdom mixed with shrewdness when answering loaded questions – questions in which the motives of those who posed them were tainted. He would often reply with a question or series of questions to draw out their true intentions. Or sometimes he would answer a direct question with a parable or a relevant teaching, giving a broader reply while maintaining a grand sense of poise and mastery over the situation. This tactic of discourse often left those attempting to entrap and discredit Jesus baffled and frustrated. When asked by an expert in the Mosaic Law about eternal life, Jesus prompted the man to answer his own question. Although his response was harmonious with Jesus' own teachings about the greatest commandments, the lawman continued to hunt for an answer that would justify himself and ended up with a major weakness revealed.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (recorded only in Luke) is one of the most famous and recognizable parables in all of the Gospels. The story pinpointed the lack of compassion displayed by both the priests (descendants of Aaron) and the Levites. At the same time, Jesus rebuked the general prejudice of the Jewish people towards their distant cousin – the half-breed Samaritans. The parable simply reinforced what Jesus dubbed as the second greatest commandment – to love your neighbor as yourself. A neighbor according to this parable was simply a fellow man or woman in need. Race, culture, and traditional differences would no longer separate people from one another in the love of God in Christ. By this definition, even those who might otherwise be considered an enemy are deserving of our love and our compassion.

Jesus' impending confrontations with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law shall continue to grow more precise and piercing. Their entire basis of righteousness and justification before God was backwards. Again, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law placed a tremendous weight upon simply not breaking the law. Not breaking the law was the true test of a righteous and pious life while breaking the law was most deplorable and punishable. Jesus lived out and

expected of others a higher standard and defined true righteousness by doing unto others as you would have them do to you.

The sin of omission (not doing the good we ought to do) seems to carry a much stronger judgment in heaven than the sins of commission based on the whole of Jesus' teachings. A tremendous amount of grace was repeatedly given to the most flagrant of all lawbreakers because they displayed more humility towards Jesus, more remorse for their sins, and a greater eagerness to change and do good. Although the Pharisees and teachers of the law kept themselves from the more blatant and defined sins of commission, they continually stumbled over their own self-righteousness. They refused to see how Jesus' method was in fact a higher calling than the legalism in which they held to so tightly.

Romans 13:9-10

Galatians 5:14

James 2:8

1 John 3:16-19



Jesus' Friends

Luke 10:38-42

In the town of Bethany there lived a family that was personally known by Jesus. The scriptures give no concrete reference as to how they had come to know each other. The two sisters were Mary and Martha. They had a brother named Lazarus, whom Jesus would raise from the dead as recorded in John's gospel. This was the same Mary who would break a jar of expensive perfume and anoint Jesus during his final Passover week, symbolizing the preparations for his burial (**John 12:1-3**). It is incorrect to conclude that this Mary was also the same woman from **Luke 7:36-38**, the sinner whose tears fell at Jesus' feet. (In fact, it is also highly speculative to assume that the woman in **Luke 7** was Mary Magdalene, another follower of Christ.) So just where and when did Jesus meet and befriend this group of siblings in Bethany?

The best possibility is that Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were either relatives of Jesus or close family friends and thus knew one another since childhood. It is even feasible that this Mary of Bethany was the physical sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, making both Martha and Lazarus her siblings as well. This would make the connection between the two families quite obvious and the reason for Jesus' familiarity with the location of the house and his ability to stay there is thus explained. See notes corresponding to **Luke 23:50-56** regarding Jesus' burial for more on the possibility of this Mary being the sister of Jesus' mother.

Since Bethany was only a couple miles from Jerusalem, it is reasonable to hypothesize that Mary and Joseph could have stayed here on their yearly journey to celebrate the Passover. It was not uncommon for Jews of the neighboring communities of Jerusalem to welcome other Jewish pilgrims – especially family members – into their homes during the Passover week. Perhaps the parents of

Lazarus (possibly Mary's own parents) welcomed Joseph and Mary along with Jesus and his brothers and sisters ([Mark 6:3](#)) year after year to stay at their house in Bethany during their annual pilgrimage from Nazareth. Even as they all reached adulthood, Jesus knew he would always be welcomed at the house of his childhood companions. Whether Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were his friends or relatives, Jesus retained a place to sojourn quite far from his own hometown of Nazareth and his adopted home in the region of Galilee.

John recorded two trips taken by Jesus and the disciples to Bethany near the end of his ministry. The first visit was four days after Lazarus' death. Once Jesus comforted the two sisters, he performed arguably the most incredible miracle of his ministry as he raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. The second stay occurred within the week leading up to his final Passover, which would be the time of his crucifixion. It is unclear whether this conversation with Martha in [Luke 10:41-42](#) occurred during one of these two visits, or even whether this story of the two sisters even belongs here in Luke chronologically. Either way, the point of this story is obvious: time spent listening and learning from Jesus the great Teacher is invaluable.

Readers of all four Gospels must understand that the task of documenting the events of Jesus' life was accomplished to fulfill a much greater purpose than simply preserving a sequential biography of a great historical figure. Instead, the gospel writers were attempting to motivate their readers to acknowledge that Jesus was and is the true Messiah. They assembled a collection of narratives from his life, his ministry, his miracles, and his teachings to achieve these ends. Thus, the importance of chronology in the Gospels was trivial compared to the enormous assignment facing the disciples of the first century as they strove to fulfill the Great Commission.

[John 20:30-31](#)

[Romans 10:14-17](#)

[1 Thess. 2:13](#)



The Lord's Prayer

Luke 11:1-4

Prayer is so vital to the life of a disciple that John the Baptist had made sure to instruct his followers the proper way to commune with God. John himself must have had a powerful prayer life that was worthy of imitation. The close followers of Jesus had also grown accustomed to seeing their Lord withdraw by himself on a regular basis to spend time with God. Now one of the disciples, presumably one that had not been a part of John's ministry, asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Luke captures the essence of discipleship in three words when he writes, "Lord, teach us..." Oddly enough, this request occurs only once in all four Gospels combined. What follows is a fantastic study from Jesus' school of prayer.

The Lord's Prayer (as it has been dubbed) is still read or repeated verbatim in many churches. As we look closely at the prayer life of Jesus, we can quickly discount this intention for [Luke 11:2-4](#). Jesus' prayer life was private, personal, and powerful. The Bible records him engaged in prayers lasting from one hour to one whole night. Thus, it is safe to assume that these phrases from the Lord compose only a framework or outline to follow in our prayer time before God. You will discover how to have an effective and moving prayer life using the Lord's Prayer to guide and structure your time with God as you pour out your soul before heaven with heartfelt supplication.

I have composed a mock-outline using the phrases of Jesus in the Lord's Prayer to indicate the kind of communion that is possible with God if we put forth the time and effort to walk closely before him. I have included several suggestions to add some flesh and blood to the skeleton provided in [Luke 11:2-4](#). Feel free to fill in the blanks as your situation dictates. We must do whatever it takes to draw near to God. A vibrant prayer life is a critical ingredient as we strive to be full of the Spirit and remain faithful disciples to Jesus and humble servants of God.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

I. Father

- A. God has created (fathered) every man and woman alive.
- B. Come to God as a son or daughter coming before their heavenly Father.
- C. Recount aloud the qualities of the ideal Father: loving, caring, protective, provider, guidance, etc.

II. Hallowed by your name

- A. Spend some time in praise and adoration towards God.
- B. Sing songs aloud to God by yourself or with a prayer partner or two.
- C. Read aloud from the Psalms that describe the awesome nature of God.
- D. Recount aloud the qualities of God: creative, merciful, powerful, holy, etc.

III. Your kingdom come, your will be done

- A. Pray for God's will to be accomplished on earth.
- B. Pray for the kingdom of God, his church throughout the world.
- C. Pray for the church to remain united, focussed, spiritual, pure, and fruitful.
- D. Pray for specific churches and countries that are on your heart.
- E. Pray for the Spirit to guide the church and its leaders as they make decisions.

IV. Give us each day our daily bread

- A. Prayer and nourishment from God's word are daily necessities, like food.
- B. Prayer should precede the events of the day, i.e. pray first thing in the morning if possible.
- C. Pray name by name through your ministry, through the daily needs and situations of others close to you
- D. Pray through your upcoming day/week and your own personal needs.

- E. Be surrendered that God does know your true physical, emotional, and spiritual needs and that in time he is working all things for the good of those who love him (**Romans 8:28**).
- F. Remember always to thank God for the way he has met your needs and will continue to do so. Remember that in fact we already have everything we need (**2 Peter 1:3-4**). Recount aloud your thanksgiving, being specific about the ways that you have seen God move.

V. Forgive us our sins

- A. Recount aloud your most vulnerable, embarrassing, and even stupid sins before God; and don't be afraid to be brutally honest and specific.
- B. Ask God for forgiveness.
- C. Remember with gratitude and recount the sacrifice of atonement for our sins that was offered by God himself – Jesus' blood, which was shed for all of us.

VI. For we also forgive everyone who has sinned against us

- A. After recounting your own failings, extend mercy and forgiveness towards others who have either intentionally or unintentionally sinned against you.
- B. Be real with God about any attitudes, bitterness, and/or hurt that the sins of others have caused you.
- C. Remember **Matthew 18:15**. If it is necessary, make a decision to confront the person who has sinned against you in love and attempt to resolve the matter before Satan gets a foothold in the church (**Ephes. 4:26-27**)
- D. If the sin against you was done by someone other than a disciple (perhaps a family member or close friend or other) and is a major situation, seek advice from a Christian counselor, an elder, or a trusted leader in the body of Christ regarding how to resolve the matter. Remember that Satan wants to destroy you and those around you by any means. At the same time, Jesus has come to give you life to the full. Remembering and repairing the damage done in the past will not be easy but may in the end help you to experience and understand more deeply God's love for you.

VII. And lead us not into temptation

- A. Do not only pray about sin after the fact. God can help us win the battle against sin before we arrive on the verge of foolish situations.
- B. **James 1:13-15** describes the path that results in sin: Temptation leads to enticement, enticement then leads us to a desire to sin, and that desire finally leads to sin, and sin eventually leads to death. Thus, the battle is most often won or lost at the first stage – temptation. This is precisely where Jesus took his stand and defeated sin and Satan altogether – **Luke 4:1-13**.
- C. Be open with God about your temptations and be honest about your frequent or occasional desires to sin.
- D. Pray for God to protect you and keep you from situations that you know are a source of temptation and sin. Then do your part during the day to avoid those tempting circumstances and always look for the way out that God will faithfully provide so that you do not sin (**1 Cor. 10:12-13**).

VIII. Amen

- A. Whatever else is on your heart, pour it out before God.
- B. As you conclude your prayer, remember that it is Christ himself who mediates between God and man (**1 Timothy 2:5**). Jesus is the one who intercedes for us and has given us the authority to come before God in prayer (**Hebrews 7:24-25, John 16:23-24**). Thus, a proper conclusion to our prayer may sound something like this, *“Father, I offer up this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”*
- C. Amen, so be it. It is good and right to share your heart with God, but remember that God is still God and we are still his servants. Whether or not we see an immediate and miraculous response to our prayers does not mean that God has not heard our supplication or is reluctant to answer our prayers. Rather, God knows our every need will surely move in our lives as he sees fit, keeping in mind the desires of our heart. Even through challenging times when we feel distant from him, we must strive to pray faithfully and consistently. When we say ‘Amen’, we surrender our will to God and allow him to unfold his will before us.



A Friend or a Son?

Luke 11:5-13

After Jesus taught his disciples what to say when they pray, he went on to describe to them the nature of an ideal relationship with God. Jesus contrasted a relationship between two friends (or neighbors) and a relationship between a father and his son. In the first relationship, Jesus tells of a man making an appeal to his neighbor in an urgent situation. The friend has settled down to sleep in his own home and his primary concern is for himself and his family. He is bothered by his neighbor’s coming and is hesitant to grant him his request. But since he persists and his request was urgent, the friend reluctantly rises to satisfy his neighbor’s plea. The second relationship in this passage describes a son coming to his father to ask for food. The contrast is obvious, as any loving father lives to provide for his children and would never give them anything that would harm them. In fact, a father naturally places the needs and well being of his family above his own wants. It is not an inconvenience for a father to give food and gifts to his children; it is his joy.

Our understanding of God is crucial as we pray because it determines whether we are truly confident and able to open up our hearts before him. We should not feel like a distant friend approaching a preoccupied God who doesn’t have the time or the interest for our petty problems. We are not bothering or inconveniencing him with our coming. God does not sleep that we might disturb him. He is not engrossed with other things so that he is reluctant to hear and grant our plea. God is not like the neighbor resting behind a locked door – only willing to move if we are persistent enough in our asking and knocking.

The question is then, are we like the aloof friend who comes before God only when an urgent need arises? So many people refuse to invest themselves in

a daily relationship with God. However, they are quick to run to him in a time of emergency. A friend of mine once said, “There are many more earnest prayers lifted up before God in hospitals than in churches”. This is true and shouldn’t surprise us. Most people treat God like a casual friend or neighbor – assuming that he’ll always be there if and when they truly need him. They remain distant from God on a day-to-day basis because they have learned to trust and rely only on themselves. They fail to see how fragile their life is and how much they need a relationship with God. Like the Prodigal Son of **Luke 15**, they have placed God the Father in the back of their minds, only to conjure up his name once a crisis comes along that is out of their control. Let’s hope they “come to their senses” as the wayward son did and restore their relationship with God before it is too late.

In fact, the first thing that Jesus expressed to his disciples regarding prayer is that we are like sons and daughters drawing near to our Father in heaven. We should not only come to him in times of urgency, but we should constantly ask, knock, and seek after God to fulfill our daily needs. We must not think that God is reluctant to give to us. Rather, he is eager to provide for his children who walk before him in obedience. But like a father with his children, he also loves us too much to give us anything that might hurt us or come back to bite us. What father would willingly hand their son a loaded gun to play with if he is too young to comprehend its lethal power? Will he give in eventually if the boy persists in asking? The son can ask until he’s blue in the face but the answer is still ‘no’. In the same way, God loves his children too much to grant a request that will be harmful to them spiritually – no matter how earnest their petition. God cares for us too much to answer some of our prayers, even if we are convinced that our request is genuine.

As disciples, the gifts we should be asking for from God involve the blessings of the spiritual nature. Those are the requests that our Father in heaven is more than willing to bestow upon us. God is much more desirous in giving the fruits of the Spirit instead of supplying us with all the ‘things’ and the ‘stuff’ that so often fill up our prayers. He loves it when his sons and daughters offer up prayer requests that lead to spiritual growth and the building of godly character. We can easily live without most of the things we ask God for, but we cannot live as faithful disciples without the Spirit present in our lives. God is more than willing to pour out the Spirit into our hearts if we would only ask him.

2 Cor. 6:18

Galatians 4:5-7

Paul’s example of praying for the spiritual blessings

Ephes. 1:16-18

Col. 1:9-12

Ephes. 3:14-19

Col. 4:2-4

Philip. 1:9-11

2 Thes. 1:11-12



The Power to Heal

Luke 11:14-20

Luke has just taken us through Jesus' teachings on prayer and on our relationship with God. Next, we are given some vital insight regarding Satan and the spiritual forces of evil. Satan and his demonic realm are the enemy of every facet of God's creation. They make war against every disciple of Jesus and against the church as a whole. Satan is fueled by his hatred towards God and he desires to lead the whole world astray. He cannot be disregarded or assumed to be just a legend or a mythical figure. He is recognized and addressed in scripture by God and by Jesus. Satan, or the Devil, is a biblical character just as real as the archangels Michael and Gabriel and mentioned far more often.

Jesus began to teach about the kingdom of darkness following the healing of a mute and the ensuing reaction from certain skeptics in the crowd. Jesus again demonstrated masterful perception and wisdom in dismissing the criticism that dwelt within the hearts of some of the onlookers. They speculated that perhaps Jesus' authority over the demonic realm was given him by the Prince of Demons himself. Considering the nature of slander, it is quite possible that these people did not actually believe that Jesus' power was actually given him by Satan. They may have simply used this accusation to poison the minds of those in the crowd that were captivated and perplexed by him. Jesus frequently overlooked the ludicrous slander of his opponents. Often, he would not even substantiate their fallacious accusations with a response. This time, however, Jesus brought their spiteful unbelief into the light and he exposed the illogical conclusion upon which they had arrived. Jesus asserted that the people of his day were witnessing the very finger of God working through him to perform these countless miracles.

It is interesting to note that several conditions that carry a common medical diagnosis today are often associated in the Bible either to Satan or the possession of a demon (also unclean spirit and/or evil spirit).

Blindness – **Matthew 12:22**

Epilepsy, seizures – **Matthew 17:15-18, Luke 9:42**

Insanity, depression – **Mark 5:2-5, Luke 8:27**

Muteness – **Luke 11:14**

Crippled – **Luke 13:10-16**

How should we react to the biblical explanation of these conditions? Can we just assume that they didn't know any better in the first century and thus any unknown illness was inappropriately labeled as an evil spirit? As much as our learned 21st century minds would like to, a true believer in the Bible cannot. If we believe that the scriptures are the words of God, then we must also accept that beyond our senses lies a spiritual realm in which the forces of evil battle against the forces of good. We must also accept the notion that the physical world and the spiritual world are allowed to mingle with one another.

One form of these encounters is when an evil spirit is allowed to seize a bodily host from a human or an animal; both of which are mentioned in the Bible. A much easier union for most of us to accept is when God sends his Holy Spirit to

dwell within a disciple who has been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. This is another way in which a spirit enters into a human host. The result of this convergence is incredibly positive as the fruits of the Spirit begin to become evident in a person's life. However, demon-possession is just as real and has extremely detrimental consequences on the physical, mental, and spiritual state of its victim.

Modern medicine usually will not associate spiritual explanations for most if not all injurious conditions. It would be imprudent to assume that each and every case of abnormality within humans is rooted in the spiritual world. In fact, the Bible does not link every illness, disease, or deformity to demon possession or some type of punishment by God. The disciples assumed that the man born blind in [John 9:1-7](#) was somehow suffering the consequences of sin, and thus the problem stemmed from a spiritual source. Jesus quickly rebuffed their line of thinking.

At the same time, we must not be too quick to rule out the possibility that our physical health is in some way connected to our spiritual well-being. In the book of Exodus, God sent disease, boils, and even death to the Egyptian people and their animals because of Pharaoh's hard-hearted refusal to repent. We also see in the book of Job that Satan is sometimes allowed to inflict disease, physical suffering, and even death to individuals. As mentioned before, several phenomena in the New Testament were correctly classified as cases of demon possession, some of which spoke to Jesus before they were cast out of their host. In the first century, Jesus gave a select group of disciples the authority to heal both those who suffered from physical illness and those who suffered because of evil spirits. It is true that modern science and technology have uncovered an incredible amount of useful and trustworthy information regarding physical and emotional conditions. Reliable care is available today that was not available in years past. However, we cannot eliminate the spiritual realm entirely when it comes to a person's physical and emotional state.

With the message of the Gospel, today's disciples possess the key to spiritual freedom from sin and darkness. In some cases, this power to conquer sin can even enable people to overcome their emotional disorders and even physical suffering. Let us not advocate complete irresponsibility as some offshoot Christian sects do by avoiding any professional medical practice, while others are equally careless as they place all their hopes in self-proclaimed faith healers. However, there is a healthy aspect that logically results from living as a true disciple of Jesus. First of all, your body becomes free from harmful debaucheries such as smoking, illegal drug use, heavy drinking, over-eating, laziness, fits of rage, and promiscuous sex. Simply walking with God and living a disciplined and self-controlled life should encourage good health and reduce stress – a condition that is highly detrimental to the mind and body. A profound understanding of the cross has allowed many to discover the power of forgiveness that can repair emotional suffering and even heal wounds left open for years due to tragic events in the past. I am not saying that becoming a Christian is the cure-all, or that our suffering will be altogether eliminated merely by following the Bible. Nevertheless, I do believe that you are

encouraging good physical and mental health if you give sufficient attention to spiritual matters. By purging the evil from your life, adhering to biblical principles, and striving to build up godly character you might just find that your mind and body will function at a much higher rate of efficiency.

Job 5:17-18

Psalm 103:2-3

Psalm 147:3

Isaiah 53:3-5

Proverbs 3:7-8, 4:20-22, 10:27, 12:18, 15:30, 16:24

Hosea 6:1

Matthew 8:16

1 Peter 2:24

3 John 1:2

The Power to Bind

Luke 11:21-22

Jesus continued to unfold the mysteries of the kingdom of darkness. In this parable, the strong man fully armed is Satan. He stands guard over the earth, which is his house. Earth is where Satan was cast when he lost his place in heaven. Filled with fury he now roams about the earth, going back and forth throughout it (**Job 1:7**). His possessions are the souls of men that he has successfully led astray. He waits impatiently for their death that he might imprison them for eternity. For someone to steal back one of the souls that he has seized, he must be stronger than Satan or first lock up his destructive power. Since Satan is more powerful than the men and women of the physical world, the stronger man in this parable – the one who is able to bind Satan – is Jesus. Since the beginning of his ministry until this passage in **Luke 11**, Jesus had been robbing Satan left and right. He had released many souls from the demonic realm and showed no fear whatsoever when confronted by Satan or even a legion of his servants. For those of us engaged in the battle of winning souls to Christ, our victory rests solely on Jesus and his authority in the spiritual world to shackle the power of Satan.

In the Bible we learn that there is a definite pecking order within the spiritual world with regards to the apportioning of power. Satan, along with every entity within the kingdom of darkness, has been given authority on earth to lead people astray, to blaspheme and slander God, to fight against the angels, to inflict death and suffering in the world, and to make war against the saints. Satan has even been given authority to conquer some of the saints. Superior to the kingdom of darkness are the angels of God. They are stronger than the spiritual forces of evil but appear at least in some capacity to be susceptible to sin, apostasy, and the lure of Satan. Above all and over all is God. In any and every form – be it the Father, or Jesus the Son, or the Holy Spirit – God is more powerful than Satan and the entirety of his evil kingdom. Through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, Jesus once and for all disarmed Satan's ultimate weapon – death. Although Satan is able to overpower mankind, Christ has given man the ability to overcome Satan. To this day, the battle rages on.

The authority given to the Devil and the kingdom of darkness:

To fight against the angels

Daniel 10:12-13

Daniel 10:20-11:1

Rev. 12:7-8

To lead the world astray

Matthew 24:11

2 Cor. 11:14

2 Thes. 2:9-10

Rev. 12:9a

Rev. 20:7-8

To blaspheme and slander God

2 Thes. 2:4
2 John 1:7
Rev. 13:5-6

To inflict suffering and death in the world

Job 2:7
Luke 13:16
John 10:10a
Acts 10:38

To make war against the saints, and even to overpower some of them

Matthew 24:9-10 **1 Tim. 5:15**
2 Cor. 2:11 **Rev. 12:17**
2 Cor. 12:7 **Rev. 13:7**
1 Thes. 2:18

The authority given to the angels:

Angels stronger than demons

2 Peter 2:10b-11
Rev. 12:7-8

Angels who have fallen, losing their God-given authority

Rev. 12:8-9
2 Peter 2:4
Jude 1:6

The supreme authority of God in Christ:

Psalm 47:2 **John 17:1-2**
Psalm 103:19 **Romans 9:5**
Isaiah 37:16 **Ephes. 1:19b-21**
Matthew 28:18 **Rev. 5:11-14**
John 3:31

The ability of mankind to overcome the power of Satan through Christ:

Matthew 16:18 **Hebrews 2:14-15**
Romans 8:38-39 **1 John 2:14b**
Romans 16:20 **1 John 5:4-5**
1 Cor. 15:55-57 **Rev. 12:11**
Ephes. 6:11-13 **Rev. 17:14**
2 Thes. 1:6-9

Decision Time

Luke 11:23-28

We've just seen Jesus testify to the crowd that he exercised the authority of the Almighty God (**Luke 11:20**). He then continued to unveil the mysteries of the spiritual world in detail. He concluded this discourse by calling each person to take a stand based on his or her convictions. Everyone had to make a decision whether he or she believed that Jesus truly was of God or not. Those who wished to remain neutral were called to the carpet. As Jesus stated, you were either with him or you were against him. You were either a servant in the kingdom of heaven or you were being used by the kingdom of darkness. Even when a woman in the crowd strayed from the subject by giving him acclamation, Jesus redirected her comment back to his point that each person has a choice to make – to hear and obey the word of God.

Jesus (the Good Shepherd) came to seek and gather up the vast number of lost sheep throughout Israel and eventually the world. At the same time, Satan (the wolf) came to attack and scatter the flock (**John 10:11-12**). Those who are with Christ gathered souls with him. The only other option is to be one who scatters. The call to follow Jesus has gone forth in every generation since his ministry. Even today, each person must face this moment of decision. We either decide to live as true disciples and gather with Jesus, or we are yoked with the one who scatters. The spiritual consequences of this decision are critical, for once we decide to place our faith in Christ we then become engaged in a more powerful struggle for our souls as we defend that stance.

Jesus made it clear that someone who has been physically or spiritually restored is not guaranteed to be forever free from Satan's attacks. Those who overcome the power of sin and darkness through the knowledge of Christ are still susceptible to the devouring appetite of the devil. In fact, Satan is infuriated all the more when someone slips out of his grasp. He then calls upon his demonic allies to mount a stronger attack against those who have broken free from his control. Unless a person continues to stand firm under the Lordship of Jesus they may be swept away by the same transgressions that previously enslaved them. And this time the wound is much more serious, the heart grows much harder, and the spiritual bondage becomes much more severe. Their final condition will be worse – far worse than the state they were in prior to their knowledge of the truth.

Luke 8:13

Luke 21:16-19

Hebrews 3:12-14

Hebrews 6:4-6

1 Peter 5:8-9

2 Peter 2:20-22



The Sign of Jonah

Luke 11:29-32

Jesus seemed to be on the verge of exasperation from dealing with the generation of stiff-necked Jews living in his day. To his sorrow, his own people

did not recognize the appearance of their Messiah. Jesus had performed countless miracles to the amazement of thousands. Still not convinced, they asked for another sign. Jesus revealed that the sign of Jonah would be the confirmation given to this generation. In [Matthew 12:40](#), Jesus related his own death, burial, and resurrection to the three days that Jonah spent in the belly of a giant fish. To be sure, the resurrection of Christ is not a sign just for the generation that witnessed the ministry of Jesus; it remains the single most pivotal event of all time. It separates Christianity from every other religion in existence. What other major religion of the world boasts a Savior who has overcome the power of death? The resurrection proved that only Jesus is able to justify the offer to mankind of everlasting life after death. That is what compels us to accept and follow his teachings.

The current generation of Jews had become dangerously unresponsive to the preaching of God's servant. Jesus even listed examples of Gentiles that revered the word of God more than they did. In times past, groups of Gentiles were allowed to hear the message of the Lord delivered through his various spokesmen. Some responded with greater fear and repentance than those who were called God's people. Even the pagan city of Nineveh humbled itself following the admonishment from Jonah, despite the fact that Jonah spoke in the name of a foreign God that they could not have fully understood.

The Queen of the South (Sheba, or modern Yemen) traveled some 1,200 miles via caravan simply because of the reports she heard regarding the wisdom and the glory that God had granted to King Solomon. She praised the God of Israel after hearing Solomon speak with the vast insight given him. The Queen of Sheba and the King of Nineveh did not have the benefit of knowing the written Law of Moses, nor were they heirs to the covenant promised to Abraham. Still they recognized godly people, they feared God's word, and they repented and gave glory to the one true Jehovah God.

On earth at this time was one greater than Jonah and Solomon. Jesus was making his appeal to a stubborn and unrepentant community – a people who had the advantage of knowing the very prophecies that Jesus continued to fulfill. A few years after the church began, the Good News would be taken to the Gentiles. Like the Ninevites, they would welcome the truth and repent with greater sincerity and frequency than the Jews. How encouraging it must have been for the Gentiles to hear the Gospel of Luke read and to hear that Jesus had lifted up these foreigners as examples of repentance. What a harsh judgment awaits the generation of Jews who heard the spoken words of Jesus and failed to respond with radical humility!

What excuse is there for us today who have such easy access to the inspired word of God in both the Old and New Testaments? We have the full knowledge of the resurrection and the fulfillment of all the prophecies regarding the life of Jesus in their completion. Will God be merciful to us if we refuse to humble ourselves and obey the written Word of God? What will be said of this generation as the kingdom of God advances throughout the world? Will we respond properly to the truth when it comes?

1 Kings 10:1-9
Jonah 3:4-10
Isaiah 65:1-2
Acts 11:18

Acts 13:46-48
Acts 18:5-6
Acts 28:25-28
Hebrews 3:15



A Lamp on a Stand

Luke 11:33-36

Jesus repeatedly used the analogy of a lamp giving off its light and placing it on a stand for everyone to see. It appears in all four Gospels although it seems to suggest several different meanings. Each however revolves around some of the central themes found in Jesus' ministry.

Matthew 5:14-16

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Clearly the message here is that those who follow the teachings of Jesus are like a light to the dark world around them. Living as a believer does not require seclusion from the world. Rather, it calls for us to live our lives as examples to be seen by the world. Our neighbors, our coworkers, our family members, and our friends should readily be able to point to us as someone who strives to live by a higher standard of love, joy, kindness, and sacrifice. Our abundant and pure lifestyle should attract others to Christianity.

Mark 4:21-22

He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? ²²For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.

Luke 8:16-17

"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. ¹⁷For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.

Although these passages may reflect a similar message as the verses just mentioned in Matthew, they also seem to express another specific point. Openness is a concept that is paramount in Christianity. We must not only let our good deeds shine before men but our sins and our weaknesses as well. One of the most attractive aspects of following Christ is the ability to live in the light and the confidence we have to be open with our many shortcomings. The people around us who live in darkness, lies, and secrecy need to see true Christians who boast not in their near perfection, but in their colossal imperfection. The lost world carries a heavy yoke of unconfessed sin that grows heavier all the time. Their fear of the light prevents them from breaking free. When we as believers demonstrate openness and vulnerability regarding our sins – past and present – it casts away that fear and makes the yoke of Christ all the more appealing. They must see in us that the power to overcome sin is available to them through the power of God's grace. When those who live in darkness expose their sins and bring them into the light of the scriptures, they start to grasp how merciful and loving our God is. Their fear of the light subsides and Satan begins to lose his tight grip on their lives.

John 5:35

John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

Jesus held up John the Baptist as an example of a man who lived in this world as a light that drew men to him and also to God. He was effective in leading many to repentance because he spoke with deep conviction and the kind of straightforwardness that the people of Judea needed at that dark hour. Those who came to John opened up their lives and confessed their sins to him. Something in John gave them the confidence to be vulnerable with him – more honest than they had been with the priests and religious leaders of their day. He even touched segments of the population that had become all but discarded from the rest of the Jewish community. He attracted thousands of people who traveled considerable distances to hear him preach. He even set aside the time to groom several disciples, some of whom would later be appointed as apostles by the Lord himself. His light burned with such intensity and passion that some even wondered if John might in fact be the Messiah.

[Matthew 6:22-23](#)

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

[Luke 11:33-36](#)

“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. ³⁴Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. ³⁵See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. ³⁶Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”

Lastly, we have the passage in [Luke 11:33-36](#), which begins like the previous passages; a lamp is placed on a stand for those who come in to see. Jesus was in the midst of what was becoming a widespread rejection of his ministry. Perhaps the most urgent need within this present audience was first to recognize that a man of God was among them (as the Queen of Sheba did when confronted with the evidence of God’s power displayed in the life of Solomon). Jesus had also been talking about the need for people to respond with humility and repentance at his preaching, holding up the Ninevites as an example of this type of response. It was vital for his listeners to be broken about their sin and to come into the light by exposing their lives and being urgent to change. For Jesus’ disciples, their present challenge was to remain faithful and courageous as the ministry and the message of their teacher grew more controversial. They could not hide in fear, but would instead be called to shine their light before men, even in the darkest period that was soon to come.

Jesus continued the parable referring to the importance of the eyes, as they are the lamp of the body. I don’t believe that Jesus was merely speaking about what your eyes are actually able to see outside your body. The lamp of the body has a more important function – to search and examine your inner self, the very core of your being. The “eyes” that Jesus seemed to be referring to are the eyes of your *conscience* that are able to search inside your heart and mind to reveal and disclose the sin and darkness within both. Those who are unwilling expose their deeds before God and godly men are afraid to permit the light of the truth to shine on the inner person. They fear the light of the scriptures and its capacity to judge their thoughts and their behavior. The flicker of their guilty conscience eventually begins to grow faint and almost invisible. They justify their sins and ignore the pangs of guilt until they finally subside. A time comes when their conscience (the lamp of the body) becomes totally dark. They are no longer able

to measure their own wickedness because the spiritual gauge that was installed in them by God has been totally severed.

Even as believers, if we allow our fear of openness to prevent us from confronting and exposing our sins, our temptations, our attitudes, and our doubts, darkness will accumulate within our souls. A time will come when our conscience shall grow dull and callused. Our ability to genuinely explore our hearts and minds in order to detect and uproot our sin may be altogether lost.

We must be careful to keep our hearts soft and our consciences bright.

Imagine that every sin you keep hidden in your heart is like a speck of mud on the lamp of the body. As time goes on, that light will grow more and more dim until you make the decision to wipe it clean. It is sad to see Christians who through time have become full of attitudes and bitterness towards the sin (intentional and unintentional) of other believers. These injured souls may be unable to offer a heart level forgiveness towards others because they have allowed pride and resentment to swell and darken their hearts. They become oblivious to their own iniquity and are unwilling and perhaps even unable to humble themselves and take responsibility for their share of the blame.

Oftentimes, the warning signs are barely visible on the outside. Some disciples acquire the unfortunate ability to feign happiness and spirituality while slowly being overcome and defeated by unconfessed sin.

Hardening of the heart and the dulling of one's conscience only happen over time; neither process is instantaneous. Do not permit your conscience – the ever-guiding lamp of the body – to become full of darkness! If we are willing to expose the darkness that creeps inside of us by being open with God and with a trusted brother or sister in Christ, we shall continually allow the light of God's grace shine on every aspect of our lives.

The eyes of your conscience are the lamp of the body

Psalm 32:3-5

1 Tim. 1:18-20

Acts 24:16

1 Tim. 4:1-2

Romans 1:21

Titus 1:15-16

Romans 1:28

Hebrews 9:14

1 Cor. 8:12

Hebrews 10:22



Clean the Inside

Luke 11:37-44

Jesus was invited to eat at the house of a Pharisee. He used the opportunity to boldly lay into the glaring sins of this prominent Jewish faction. He began to challenge them by applying a deeper spiritual truth to their customary practice of washing. The Pharisees washed their hands prior to meals and gave their cups and pitchers a customary washing as well. They were so concerned about their outward appearance and their ceremonial cleanliness that they had

completely missed the point of God's law. They even scorned Jesus' message, which was the fulfillment of that very law they swore to uphold.

The Pharisees were in love with the respect and honor they received in the general populace. They loved their position in the synagogue and the Sanhedrin. They viewed themselves as superior to their fellow Jews. Their role was to ensure that the Law of Moses was correctly interpreted and upheld. But they failed to embrace the role of a servant – to encourage and shepherd God's people closer to the Lord. True, they had an impressive knowledge of the Law and could articulate with skill the judgments it pronounced. However, they had forgotten the greater qualities of God like justice, mercy, and love. Without even knowing it, they were causing the community of God's people to become defiled, as when a person came in contact with the dead (**Numbers 19:16**). Jesus' admonishment here in **Luke 11:39-40** (to clean or wash the inside) is similar to those given by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. On the Lord's behalf, they spoke to the Jewish leaders of their day who had become guilty of the same sins that Jesus confronted in the Pharisees and the experts in the law.

Read Isaiah 1:15-17
Jeremiah 2:22
Jeremiah 4:14

The Pharisees were careful to fulfill the requirements of the law regarding their offerings, yet they were not pleasing God with their legalistic obedience. The standard tithe or "tenth" given by the Pharisees did not satisfy God because their heart was still permeated with greed. Jesus did not discourage the Pharisees from giving the necessary tithes; he challenged them to give even more. After they had fulfilled the requirements of the Law, Jesus called them to be willing to give sacrificially of what was left over to meet the needs of the poor. It is this offering – over and above the required tithes – that is able to purge the heart of greed. This type of giving is also able to humble a person in good financial standing by helping and identifying with the poor and the needy. Instead of taking pride in their high position, this sort of generosity reminds the giver to be thankful for God and to appreciate all the many blessings that have been given to them.

A tithe was simply the starting point, set apart and given to the LORD. These tithe offerings were given to provide for those who served in the ministry of the Lord's temple, lasting all the way up to the establishment of the church and beyond. Beginning with Abraham and later established in the covenant of Moses, a tenth of everything was set aside and given firstly to the Lord. When the Israelites and their priests failed to give what was required of them, God took notice. Over long periods of time as they continued to compromise and fall short regarding the required tithes and special offerings, God would oppose his people and urge them to repent (**Haggai 1:5-11, Malachi 1:8-14, 3:8-10**). However, true righteousness in the eyes of God was and still is a much deeper issue than just satisfying the written obligation.

The offerings prescribed by the Law were not simply given to supply the needs of those who administered at the Temple. Giving was designed to benefit the giver just as much if not more. Sacrifice was designed to increase the people's faith in God and to purify the hearts of God's people from the destructive forces of greed and materialism (which can lead to many greater evils such as coveting, envy, jealousy, lies, hatred, and even murder). God was more than able to provide them with a blessed harvest and an abundant life, even as they dedicated their firstfruits to the Lord. Actually, many Jews prospered and became exceedingly wealthy. Again, they were allowed to enjoy their prosperity without developing an unhealthy love and dependence on money that could quickly overshadow their love for God and reliance upon him. The Jews could remain generous of heart and free from the sin of greed if they obeyed the requirements of the law and continued to give generously over and above those tithes.

The precise model of giving in the Church Age remains a debated issue. However, the example shown by the Christians in the New Testament is often above and beyond that which was required under the Law of Moses. The Christians did not consider their possessions to be their own but gave to one another to meet whatever need arose. Special collections were made for the poor and the needy. Some believers offered up their inheritance to be used for the greater good of the church per the apostle's discretion.

Paul clearly taught that those who work in the full-time ministry should be financially supported by the members of the church. He states in **1 Cor. 9:13-14** that just as those who ministered before the Temple under the Old Covenant received their sustenance, so also should those who are ministers of the Gospel earn their living. In other words, Paul is suggesting that the *method* of supporting the full-time ministers remains much the same as it had for the past thousand years or more. His direct comparison between the two eras and the already customary practice of devoting a tenth to the Lord leads me to believe that the first-century church continued this practice of tithing in order to support the full-time ministers of the Gospel.

For the Jewish Christians, withdrawing their financial support from the temple and giving instead to the ministers of the New Covenant would have been a major paradigm shift. It would not be an easy transition. They would no longer give under compulsion from the Law but would instead offer up a tenth of their livelihood, even more on several occasions, from the overflow of their hearts. Based on the writings of Paul, we are left to conclude that in many towns and cities where a sizeable fellowship of Christians arose there were some disciples who left their trades to serve in the full-time ministry and received their sustenance from the rest. And to further conform to the pattern of tithing found in the Old Testament, those who received financial support from the congregation would offer a tithe from this income. The full-time ministers under the new covenant are to give a tenth of everything, just as the Levites did under the Law of Moses (**Num. 18:25-29**).

Giving to the Lord was not meant to simply be an issue of obedience and sacrifice, but an issue of the heart and of faith. Even today, pleasing God with our level of sacrifice is not just a question of systematic observance; it is a question of

our faith and the attitude of the heart behind our offering. We must have faith that God is able to provide for us even as we dedicate a portion of our livelihood unto the Lord. There should exist in our hearts a willing desire to meet the needs of the church and even a sense of gratefulness towards God and towards those who do the work of the ministry. So in most cases, it is not unreasonable at all for today's believers to be willing to sacrifice a tenth of their livelihood to meet the financial needs of the church. Those who are fully capable of giving to this capacity and yet do so in a reluctant fashion – feeling burdened and faithlessly compelled – are in danger of falling into the same sins that Jesus specifically confronted in the Pharisees. We as Christians strive to please God with our faith and our hearts, and we ought to view the contribution to the church as one avenue to fulfill this desire.

Over and above this tithe offering, those who are able should continue to give generously with a cheerful heart regarding special collections and poor offerings. At times, we should give to benefit the needy within the family of believers. Other times our donation should go to those in the world who are suffering illness or the effects of poverty. Those who have been blessed with greater financial prosperity are called by the scriptures to be more generous. Paul's directive in **2 Cor. 9:6-7** (that those who give should offer generously what their hearts have decided to give and not under compulsion) is advice given specifically for this type of offering. The Gentile churches were giving a contribution for the needy in Jerusalem and Paul was instructing them on the collection of this specific offering. This was not the local collection that supported the ministers in their given congregations, but a freewill offering to be given over and above the former. Although the heart behind **2 Cor. 9:6-7** should be imitated in Christian giving as a whole, let us not think that Paul was addressing the collection of local tithes in the church in Corinth, or any other city for that matter.

In an attempt to disguise their own greed, some have gone so far as to use this passage in **2 Corinthians** to abolish the practice of tithing (giving a tenth of their livelihood) in the church altogether. They have become burdened with this standard of giving and do so under a sense of compulsion. They eventually conclude that giving sparingly but cheerfully is somehow not a contradiction of **2 Cor. 9:6-7**. In truth, they redirect these scriptures to satisfy their conscience. They have even stumbled into a deeper pit of greed than did the Pharisees – who still gave a tenth out of sheer legalism!

As a whole, the local church members should be grateful for the opportunity to give a tenth of their firstfruits to provide for the needs of the church. For the individual, the act of giving generously to the Lord is a tremendous blessing as it is able to cleanse our hearts of the same kind of greed, selfishness, and arrogance in which the religious people of Jesus' day had fallen victim.

Genesis 14:20b

Numbers 18:25-28a

Deut. 18:1-5

1 Cor. 9:13-14

2 Cor. 8:10-12

2 Cor. 9:6-12

Psalm 37:25-26
Proverbs 11:25
Proverbs 22:9
Acts 2:44-45
Acts 4:32-37

Ephes. 5:3
Col. 3:5
1 Tim. 6:10
1 Tim. 6:17-19
Hebrews 13:5



The Key to Knowledge

Luke 11:45-54

Some experts in the Law were also in attendance at the dinner with Jesus and the Pharisees; they were most likely friends of the host. They began to feel judged and insulted by the challenges that Jesus was giving to the Pharisees. Jesus in turn directed his attention to them for a while and dealt openly with their specific sins. Jesus first confronted in these legal experts a wrong that he often pinned on the Jewish religious leaders. They had become so legalistic and judgmental that the greatest qualities of God – his love, his mercy, his justice for the oppressed, his great patience, and his willingness to forgive sins – had been overlooked. They allocated a major amount of time in more minor issues of the Law, but they were incapable of seeing or understanding clearly the motive behind the kind of obedience they trumpeted. The greatest commandments – a pure love for God and his commands and a sincere love for people – had been drowned out by far less critical issues. Thus, they insisted on calling the Jews to strictly adhere to the letter of the Law of Moses, but they remained unwilling to offer themselves to serve and provide for the needs of their fellow men.

Jesus also warned the experts in the Law that they were guilty of sins similar to those that caused the Pharisees to stumble. They had become more concerned with their outward appearance and the way they were viewed by others. Upgrading and constructing marvelous tombs for the martyred prophets and other godly people had become a popular and noble task (and was possibly the result of Roman influence). So to the average bystander, it appeared that these men deeply honored God’s former messengers. However, their inability to recognize God’s current messenger – in truth God himself dwelling in flesh – proved that their veneration for the prophets was only skin deep. Like the Pharisees, the words of the prophets and the message of Jesus couldn’t penetrate deep enough to change their hearts and direct their actions. And it was on this heart to heart level that the experts in the Law had also lost touch with the common Jew. Jesus on the other hand was exceedingly effective in reaching the masses and gaining their trust, and thus the religious leaders began to fear his power with the people.

Jesus’ last challenge to them was that they had taken away the key to knowledge and had become a stumbling block to those who sought true understanding. **Isaiah 33:6** states, “*He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.*” The fear of the Lord is the key to unlocking the greatest treasures that God has offered unto mankind – wisdom, knowledge, and even

salvation. The **Proverbs** also speak of the fear of the Lord as the beginning of true knowledge and wisdom. A man or woman who fears the Lord is careful to please God and walk in his commands. As their knowledge of the Lord increases, they come to understand and rely on the gracious qualities of God so inherent in the scriptures: his benevolence, his mercy, and his ability to protect those who fear him. Their fear of God merges with their love of him. They respect his wrath but rely on his ability to save. Thus, they make the Sovereign Lord their refuge.

Somewhere along the way the experts in the Law had missed this progression. Their knowledge and understanding of God remained immature. Appearing religious and noble to others had superseded their fear of God's ability to search their hearts and minds. They had become more concerned with pleasing people than with pleasing God. Breaking the law was often feared more than God himself, the very author of the Law. And these were the very things that they imposed on the Jewish community. The people had become burdened with the regulations of the Law. No longer were they purely motivated by their adoration and awe of God. Thus, the experts in the Law were preventing others from discovering the key of true knowledge and wisdom that leads to salvation. As Jesus left them, this series of reprimands still loomed in the air. He had no doubt fanned into flame the very fire of hostility and pride that would soon lead to the Sanhedrin's decision to put him to death.

1 Samuel 16:7

Psalms 111:10

Proverbs 1:7

Proverbs 2:5-6

Proverbs 9:10

Isaiah 11:1-4

Isaiah 33:5-6



Preparation for Opposition

Luke 12:1-12

It would appear that the events in the beginning of **Luke 12** took place immediately following Jesus' dinner at the house of the Pharisee. As he left the house he entered into a crowd of perhaps thousands who were aggressively trying to force their way to be close to the man of the hour. In the midst of the mayhem, Jesus was somehow able to collect his disciples and he addressed them first. His words here in **vs. 1-12** carry a serious and resolute tone, and they appear to stem from his confrontation with the religious leaders at the end of **Chapter 11**. Jesus cautioned his disciples to be wary of falling into the same pattern of hypocrisy in which the Pharisees had succumbed.

Jesus then began to prepare his disciples to take a stand, as the fires of opposition were about to burn at their hottest. The heat shall first be concentrated on Jesus alone, but they would eventually be directed at those who were identified as his followers. Jesus urged them several times not to be afraid of those who would use their positions of authority to breathe out threats against them. Even

death should not be feared by a man or woman who fears God according to Jesus. God knows each and every follower of Christ intimately – even the very hairs on their head have been counted. Thus, he is able to protect those he loves when they take a stand for their faith and put their trust in him.

God does allow his servants to suffer and even die at the hands of ungodly men. This shall be seen plainly in the crucifixion of Jesus. But even this type of tribulation should not be feared, as there remains a judgment day for both the living and the dead. Everything hidden shall be brought out into the light and God will give to each person accordingly – a resurrection for the faithful in Christ and a second death for those who denied him. God may or may not “save” his faithful from trouble, persecution, or even death during their lifetime. Through Christ however, the finality of death shall be forever erased. God will gather up those who remained steadfast in the face of suffering and they will be welcomed into eternal life to reside forever with God. Compared to the weight of our eternal judgment and the fires of hell, nothing on earth is to be feared by those who believe in Jesus and walk in light of his commands.

Surely Jesus was able to foresee his own trial before the Sanhedrin and his appearance before Pilate and Herod. At that time his disciples would fail to stand firm in their convictions because of their fear. Yet a day was coming when they too would be brought before the authorities and called to testify about their faith in him. As Luke penned these words of Christ, he faced the inevitable reality that his time of testing too would come. Luke is believed to have been hanged in Greece after preaching against the many false gods of this pagan nation. Likewise, the persecution against the apostles would be quite thorough, as each was forced to stare death in the face many times. Only John was allowed to die of “natural” causes, exiled to the island of Patmos. During his exile, Christ would come to him with a message very similar to this passage in [Luke 12:1-12](#) for the Christians who were suffering horrible persecutions in the first and second centuries. They shall again be encouraged to stand firm, casting aside their fear of death. Hence, the book of Revelation.

Compare the following verses to Luke 12:1-12
[Revelation 2:2-3, 2:9-11, 2:13, 2:17, 3:4-6, 3:8-11](#)

The following is an excerpt from FOXE’S BOOK OF MARTYRS¹⁶ written by John Foxe (1563). It contains the historical accounts of the martyrdom of the apostles and a few other disciples known by name in the Bible. Some of the information is based on Biblical accounts while some was taken from passed down Christian legend and oral traditions recorded by second, third, and fourth century writers.

I. St. Stephen

St. Stephen suffered the next in order. His death was occasioned by the faithful manner in which he preached

¹⁶ The following excerpt taken from Chapter 1 of *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*; John Foxe (1563)

the Gospel to the betrayers and murderers of Christ. To such a degree of madness were they excited, that they cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. The time when he suffered is generally supposed to have been at the passover which succeeded to that of our Lord's crucifixion, and to the era of his ascension, in the following spring.

Upon this a great persecution was raised against all who professed their belief in Christ as the Messiah, or as a prophet. We are immediately told by St. Luke, that "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem;" and that "they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

About two thousand Christians, with Nicanor, one of the seven deacons, suffered martyrdom during the "persecution that arose about Stephen."

II. James the Great

The next martyr we meet with, according to St. Luke, in the History of the Apostles' Acts, was James the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John, and a relative of our Lord; for his mother Salome was cousin-german to the Virgin Mary. It was not until ten years after the death of Stephen that the second martyrdom took place; for no sooner had Herod Agrippa been appointed governor of Judea, than, with a view to ingratiate himself with them, he raised a sharp persecution against the Christians, and determined to make an effectual blow, by striking at their leaders. The account given us by an eminent primitive writer, Clemens Alexandrinus, ought not to be overlooked; that, as James was led to the place of martyrdom, his accuser was brought to repent of his conduct by the apostle's extraordinary courage and undauntedness, and fell down at his feet to request his pardon, professing himself a Christian, and resolving that James should not receive the crown of martyrdom alone. Hence they were both beheaded at the same time. Thus did the first apostolic martyr cheerfully and resolutely receive that cup, which he had told our Savior he was ready to drink. Timon and Parmenas suffered martyrdom about the same time; the one at Philippi, and the other in Macedonia. These events took place A.D. 44.

III. Philip

Was born at Bethsaida, in Galilee and was first called by the name of "disciple." He labored diligently in Upper Asia, and suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A.D. 54.

IV. Matthew

Whose occupation was that of a toll-gatherer, was born at Nazareth. He wrote his gospel in Hebrew, which was afterwards translated into Greek by James the Less. The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60.

V. James the Less

Is supposed by some to have been the brother of our Lord, by a former wife of Joseph. This is very doubtful, and accords too much with the Catholic superstition, that Mary never had any other children except our Savior. He was elected to the oversight of the churches of Jerusalem; and was the author of the Epistle ascribed to James in the sacred canon. At the age of ninety-four he was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

VI. Matthias

Of whom less is known than of most of the other disciples, was elected to fill the vacant place of Judas. He was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

VII. Andrew

Was the brother of Peter. He preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross.

VIII. St. Mark

Was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. He is supposed to have been converted to Christianity by Peter, whom he served as an amanuensis, and under whose inspection he wrote his Gospel in the Greek language. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands.

IX. Peter

Among many other saints, the blessed apostle Peter was condemned to death, and crucified, as some do write, at Rome; albeit some others, and not without cause, do doubt thereof. Hegesippus saith that Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshipping, said, "Lord, whither dost Thou go?" To whom He answered and said, "I am come again to be crucified." By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.

X. Paul

Paul, the apostle, who before was called Saul, after his great travail and unspeakable labors in promoting the Gospel of Christ, suffered also in this first persecution under Nero. Abdias, declareth that under his execution Nero sent two of his esquires, Ferega and Parthemius, to bring him word of his death. They, coming to Paul instructing the people, desired him to pray for them, that they might believe; who told them that shortly after they should believe and be baptised at His sepulcher. This done, the soldiers came and led him out of the city to the place of execution, where he, after his prayers made, gave his neck to the sword.

XI. Jude

The brother of James, was commonly called Thaddeus. He was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72.

XII. Bartholomew

Preached in several countries, and having translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient idolaters.

XIII. Thomas

Called Didymus, preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.

XIV. Luke

The evangelist, was the author of the Gospel which goes under his name. He travelled with Paul through various countries, and is supposed to have been hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece.

XV. Simon

Surnamed Zelotes, preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, in which latter country he was crucified, A.D. 74.

XVI. John

The "beloved disciple," was brother to James the Great. The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him. From Ephesus he was ordered to be sent to Rome, where it is affirmed he was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. He escaped by miracle, without injury. Domitian afterwards banished him to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation. Nerva, the successor of Domitian, recalled him. He was the only apostle who escaped a violent death.

XVII. Barnabas

Was of Cyprus, but of Jewish descent, his death is supposed to have taken place about A.D. 73.

And yet, notwithstanding all these continual persecutions and horrible punishments, the Church daily increased, deeply rooted in the doctrine of the apostles and of men apostolical, and watered plentifully with the blood of saints.

Rich Towards God

Luke 12:13-21

Jesus had just been challenging the Pharisees on their greed and he now confronted his listeners on the perils of this sin as well. Amid the crowd was a man who had come to Jesus with a dispute concerning his inheritance. Little else is known about his predicament – whether he was asking for more than his apportioned share (if he was not the eldest son) or if the other brother was simply unwilling to grant him his rightful allotment. Either way, it was a question of land ownership and of money, which was at the core of Jewish society and first century culture as a whole. The Jews associated prosperity with the blessing and approval of God and had many examples in the scriptures in which this theory was founded (Jacob, Job, David, Solomon, etc.). It is no wonder why Jesus continually emphasized the condition of a person's heart before God and minimized their outward appearance and the belongings of the physical world. He would attempt a complete paradigm shift in their thinking with regards to material wealth.

The attitude of the rich man in this parable did not only personify the sin of greed within the Jewish community, it was also a broad sweep of the Greco-Roman idea of wealth, pleasure, and leisure. The pursuit of comfort and the easy life – to eat, drink, and be merry – was and still is a common theme in Western Civilization attributed to the elite and upper classes, oft to be envied by the rest. The whole concept is idolatrous because it places complete trust and security in one's riches. Those who amass wealth tend to rely very little (if at all) on God. Rarely do they commit their lives to spiritual principles or embrace the level of self-denial, self-sacrifice, and generosity to which a follower of Christ is called.

Being rich towards God does not only entail financial offerings. To truly give generously to God includes giving of our whole selves. We are to give generously of our time to serve the Lord and carry out his commands. People are often more unwilling to surrender their time for God than their money. We are to give generously of our hearts to God and to people. The overall abundance of our lives, whether it is our time, our money, our homes, etc., should be used to spread the love of God to those around us in need. We mustn't hoard or cherish our possessions for selfish purposes; neither is generosity a license for idleness or financial irresponsibility. However, the investment we make in the eternal things of God carries a far greater reward than the momentary security we could obtain by selfishly pursuing materialism, leisure, and pleasure.

To be sure, Jesus was not condemning the wealthy, the successful, or the prosperous, nor was he discouraging the act of saving money. Rather, he was reminding his followers that the spiritual things of God are far more important than anything the world has to offer. He was cautioning them against the evils that often attach themselves to the quest for comfort and merriment. The sins of greed and idolatry with regards to wealth are some of the most devious snares to a life of godliness; they elude even the most watchful eyes. The force in which they pull must not be underestimated. However, when we give of ourselves abundantly to God, we are more likely to avoid these pitfalls as we faithfully store

up for ourselves eternal treasures in heaven. This is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

The scriptures do not record Jesus owning or possessing much of anything besides his clothes, his sandals, and his words. He borrowed a coin to teach a point about paying taxes to Caesar. He instructed his disciples to fetch a colt for him to ride into Jerusalem during his final week of life. He sent Peter to find money in the mouth of a fish to pay their temple tax. He was handed scrolls of the Old Testament to read from. He stayed in the homes of friends and the relatives of his disciples. He had no palace, no crown, no treasure, and no servants – yet he was a king. He owned no cattle, no sheep or goats, no land, not even a staff – yet he was the Good Shepherd. He kept no scrolls, no scribes, and nothing written on paper can be attributed to his hand – yet his words map the trail to eternal life. With nothing to call his own, his life was still as rich and abundant as any that has ever been lived. Truly, an abundant life does not consist of the abundance of one's possessions.

Psalm 39:6

Psalm 49:16-20

Proverbs 3:9-10, 11:4, 11:28, 18:11, 23:4-5, 28:20, 30:8

Eccles. 5:10-12, 5:19

Matthew 19:23

Col. 3:5

Luke 16:9

1 Tim. 6:9

Ephes. 5:3,5

Rev. 3:17-18



The LORD Will Provide

Luke 12:22-34

Early on in the scriptures we learn that God provides for his devout followers who are willing to step out on faith at his command. Abram was called to leave his country, his people, and his father's household. He would be led through the wilderness to make his home in a foreign land. He believed the covenant of God and the Lord provided for him throughout his years of wandering. Even when he was called to sacrifice his son of promise, Isaac, he did not waiver but gave him up freely at God's command. There on the mountain, the Lord provided deliverance for Isaac and an acceptable sacrifice for Abraham, who became the father of our faith.

The God of heaven also provided for the descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) during their bondage in Egypt. He displayed numerous miracles before Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron. The Lord allowed hundreds of thousands of Hebrew slaves to slip out of Pharaoh's grasp as they passed through the Red Sea on dry ground. During their many years of wandering in the wilderness, God provided food, water, and protection from their enemies. The presence of the Lord never left them day or night as he led the people. Moses' farewell address to the Israelites in Deuteronomy is a vivid portrayal of the way God is able to provide for his people even during times of hardship, sacrifice, and walking by

faith. God then supplied his people with a land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord delivered them into this land by granting them conquest over the nations who had occupied the land beforehand.

Now, Jesus offered this same promise to those who were willing to give up everything to follow him and seek first the kingdom. Unlike the pagans, whose lives are consumed with the fulfillment of their daily needs and the accumulation of possessions, those who serve in God's kingdom shall be given a higher calling. They shall walk by faith, knowing that their Father in heaven is able to provide for their daily necessities. At the same time, they shall use their earth lives to store up for themselves treasures in heaven. Like all those who have believed in the promises of God before them, those who set their hearts to follow Christ will be called to sacrifice much. Yet God will watch over them and provide for their needs, even as he prepares an eternal dwelling for them that is far greater than anything the world has ever seen.

With the establishment of the church in **Acts 2** and following, this promise of Jesus would be fully realized and practiced by a multitude of new disciples. The believers gave sacrificially to anyone in need. As the Good News was preached to Jews and Gentiles scattered throughout the known world, the reaction of the new converts would be much the same. The kingdom of God would become their passion. They were no longer living for the material things of this world but instead dedicated themselves to the family of believers. There was no needy person, as God provided for his people through the faith and the sacrifice of many. As they gave of their earthly treasures, God was storing up for them an eternal inheritance in heaven.

Genesis 22:13-14

Deut. 6:10-13

Deut. 8:2-4

Psalms 37:25-29

Acts 2:44-45

Acts 4:32-35

Acts 24:23

Romans 12:13

2 Cor. 8:14

1 Tim. 5:3

James 2:16

1 John 3:17



Ready or Not

Luke 12:35-48

Although Jesus had begun to discuss openly his betrayal and his death, he had only hinted towards the plan of his ascension into glory and his eventual return at the final judgment. These two parables shed some light on the Second Coming of the Son of Man. In truth, both of the parables in this passage might easily be applied to the generation present during Jesus lifetime. However, they carry an equal amount of weight to all those who will have a chance to hear and respond to the Gospel message throughout the centuries that follow. We are now able to put all of the pieces into place regarding the plan of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus shall be rejected by the religious leaders, put to death, and on the third day be raised to life, proving that he is the Messiah (**Luke 9:22, Luke 11:29**). The method of handing Jesus over to the men who will inflict this suffering will be a betrayal of one of those close to his ministry (**Luke 9:44**). Following his resurrection, Jesus the Son of Man will return to glory with the Father and the host of heavenly angels, and he will one day return again to find those who are holding on to his commands and waiting expectantly for his arrival (**Luke 9:26, Luke 12:43**). At that time, judgment will be issued. For those who heard the truth and responded they will receive a reward (**Luke 12:37**). For those who knew the truth and yet refused to submit themselves, they will be punished most severely (**Luke 9:26, Luke 12:47**). And for those who remained ignorant to the will of God for their lives, they too will be punished but not to the degree as those who deliberately rebelled (**Luke 12:48**).

The theme of these parables here appears to be twofold: readiness and total commitment. Someone who is fully obedient to Jesus' teachings is in effect ready at any given time for the arrival of the Lord. Whether he is soon in coming or delayed, they are about the work entrusted them by God. They will not be caught off-guard or dismayed when their hour of judgment comes. And though they are conditioned to serve Jesus as their Master, this parable explains that the master will actually be dressed to serve the faithful ones who kept watch for his return (**vs. 37**). He will also place them in charge of his wonderful belongings (**vs. 44**).

On the other hand, there are those who take a more contemptuous approach to the commands of God and are unwilling to completely fasten the yoke of Christ around every aspect of their lives. Believing that the coming of the Son of Man is a long way off, they permit themselves the freedom to behave in a boisterous manner. They are reluctant to live as true servants of God and of God's people. Thus, the hour of their judgment will catch them by surprise, like a thief in the night. Although they knew the truth, they lacked the fear and the reverence towards God to live each day with the measure of love and discipline required by the Lord's commands.

Again, the issue is total commitment. Total commitment equals complete readiness. So are we ready or not? Are there pockets of time in which the weight of the cross becomes burdensome and we permit ourselves to cast it aside? Or do we simply enjoy the opportunity to use every hour of our lives to serve God as we await his return? Do we strive to please God each day by drawing near to him with our early mornings, bearing the fruits of the spirit in our workplace, using our free time to strengthen our brothers and sisters in Christ, and sharing the Gospel with as many as possible? Although the hour of his coming may still be far off, the hour of your judgment can come at any time. As Jesus said, *"It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes."* – **Luke 12:37a**.

1 Cor. 15:51-52

1 Thes. 5:1-11

2 Peter 2:21-22

2 Peter 3:3-14

Rev. 3:3

Rev. 16:15

Fire, Baptism, and Division

Luke 12:49-53

Although God is a God of justice, he is also full of compassion and mercy. These two qualities are sometimes at odds with one another as we see in Jesus. He was extremely patient with the people of his day, yet it seems as if his inherent desire for justice was waiting to be released. The coming of the last day and the refining fire of God's eternal judgment shall sift every man and woman as they are called to account for their lives. For now, God's compassion and his patience through Christ is putting that day on hold to give people a chance to repent, to come to him and be saved. We must understand however that just as God waits on mankind and extends them more time to turn from evil, his desire for justice has kindled the flames of his wrath that shall one day be unleashed. Therefore, as we read in **2 Peter 2:3-14** (referenced in the previous segment), let us not think that the Lord is slow in coming. He is patient, not wanting anyone to be destroyed.

Romans 2:5-8

1 Cor. 3:12-15

Hebrews 10:26-27

Jesus himself may have had to experience these fires of judgment following his own death. The "baptism" that Jesus had to undergo (**vs. 50**) may simply pertain to his suffering and crucifixion. However, it is possible that he is including here a reference to his own passing through of the refiner's flame – the baptism of fire. The scriptures may indicate (though it is unclear at best and remains a debated issue) that during the span of time that Jesus' body lay dead in the tomb, his spirit may have descended into the fires of Hades (Hebrew *Sheol*¹⁷) to preach to those held in bondage there.

At the time of his death, Jesus bore the sin and guilt of the entire world in his body. Consequently, he would not have ascended into glory during the time that immediately followed his death and preceded his resurrection. He might have instead been escorted into the same spiritual dungeon that all those before him who died without their sins having been atoned for were sent. **Acts 2:27-32** might provide the most conclusive proof that Jesus was in fact present in Hades while apart from his physical body.

Acts 2:27-32 (NASB)

*BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES,
NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.*

²⁸YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE;

YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.'

²⁹"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰"And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN

¹⁷ Hebrew 7585; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, ³¹he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. ³²"This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

Peter quoted **Psalm 16:8-11**, which may indicate that Jesus made a brief visit to Hades – the intermediate place of the dead wherein the wicked await their judgment (**Rev. 20:13**). However, Jesus’ spirit was not abandoned there, nor did his body lie dead long enough to begin to suffer the irreparable consequence of decay. If Jesus did have to endure a brief stay in Hades, he too would have suffered agony in the fires that torment the unrighteous. Knowing this prison all too well (and describing it later in **Luke 16** in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus) and the horrific circumstances of his own impending death may have led Jesus to exclaim in **vs. 50**, “*How distressed I am until it is completed.*” If his period of suffering included a time of torment in Hades, the completion he was speaking about would likely be the time of his resurrection from death after the Passover weekend had concluded.

But what about Jesus’ proclamation to the penitent thief dying next to him, for Jesus assured him, “*today you will be with me in paradise*” (**Luke 23:43**)? If Hades is the intermediate place of the unsaved dead, then we might conclude that paradise is the place where the righteous await their judgment. Apparently, Jesus had a rendezvous here immediately following his death. It is also possible that paradise itself was simply a compartment of Hades in which the righteous dead were held until the time of Christ’s ascension¹⁸. Even godly men of old like Jacob (**Gen. 37:35**), David (**Psalm 16:10**), Hezekiah (**Isaiah 38:10**), and Job (**Job 17:13**) expected to be taken to Hades as they looked towards death. Perhaps it was this location (paradise) that Jesus’ disembodied spirit was originally taken, only to descend into the lower realms of Hades soon thereafter. When Christ ascended from Hades, the scriptures may indicate that he freed the captives from their current holding place (the lower subdivision of Hades) by breaking through the chasm that prevents all others from passing from one place to the other. Thus, Hades no longer included both the righteous and the wicked, but was now a place exclusively for the wicked to await judgment.

Any conclusion we might reach regarding the whereabouts of Jesus’ spirit during the time his body lay dead in the tomb is speculative. The scriptures do lend themselves to the suggestions just made and some hold this view. Further discussion on Hades and the intermediate place of the dead is included in the notes for **Luke 16:19-31**.

NASB Updated used here

Genesis 37:35

Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, "Surely I

¹⁸ See *New Testament History – Acts*; Gareth L. Reese, Special Study #7 – Hades and the Intermediate Place of the Dead, pp. 135-144

will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son." So his father wept for him.

Psalm 16:10

*For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.*

Isaiah 38:9-10

*A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness
and recovery:*

*¹⁰I said, "In the middle of my life
I am to enter the gates of Sheol;
I am to be deprived of the rest of my years."*

Job 17:13

*"If I look for Sheol as my home,
I make my bed in the darkness;*

The interpretation of the following passages is varied – (NASB Updated used)

Acts 2:24-32

Ephes. 4:8-10

1 Peter 3:18-20a

1 Peter 4:6

Luke 23:42-43

Jesus then went on to indicate the nature of the divisions that will arise when a person truly commits himself or herself to living as his disciple. Within Jesus' own family there existed misunderstanding and division at times. For many of his followers, the ultimate test of their faithfulness will be the fierce opposition that would come from those closest to them, from their own flesh and blood.

Throughout the centuries, Jesus' warning has proven all too accurate. Parents motivated by panic, concern, disgrace, and even love try to prevent their children from being "led astray" by the Christian message. Brothers and sisters within a single family become divided amongst themselves, attempting to persuade the others into their way of thinking. Husbands will defy their wives for becoming disciples of Jesus against their will, and visa-versa. Religious division within a family can strike deep at the heart, pitting lifelong relationships against one another in a collision of emotions, a battle of wills, a fight for control, and a contest of pride. In some cultures still today, complete disgrace is brought on a family if it is known that one of its members has converted to Christianity. The only way for them to save face and regain honor in the community is to kill the wayward child or sibling. This is a cost of being a disciple of Jesus. Instead of apologizing for it, Jesus told us to expect it.

Let us not think however that the Gospel only brings division within families. Even as Jesus prepared us for such conflicts, he explained in **vs. 52** that

at times there would be two against three, or three against two. In other words, some family members will actually unite based on their decision to follow Christ and will stick together as they stand firm in the faith. It is not uncommon to see the teachings of Christ enable parents and their children to restore a loving relationship that had deteriorated for years due to disagreements, lack of forgiveness, and ignored hurt from the past. Marriages can be reconstructed after years of tearing each other down. Even siblings separated by hatred, pride, and misunderstanding can rebuild a level of friendship that they did not think possible. When at least one of them has decided to walk as a disciple of Jesus, they are able to unlock the secrets of forgiveness, humility, loving your enemy, taking responsibility for their own sin, and extending grace towards others. Indeed, several members of one family can end up becoming Christians when such a drastic change of heart and behavior – a change for the better – is witnessed in the life of one of their relatives. Perhaps there will still exist an element of strong opposition within the immediate family, extended family, and/or the community. However, those members who have become brothers and sisters in Christ now share a bond of unity even closer than flesh and blood.

Division & Unity in the Family

Mark 3:20-21

Mark 13:12-13

1 Cor. 7:13-16

2 Tim. 1:5

Acts 16:33-34



Understanding the Times

Luke 12:54-59

Jesus now turned his attention to the crowds in order to admonish them in hopes that they might understand the importance of this hour. Unrecognized by the masses, the Creator of heaven and earth now stood among them, but only for a time. This flesh was only a temporary dwelling, housing the Spirit of God in full measure. As he spoke, he uttered the words of God. As he functioned, he fulfilled the words of the prophets. Born of a virgin (**Isaiah 7:14**) in Bethlehem (**Micah 5:2**). Descended from the line of David (**Jeremiah 23:5**). Raised in Nazareth (**Matthew 2:23**). Preaching the good news to the poor (**Isaiah 61:1**). Reviving the sick (**Isaiah 53:4**). All the signs indicated that Jesus is the Christ who was to come. The completion of his mission shall once and for all fulfill the plan of God as foretold by the Psalms and the prophets. He would willingly (**Isaiah 53:7**) lay down his life as a sacrifice for sins (**Isaiah 53:5**) by crucifixion (**Psalms 22:16**), and he would be raised up again (**Isaiah 53:11**) on the third day (**Luke 24:46**).

Although the people had been able to read the patterns of nature and predict the weather, they could not seem to perceive the mountain of evidence that pointed to Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior of the world. To this day, many people

demand proof for such a claim (although this request is often nothing more than a smokescreen for those who clearly do not want to change their lives and serve God). Often, those who demand such proof refuse to carefully examine the sum total of facts and sound reasoning that together testify that Jesus had to be exactly who he claimed to be. For those who are genuine in their search for truth, they will be delighted to see that blind faith is not necessary to live as a Christian. Rather, we simply believe the facts.

In view of the facts, we must heed Jesus' warning in **Luke 12:57-59**. While there is still time and while we are still alive and well, let us make every effort to be found in a right relationship with God – the judge of heaven and earth. This passage stands for all people throughout the ages, warning us not to put off our responsibility to be reconciled with God. Jesus wants us to examine the evidence, get the facts, and earnestly search the scriptures for the truth. Take a sober look at your own life, your shortcomings, and the fragility of your very existence; then you must make a decision to settle your outstanding debt to God.

Remember, it is you and I who have fallen short (**Romans 3:23**). Since the words of Christ will judge our very souls (**John 12:47-50**), we must not delay in conforming our hearts, our minds, and our actions to be found in total harmony with his commands. In view of his anticipated return and the unexpected nature of its occurrence, nothing should replace this resolution between man and his Creator as life's most consequential and urgent priority.

Be reconciled with God

Romans 5:8-11

2 Cor. 5:17-21

Ephes. 2:14-18

Col. 1:19-23

Eccles. 12:1

Eccles. 12:13-14

THE REVOLUTIONARY

BREAKFAST WITH LUKE CHAPTERS 13 - 18

Repent or Perish

Luke 13:1-9

The Jews were a superstitious lot. They often associated the cause of events within the physical world with spiritual origins. If some random calamity befell someone, it was a sure sign of unrighteousness and God's visible display of disapproval and judgment. Obviously, the Galileans who suffered at the hands of Pilate had received their due from God, their secret sins repaid. Likewise, those crushed in Jerusalem by a freak accident had not escaped without receiving their just punishment. This concept makes perfect sense using humanistic wisdom. The book of Job is a good example of this type of reasoning. Job's friends were convinced that he had sinned and was somehow refusing to repent. Around and around, they argued with one another. Job defended himself to the point of self-righteousness and his friends accused him to the point of exasperation. However, man's wisdom is foolishness to God, and God's foolishness is wiser than all of man's wisdom.

As discussed previously, God is not bound by some obligation to execute a swift and obvious show of judgment – endorsing the righteous and bringing down the wicked. Nor does he have to answer to men when they question the existence of injustice in the world. God may allow the righteous to fall victim to persecution, suffering, and grievous occurrences of time and chance. At the same time, those who are corrupt and deceitful may live on, increase in wealth, or simply enjoy good favor throughout their time on earth. Many people use this as a basis to harden their hearts towards God altogether, assuming that a good and sovereign God could never allow a world full of random evil and injustice. What they have failed to grasp is that in view of the importance of a person's eternal state, the hardships that may befall them during their life on earth are trivial by comparison. God reserves his right to judge the living and the dead and is waiting for that great day. He will reward each person according to what they have done. The righteous shall be justified and their suffering long forgotten. The wicked shall be punished; any comfort or prosperity they may have achieved during their lifetime shall be forgotten forever.

Perhaps a life of holiness would be more attractive if God's immediate justice was continually and visibly implemented. Imagine if every evil act – every sin, every lie, and every injustice – was met with some instantaneous and supernatural punishment while every righteous act harvested an immediate blessing. Our souls would certainly benefit, as the fear of God's wrath would dominate our every action. Wouldn't more people fear God and strive to repent? That is obviously not the world we live in, and God has never demonstrated this mode of operation when dealing with his creation. It seems that God does not want to be recognized only for his power to judge, to bless,

and to punish. Sovereignty is not the characteristic of God that he has chosen to display in order to lure mankind into a lasting relationship with him. Instead, it is God's incredible love and grace for man and all of his creation that are his greatest and most defining qualities. Because of his great love for us, God allows for our wickedness to go unpunished in hopes that many will turn from evil and consciously choose to return that love to him. Certainly God's love and grace extend to both the wicked and the righteous. His grace gives the wicked more time to repent, and he is eager to forgive those who turn. God's grace also covers over the inevitable sins of those who are striving for righteousness. But to those who refuse to love God and instead continue in sin, they will find that God is not unjust after all. Because of God's immeasurable grace, they may escape his vehemence on earth. However, they will also discover that a full measure of his wrath has been stored away for them because they treated his love for them with contempt.

According to Jesus, the question is not whose sin is the worst or who deserves retribution the most. A worthy recipient of God's punishment may not be as obvious as our humanistic wisdom might lead us to expect. Comparing our sin with someone else's is a dangerous endeavor, especially when we justify ourselves in the process. Like those whom Jesus admonished in [Luke 13:1-5](#) we too can point the finger at others, denounce their iniquity, and subconsciously make light of our own. In truth, we ought to be a lot less judgmental of others and much more careful when it comes to recognizing and exposing the sin in our own lives. God desires for each person to own up to their own sin, deal with it humbly, and continually repent.

Before God in all of his glory none of us can stand; we all fail miserably to reach the standard of his holiness. Isaiah the prophet understood this when faced with the glory of God and he cried out in [Isaiah 6:5](#) *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."* In fact, fear and trembling are commonplace when man is confronted with God or one of the Lord's helpers. When faced with the magnitude of our own sin, falling prostrate before his throne is the only logical reaction. Let us try to remember and practically apply this mindset in our daily walk with God. Do not attempt to justify yourself by comparing your sin to that of others. And let us never minimize our need of daily repentance and another dose of God's grace.

**Read [Eccles. 3:17, 7:15, 7:20, 9:11](#)
[Jeremiah 17:10](#)
[Romans 2:6-8](#)
[Rev. 20:12](#)**

Jesus went on to define true repentance with a short parable showing that the fruit of a person's life must be present. Merely attempting to reduce and eliminate sin is not the complete repentance that God desires. Jesus continued to reinforce the fact that not breaking the law does not determine a person's righteousness. Yes, we must avoid evil, but evil must be overcome with goodness

(Rom. 12:21). The evidence of repentance in an individual is seen in the fruits of their life. A total change in heart, a change in attitude, a change in behavior, and a change in lifestyle that reflects the teachings and the spirit of Jesus should be obvious to God and to others. And like Jesus, this changed person is able to have a profound impact on the lives of people all around them. As they continue to bear the fruits of repentance, they are able to call others to the goodness of Christ and bear fruit in a second way – by winning souls. Without evidence of true regeneration, conversion may be feigned and the fellowship contaminated with fruitless branches. They are takers, not givers. They are selfish and unbroken. Unless they repent and change, God will prune them so that the group as a whole might become more fruitful.

Jude 1:12

John 15:5-8

Col. 1:6b

Col. 1:10a



Set Free

Luke 13:10-17

The pattern of confrontation between Jesus and his opposition had become almost routine. Jesus again displayed his compassion and wonderful power on a woman crippled and hunched over for many years, bound by Satan himself. With a simple touch from the Lord she would be forever healed. On this particular day, Jesus had been a guest Rabbi in the synagogue of a ruler whose heart was hardened towards his ministry. The ruler did not address Jesus but instead spoke to the people and warned them to refrain from coming to be healed on the Sabbath. We continually see the Jewish leaders defending and upholding their interpretation of the law while impeding the true movement of God. They ended up as stumbling blocks for those who were trying to come into the kingdom. As Jesus said previously in **Luke 11:52**, “*You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.*”

Jesus publicly rebuked his opponents and called them hypocrites. The Greek definition of this word is as follows:

hupokrites, *hoop-ok-ree-tace'*; (hupokrinomai); an *actor under* an assumed character (*stage-player*), i.e. (figurative) a *dissembler, or pretender* ¹⁹

So many of the spiritual leaders of the people had simply become actors. They played the spiritual game while appearing to be devout and righteous. They successfully deceived the people and sadly they deceived even themselves. Their pride made them unable to see the true heart of the Law of Moses personified in Jesus and the spirit of God moving powerfully through his words and actions.

¹⁹ Greek 5271; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Again, let us not think that this public humiliation of his opponents was a victory for Jesus. This ongoing trend of rejection from the stiff-necked religious leaders was distressing to him. It would continue until his final hour, as they mocked and humiliated him while he hung shamefully on a cross. The sins of pride and hypocrisy are a deadly combination. They seize their victim, who now becomes a useful instrument of Satan to oppose God and God's movement. They are successfully deceived and believe they are defending the true directive of God. They oppose the Holy Spirit with an untiring passion and vengeful cunning.

We see even today that the churches of Christ are continually stalked by individuals whose hearts and words are full of venom and loathing. Some are former disciples who have fallen away from God. Yet, most of these opponents pretend to know God and hold their interpretation of scripture to be true, as did the Jewish leaders whom Jesus so frequently disputed. Their pride and their hypocrisy have so clouded their vision that they become enemies of God and a stumbling block to those who want to enter his kingdom. They are just like the synagogue ruler – imposters in God's true movement. They present their side of the story with heinous distortions of the truth. The Internet is filled with these types of deceitful allegations. They do not present the whole truth nor do they accept responsibility for their own sin. Full of spite and conceit, they distort the truth using gossip, slander, and exaggeration as their disguise. Unfortunately, many naive disciples have wandered into their trap and have fallen captive to their bitter poison.

Inevitably, there is some truth to most if not all of these stories. The kingdom of God on earth shall always be wrought with sin in the lives of ordinary disciples, lay leaders, and even ministers. This does not excuse sin but is a sober reminder that the church shall never outlive the need for genuine repentance from its members and leaders. Biblical discipline and heartfelt forgiveness from every believer are commanded by Christ and must be followed; otherwise Satan will get a foothold in the fellowship and the church will decay from within. That being said, the enemies of God and his church will always exist and will continue to find enough fodder to keep their fire of opposition burning. This is all the more reason for us to hold ever tightly to the scriptures and the never-changing truths of God.

Acts 20:29-30

Romans 16:17-19

2 Peter 2:1-3

2 Peter 3:15-16



Humble Beginnings

Luke 13:18-21

Jesus told a couple parables with similar meanings to illustrate the glorious nature of the coming kingdom of God. A mustard seed – no bigger than

a grain of fine sand – can grow to be around ten feet tall in less than three months. Compared to other garden plants the mustard plant comes from the smallest of seeds and rapidly towers over the others, almost like a small tree, so that even a bird might rest on its growth. This is a perfect comparison to God's kingdom on earth. From humble beginnings – a travelling rabbi and a small collection of very ordinary men and women – the world was revolutionized. Their message would spread rapidly and reach every corner of civilization in their generation and in the generations that followed.

Even now we see God's kingdom advancing to the farthest reaches of the world in a time where more people are presently alive on the earth than the sum of all who have ever lived and died throughout history. This is to God's glory, for he is responsible for the growth. As disciples we are responsible for planting the message of the Gospel in the hearts of men and continually watering them with truth, love, and encouragement. Although we can multiply the amount of seeds planted and the amount of watering given, we cannot control the growth. Let us strive to keep our consciences clear regarding the purpose for which we were created new in Christ, which is to love God and to scatter his message to the lost world all around us, showering them with the love of the Lord. And let us then be content with the growth that results because it is from God and not from ourselves.

1 Cor. 3:6-9

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Likewise, the character of yeast accurately describes the nature of the kingdom of God on earth. By introducing a small amount of yeast in any one area of dough, it spreads and pervades throughout the whole batch during the kneading. In the New Testament, yeast usually referred to some type of evil behavior or destructive false teachings that can spread rapidly once introduced. Perhaps Jesus meant to describe the inevitable rise of harmful elements within the kingdom and the way in which they will spread and contaminate the church as a whole. This is entirely possible and is consistent with other warnings Jesus' gave. However, you may just as soon conclude that Jesus was describing the nature of the Gospel message that is introduced in one area of the lost world and soon multiplies until the entire world has been saturated with the truth. Both of these explanations seem possible, and perhaps both were meant to be understood by his hearers.

Make Every Effort

Luke 13:22-30

Luke reiterates that Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem. These were the final days and weeks of his ministry on earth. A good percentage of all four Gospels focuses on the final period of Jesus' life until the time when he ascended back into heaven. It was seemingly during this time when the confrontations became more heated, Jesus' teachings rang out with more intensity, the disciples began to face their biggest fears thus far, and the entire Jewish community was perplexed and fastened on this mysterious teacher from Galilee. It was near this time that **Mark 10:32** describes the general state of Jesus and the people when he writes, *"They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid."*

It was generally assumed and taught that Israelites were the chosen people of God and would sit at the feast as God ushered in his kingdom. As a whole, they believed they would be saved and delivered by God. However, the current state of Israel and their treatment of Jesus told a different story. The Jewish leaders continued to mount opposition to his ministry and Jesus consistently rebuked their wayward leadership.

Apparently this recurring dispute began to make an impression on Jesus' followers. One prompted the question, "Lord, are only a few going to be saved?" Jesus' reply did not quantify those who would be saved but instead shed some needed light on the requirements for salvation. Simply being an Israelite and a descendant of Abraham was not sufficient and would not qualify a person as an heir to the promises made to the father of faith. This will come as a shock to many, those who sincerely believed that they were known by God. Indeed, there will be a great sadness on their part (weeping) followed by torment (gnashing of teeth).

God's chosen people would no longer be the physical descendants of Abraham. Instead, an open door would be given to people from all over the world. From the north, south, east, and west would come hungry souls who would accept the good news message. They wouldn't make the mistake of assuming that their salvation was purely a birthright. They were willing to make every effort to follow the teachings of Christ and lay down their life for God, the family of God, and the lost world. Clearly, the Gentiles were the last to be called into God's kingdom. Nevertheless, they were the first to respond with the full measure of eagerness and humility that pleased God.

Sadly, it was the Israelites who would falter into last place. They had been the first people called by God. They were a nation loved and blessed like no other, a community that witnessed and recorded the history of God and his miraculous powers, a people chosen by the Creator as his own inheritance, and a kingdom in which the name of the Lord was to dwell forever. But Jesus would revolutionize a covenant over a millennium old and in doing so wipe the slate clean and give all men and women a wonderful opportunity to seek God's favor. The world now stood on the brink of a new kingdom that was not of this world.

Despite their stubbornness, many Jews would repent at the words of the Lord and receive God's covenant through Christ. But the Jews who lost sight of

God and did not recognize the time of his coming would be shut out of the kingdom. Though they expected to have seats reserved for them at the heavenly feast, they shall be left outside trembling and weeping. Then they will recall, “*we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets*”. They will make their appeal to God. They had shared communion with him as his chosen sons and daughters; surely they had fellowship with Jehovah God. But their plea will fall on deaf ears. In fact, those who were once known by God will hear the words, “*I never knew you*” and from their own Psalms the refrain, “*Away from me, evildoers.*”

Psalm 6:8a

Psalm 119:115a

Psalm 139:19b

This passage in Romans has been referenced previously in this commentary. However, I shall include it here again because Israel's rejection of their Messiah is a crucial theme in scripture.

Romans 11:1-14



The Completion at Jerusalem

Luke 13:31-35

In an apparent effort to detour Jesus from his declared destination of Jerusalem the Pharisees reported a death threat from Herod Antipas (Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, 4 BC-39 AD). This was the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded (**Mark 6:14-29**). The strong manner of Jesus' retort leads me to conclude that he still reserved judgment against Herod for his execution of John and his many other wicked acts. Perhaps Jesus also meant to communicate to the Pharisees his unwavering commitment to bringing his ministry to Jerusalem, despite their disingenuous concern for his well-being. Herod desired to see Jesus and may very well have issued a threat to his life. It is also quite possible that the Pharisees were merely attempting to disrupt Jesus from his forthcoming visit to the Holy City, for it was common knowledge that Herod would be in Jerusalem for the Passover. Knowing full well God's plan for his life, Jesus placed little weight on Herod's threat (if indeed such a threat originated from Herod). Neither would he allow the scheming of the Pharisees distract him from his goal.

He was making his way to Jerusalem to bring to fulfillment all that was purposed for him since the creation of the world. Jesus even made a specific reference to the impending triumphal entry, giving us in **vs. 35** the precise psalm of praise that would be offered at that time (**Psalm 118:26**, ref. **Luke 19:38**). The importance of his mission of atonement eclipsed all other affairs and world events. Prior to its completion, Jesus would continue to preach, to heal, and to drive out demons. He would not be detoured by the Roman government or the Jewish leaders.

“*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*”, sighed Jesus. The significance of the city of Jerusalem throughout the history of God’s people cannot be overstated. The high priest Melchizedek also held the title king of Salem, or pre-Israel Jerusalem. He was the only individual recognized as Abraham’s superior, for he extended a blessing to Abram and accepted a tithe of his plunder. The city later became the capital of the Israelite nation and was dubbed the city of David. David himself described Jerusalem in all of its glory in [Psalm 122](#). The city would become the home to God’s holy temple (originally constructed under King Solomon’s direction from 960-953 BC). With the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem, God’s name dwelt with his people. The Lord communed with them through the priestly regulations and atoned for their sins by the sacrifices made on the altar. The holy city of Jerusalem and its temple were at the very heart of the Jews’ relationship with God.

Through the years however the city became the sight of horrendous idolatry and sins resembling and surpassing pagan worship. It even witnessed the murders of holy men who strove to lead the people back to their forsaken God. The destruction of the temple by the Babylonians demonstrated God’s internal pain as he was forced to punish his own people for their continual defiance of his commands. He likened the destruction of Jerusalem – and more specifically the temple – to the death of his own wife as seen through the life of Ezekiel. God intimately describes his relationship with his people and the holy city of Jerusalem in [Ezekiel 16:1-14](#). How distressed was the heart of Jesus as he prophesied their impending and final rejection of God that would be carried out in this great city. The words of Jesus written here in Luke express the centuries of pain that God had to endure as he opened his arms and his heart to an obstinate and unfaithful nation.

Although a continual city of influence throughout world history, the city of Jerusalem would no longer hold the spiritual exclusivity for God’s people as it had in the past. The church in Jerusalem would be home to the apostles throughout the birth of the Christian movement, although most would eventually be called to the mission field and die elsewhere. The temple would forever be destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans, as prophesied by Christ in [Luke 21:5-6](#). Today, at the site of the temple that once bore God’s name sits the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim Mosque.

[Psalm 122:1-9](#)

[Ezekiel 24:15-21](#)

[Luke 21:5-6](#)



Nothing to Say

Luke 14:1-6

Jesus continued to be invited to the houses of prominent Pharisees and to sit among the experts in the law despite the fact that many confrontations had

arisen at such gatherings. Surely the motive of this particular invitation was tainted, for Luke mentions that Jesus was being carefully watched. It seems as if the Pharisees and experts in the law were building up their case against this bothersome movement and its leader. We might also assume that the man suffering with dropsy was part of their plot, whether he even knew it or not. The way [vs. 2](#) reads, we are allowed to assume that the Pharisees planted this man, for he seems to be positioned right in front of Jesus and there appears to be no other persons in sight in need of healing.

Ancient medical excerpts confirm that dropsy was a condition that caused the body to swell up due to the retention of excess fluids. Having recognized their ploy, Jesus as usual attempted to bring the whole situation out into the open. He questioned those at the feast, asking if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. This matter is not specifically addressed in the Law and was subject to differing views. Nevertheless, their refusal to answer or state their position all but confirms that those surrounding the Lord had not come to learn from him, to question him, or to change their opinion about him. Their minds were made up and they had come only to monitor him, test him, and build their case against him.

Jesus took hold of the man, healed him, and purposely sent him away from the scene. Jesus appealed to the Pharisees and experts in the law with common sense, pointing out that they too would permit a man to put forth the effort to free an animal or something valuable to them on the Sabbath if the need arose. Over and above the requirements of the Law, Jesus desired for his people to care for one another, to do good to one another, to be kind and compassionate to those who were hurting, and to have a soft heart towards their fellow man. If they would have only understood the ministry of Christ, they would have tapped into a true depth of spirituality that required no violation to the Law. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law”* ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). Jesus consistently called the Jewish leaders to repent of their legalism and demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit. Instead, their fear of violating the Law kept made them slaves to it and produced a calloused heart towards the ministry of the Spirit. The healing of the man with dropsy seemed to have had little impact on those in the room, as did the wealth of other miracles they witnessed from Jesus of Nazareth. His appeal to them fell on deaf ears, closed eyes, and hard hearts.

Isaiah 6:9-10

He said, "Go and tell this people:

*" 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'*

*¹⁰Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull
and close their eyes.*

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed."*

Worthy of Honor

Luke 14:7-14

Whether or not the prominent Pharisee and his guests had come prepared to listen to Jesus made little difference; he still used the opportunity to teach. Jesus confronted their pride and their hunger for admiration from others. He described a scene that he had seen earlier – guests posturing for the most desired places around the table. They would have wanted to sit either nearest the host or nearest to the guest of honor, which probably was Jesus. As had become his custom, Jesus revealed their sin so that everyone might take heed. Those who now held these places of honor no doubt squirmed a bit and welled up with contempt for the Lord.

He then addressed the host and explained to him the meaning of true righteousness before God. Jesus advocated kindness to the sick and lame and urged his listeners to associate with those in low positions. Perhaps Jesus brought this to the host's attention as it related to the man with dropsy, who had just previously been healed and sent away. It is safe to assume that a man with such an affliction would not have been invited to a dinner of this sort at the house of such a prominent Pharisee. However, because they wanted to test Jesus, he was brought in. Seeing through their ploy, Jesus challenged the host on his pride and his hypocrisy.

The instruction given here by Jesus goes deeper than the obvious explanations that have just been suggested. In general, the Jews expected to sit at the places of honor in the coming kingdom of God. Each was willing to push and shove his way to the front, rather than humbling himself and allowing God to lift him up in due time. They hoarded prestige for selfish purposes and continually concerned themselves with their own good reputation and standing in the community.

As a whole, the Jews remained an inferior nation of people compared to the affluence and power of the Romans. Hence, the Jews were waiting on their God to snatch the scepter of world domination from the hand of the Roman Empire and return it to their king, the coming son of David. Certainly the Jews were assured a place of honor in the coming kingdom, or so they thought. In fact, these places were reserved for those whom God had prepared. The meek, the poor in spirit, and the humble in heart were instead called up from their low place and were asked to fill the seats of honor in the kingdom. Many unassuming souls throughout Israel and Judea responded appropriately and helped to lay the foundation of Christ's church. But the majority of the Jewish leaders refused to come to Jesus in this manner. Without realizing it, they gave up the place of honor that God had intended for them. Even the Gentiles who once sat outside will be called in to enjoy the feast in the kingdom of God.

The first Gospel issued by Matthew (taking a date of composition around 50 AD) was a clear call to his fellow Jews to accept Jesus as the Christ and to come into his church. There is speculation as to whether his work was originally penned in Hebrew or Greek, and some even point to Aramaic (although Matthew may have written another work called "*The Sayings of Jesus*" in which this Aramaic evidence points). He clearly depicted Jesus as Israel's Messiah and gave

around fifty Old Testament references to sway Jewish hard-liners. Matthew also included several warnings to his own people about their overall pride and conceited spirit. To solicit their humility, he demonstrated the nature and spirit of Jesus in several passages. As a tax collector, Matthew was undoubtedly snubbed by the prominent Jews within the religious community throughout his adult life (and possibly longer had his father held a similar occupation). Yet his humble response to Jesus allowed God to lift him up and bestow honor upon him, designating him an apostle. This is an excellent example of Jesus taking someone of low position in the religious community and exalting them to a position of honor within his ministry. Such is the kingdom of God.

Matthew's records Jesus' appeal to his own people, the Jews

[Matthew 5:3-8](#)

[Matthew 11:28-30](#)

[Matthew 18:2-4](#)

[Matthew 23:5-12](#)

God had already warned his people about their pride, their selfish ambition, and their lack of concern towards the needy through his prophet, Ezekiel

[Ezekiel 16:48-49](#)

[Ezekiel 34:17-24](#)



The Great Banquet

Luke 14:15-24

“Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”, exclaimed a man present at the dinner, which apparently encouraged Jesus to continue this line of teaching. The parable of the Great Banquet is further proof that the Jews had rejected their invitation into the kingdom and were thus rejected as a chosen people holy to God.

It is reasonable to conclude that the three waves of invitations to the banquet represented the order in which the Gospel would come to the first century world. The first invitation had been offered to those who were responsible for shepherding the Lord's people: to the priests, rabbis, and experts in the Law. It was becoming painfully obvious however that most of these men had joined together to oppose Jesus, thus excusing themselves from the kingdom – the banquet prepared by the God.

The second wave of invitations (the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame) might very well represent the outcasts or less prominent members of the Jewish community. These were the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the “sinners”, and even some unschooled and ordinary fishermen. These would later be called apostles, evangelists, teachers, and overseers in the churches of Christ. We might even place the Samaritans in this group, as Jesus purposely taught and ministered to this area. However, it would not be until the years after the inception of the

church in Jerusalem (during the dispersal following the martyrdom of Stephen – [Acts 8:4-5](#)) that Philip the Evangelist would reap a harvest in Samaria. So perhaps they are best included in the third wave.

Still, the banquet hall had not yet been filled. The host sent his servants out one last time with the final invitation to those far away along the roads and country lanes. In keeping with our conclusions, these final guests to come in would be the Gentiles. God had reserved a place for the many nations once excluded from the kingdom. The doors of the church eventually opened up to the Gentiles and they came to the baptismal waters in droves. Churches of several thousand disciples were built in many cities within the Roman Empire and beyond. Gentiles (and even displaced Jews) living in Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, Athens, Ephesus, Colossus, and many more cities would embrace the good news message and accept the invitation of eternal life through faith and obedience to Christ.

[Acts 28:25-28](#)

[Romans 1:5](#)

[Romans 1:16](#)

[Romans 3:29-30](#)

[Galatians 3:8](#)

[Ephes. 3:6](#)



[The Cost of Being a Disciple](#)

[Luke 14:25-27](#)

As Jesus made his way to Jerusalem, large crowds of people joined the procession of apostles, faithful disciples, and women followers. As the Passover neared, it would not be uncommon to see many families and groups of people traveling together to the Holy City for the week-long celebration. On this particular year, many Jews began their pilgrimage a bit early to get a firsthand glimpse of this fascinating movement. Certainly they hoped to uncover the mystery and controversy surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. Perhaps it was one of these observers who years later would testify to Luke about what he had witnessed, for this final journey to Jerusalem is documented much more thoroughly in his Gospel than any of the other three.

Jesus' faithful disciples now made up a small percentage of the large crowd traveling together to Jerusalem. These committed few had not just joined Jesus' entourage on the way to the feast; they had left everything they knew to follow him. Some had not seen their homes or their families in months. Others had nothing to return to and nowhere else to go; they owed their very lives to Jesus and would follow him wherever he went.

So we see that two very diverse types of people composed the company surrounding Jesus – the committed and the curious. He turned to them all and with the same words confounded the majority of the crowd and encouraged the few. For those who had taken on the yoke of discipleship and had completely forsaken their former selves, they surely felt some sense of validation as they watched Jesus call the half-hearted onlookers to carry their cross. Those on the fringe were ordered to place their trust in the Lord above self, family, and loved

ones, as the disciples had already done. Those who simply wanted a closer look at the man from Galilee were directly challenged. There would be no back-row observers in this movement. You were either in all the way or you had compromised your true calling, and compromise was not an acceptable option. A disciple loves God and upholds their commitment to Christ above all else, including self.

Much has been said regarding the English rendering of **Luke 14:26**. The Greek word *miseo* is at the center of the discussion. The verb is translated here as “hate” in all major English Bibles including the NIV, KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, and others. The Greek definition is as follows:

miseo, *mis-eh'-o*; from a primary **misos** (*hatred*); to *detest* (especially to *persecute*); by extension to *love less* :- hate (-ful).²⁰

Of the 40 times that the NIV uses the English verb *to hate*, 38 of those were translated from the Greek root *miseo*. Expressions of Jesus like “*All men will hate you because of me*” (**Luke 21:17**), “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’*” (**Matthew 5:43**) and “*Blessed are you when men hate you*” (**Luke 6:22**) are all renderings of the Greek verb *miseo*, meaning *to hate* or *to detest*. Only by inference are we allowed to use the definition *to love less* as a rendering of **miseo**.

Should we assume that Jesus simply meant to say that we must love our families, loved ones, and ourselves less? Less than whom? Jesus doesn’t say, nor does this sentence construct a comparison between love and hatred, or some degree of either emotion. Had a comparison been offered, the rendering “*to love less*” might nicely fit. But by assuming that Jesus did not mean to communicate the word *hate* or *detest* to his hearers, we might be taking the ‘umph’ out of an intended verbal blow. What the crowd most certainly heard – so much as it is written in the Greek – is that they must detest their mother and father, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even their own life in order to be a disciple of Jesus. No further explanation or apology was given. This is the cost of being a disciple.

To love God more than anything else – more than family, friends, children, even self – is a consistent biblical principle. We might all agree that this is the figurative meaning behind Jesus’ words in **Luke 14:26**. Still, for those whose commitment to Christ has cost them the good favor of family, such a bold statement needs no clarification. To those who have placed the lives of their wife and children at risk to bring the Gospel to the farthest reaches of the world, there is no need to argue the true Greek text or the possible tone behind Jesus’ admonition here. To those who have sacrificed personal gain, time, and honor for the kingdom of God, this verse reads crystal clear as is. And for those who’ve shed their blood and lost their lives for Christ, it’s a bit embarrassing to think of explaining to them that in order to be a disciple, they must love themselves a little less.

²⁰ Greek 3404; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Read Mark 10:28-30

Count the Cost

Luke 14:28-30

Jesus then cautioned any of his would-be followers and his current disciples. He issued a short parable about building a tower and the need to first estimate the cost before one can undertake such a task. A tower stands above most other structures and can be seen for miles. Thus an incomplete structure would certainly stand out as an object of ridicule.

Jesus' hearers were able to understand many lessons from this brief analogy. Their decision to follow Christ must not be made in haste, but with the desire and faith to see their commitment to his teachings to the end – faithful throughout their lifetime, even unto death. A temporary willingness to surrender was unacceptable. Discipleship on a trial basis would not work. Before a person begins, they need to be resolved to bring to completion the calling set in front of them. When disciples bail out on their commitment to Christ, they bring disrepute upon themselves and on God.

Jesus' disciples were now called to reconsider their decision to follow the Lord and make sure that their foundation of faith was indeed substantial enough to build the rest of their lives upon it. Those in the valley of irresolution were shown the gravity of the decision that faced them. Jesus also established the inherent wisdom in making such a commitment only after a realistic estimate of the cost. The biblical standard of love and commitment to God supercedes all else – including friends, family, and self. Make no mistake, the call to follow Jesus was and is revolutionary. It is the most crucial decision life has to offer. It must be resolved with seriousness and great faith.

A true disciple doesn't leave the back door open just in case his or her relationship with God loses its appeal. As followers of Christ, we will all become weary at times. The world will begin to attract us with an enormous pull. Yet these are the very times when you are able to test and see how strong is your resolve! How absurd to lay down your life for Jesus – to make a clear and obvious distinction between your old self and your new purpose in life – only to shrug off the weight of the cross during these times of testing or persecution. Those who forsake their decision to follow Christ and fall away often seek a refuge of self-absorption and self-consolation. While those around them who have witnessed this wavering are now given reason to discount such a radical decision to obey God in the first place.

Sometimes, these fall-aways join in with others that share a common unwillingness to make such a profound surrender to God. Together they end up creating a form of godliness that is nothing more than a complete compromise of biblical discipleship. And yet they still wish to justify their decision and new-found religion and come up with many arguments to defend themselves. They claim to be "free in Christ", but in fact they merely remain free from the yoke of Christ. They profess to follow God, not men. Yet one wonders if they would even submit to the leadership of godly men like Peter or Paul or any of the other apostles if they were present. They attest to now worship and serve God by their own free will, when in fact they are reluctant to completely crucify their own will. Their sin, they argue, is a personal issue between themselves and God. But by not

being willing to openly deal with their sin between trusted disciples and in love confront sin in the lives of their brothers and sisters, do they not fall prey to the same fear that keeps the lost world in the darkness (**John 3:19-21**)?

God cannot be mocked. Their fine sounding arguments will crumble on the day everything is made known. Those who have fallen away and in so doing have subjected the name of Christ to public shame will receive their due. Through the years however, many disciples have shipwrecked their faith only to return to the Lord again after a tremendous humbling from God. These are the fortunate few. There remains many more whose hearts remain hardened towards God and his kingdom. None of us are impervious to Satan's attack, for he waits patiently for each of us and ensnares us during our weakest hour. So let us continue to pray for God's protection over us as we commit to standing firm even during hardships. Let us also pray for our fallen brothers and sisters, for their hearts to soften again, so that they might be restored before it is too late.

Proverbs 24:10-11

John 3:19-21

Col. 2:4-8

Galatians 6:7-9

Hebrews 6:4-6



Our Surrender to God

Luke 14:31-33

Jesus' next parable describes two kings going to war. He illustrated the simple wisdom in coming to terms of peace for the sake of one's own survival. The outnumbered army does not have a secure standpoint to negotiate or make demands. Instead, they must be willing to totally surrender, yield to the mercy of their opponent, and attempt to bargain based on the simple hope that their vanquisher might act in a lenient nature.

In order to be his disciple, Jesus explained, you must come to him with this spirit of total surrender. We must release our grip on everything we have been given and allow God to take control. As Jesus revealed in **Luke 9:24**, it is better to assume that you have completely lost your life for Christ and now live according to his purpose and his commands. Our mindset as we yield our lives to God in Christ is described in the scriptures as one of surrender (**Luke 14:31**), servitude (**2 Tim. 2:24**), submission (**Hebrews 12:9**), and even slavery (**Romans 6:22**). This is difficult for those of us who are extremely independent, self-driven, self-focused, and even successful. For those who crave the notion of being in total control of their lives, this level of surrender is agonizing. Some have even labeled this type of forfeiture to the Lord as a crutch for people with weaker characters – a means of support for insecure individuals who are unable to cope with life's challenges on their own. On the contrary, the ability to gather up all your God-given abilities, talents, intellect, and the gift of freewill and to willingly

subject yourself to the leadership of Christ (and to stay faithful in this decision) requires the highest degree of discipline, character, self-control, and self-sacrifice.

So why does God require this level of total surrender from us in order to be his disciple? The answer is LOVE. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we are relinquishing our lives into the hands of the very same God that created us and loves us more than our minds can comprehend. As our creator, God takes on the very nature of a loving father watching over his own children. He is protective of us and longs to direct our steps, fulfill our dreams, and shape our characters. We can run away and renounce him, for he gives us this choice. But if we are rebellious to the commands of God, he can no longer shape our lives, nor can he offer us guidance when we wish to be free from his yoke of leadership. Like a Father trying to manage an undisciplined and unyielding child is God with us when we refuse to surrender our lives to the scriptures. Yet when we submit to him as loving and obedient children, we are honoring him as our Father and trusting in him to keep our paths secure.

As we enter into this covenant relationship with God, he considers the bond as strong and eternal as marriage. Just as a loving husband does not want to share the bond of intimacy between he and his wife with anyone else, so God does not want our love for him to be shared with an immoral world. From of old, God has frankly described his nature as jealous. Once we are his, he becomes possessive of us and will remain faithful to us. Like a husband, he desires – in fact commands – total faithfulness to him. What a deep wound is produced when a husband or wife is unfaithful and becomes intimate with someone outside the covenant of marriage. This is the same anguish felt by God when we are not faithful to him. It is not that God is merely angered by our sin and is anxiously waiting to punish our every compromise. Rather, he is just deeply hurt by our adulterous affairs with the world. As was just expressed by Christ in **Luke 14:28-30**, it would be better to simply reject God's covenant altogether than to enter into a relationship with him and then continually flirt with sin and embrace the sinful world like an unfaithful spouse. Our surrender to God must be a demonstration of our deep love for him. Forsaking all others, we must eagerly desire to give ourselves wholly to Christ in a life-long covenant relationship. And compared to the glorious riches and eternal blessings that God will bestow on his faithful bride (the church), whatever we might have given up or forsaken in this life will look like complete and utter rubbish.

God's love for his people like a Father

Isaiah 43:4-7

Jeremiah 3:19-20

John 15:9-10

2 Cor. 6:14-18

Hebrews 12:7-10

1 John 2:15-17

1 John 3:1

God's love for his people like a husband

Isaiah 54:5-6

Isaiah 62:3-5

Jeremiah 2:2

Hosea 2:16, 19-20

Ephes. 5:28-32

Rev. 19:7-8

Jeremiah 2:32

Rev. 21:2-4



The Salt of the Earth

Luke 14:34-35

Finally, Jesus used another short parable to explain that followers of Christ are useful to God and essential to the lost world. Salt, whether it is used as a seasoning or a preservative, was and still is a useful substance. If it loses the properties of salt, it loses its usefulness – plain and simple. What distinguishes a disciple of Christ from every other soul on earth is that they live out the commands of God and carry with them the word of truth, which is the hope of a lost and dying world. If we compromise the very characteristics that make disciples distinct from the world around us, we are then rendered useless to God. We are essentially refusing to allow him to direct our steps to fulfill his purposes and we become unqualified to call others into the glorious light of truth. The end result is that we will not taste God’s eternal salvation, nor will we lead others to the light of God. In the words of Jesus, we are fit only to be “thrown out”.

Matthew 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Mark 9:50

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

The revolutionary message of discipleship was issued loud and clear throughout **Luke 14:25-35**. Jesus continued to reemphasize the standard of following his teachings, which was and is total commitment. But let us not forget the motive behind this fervent calling, which is love. God’s overwhelming love for his creation and his desire to enter into an everlasting covenant with each one of us brought about his appearance in the flesh. Jesus willingly became nothing; he relinquished the glory of the heavenly realms to come to earth and serve mankind. He modeled for us total surrender, total humility, and total commitment. And he commanded from his followers this same level of surrender, humility, and commitment. The driving force that compels us to give ourselves completely and unconditionally to God must be love. Our love for God must be unrivaled. We must forsake all else in order to enter into a life-long marriage with our Creator.

When we repent and confess Jesus as our Lord, our baptism subsequently serves to unite each of us with his death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. We

become one with God as his Spirit begins to dwell within us from that time forward. Furthermore, it is at that very moment when his blood washes away our sins and our guilt as we stand before God with a good conscience, making the simple and yet profound pledge to live for him completely and serve him forever (**1 Peter 3:21-22**). As a husband and wife are officially bound in the covenant of marriage at their wedding ceremony, this immersion makes our union with God official as it is the moment in time where God sends his Holy Spirit to dwell inside of us. Collectively, the entire body of Christ is being prepared to become his bride as we await the ultimate wedding day in the heavenly realms following the end of days and the beginning of eternity (**Rev. 19:6-9, Rev 21:1-4**).

In light of this invitation, shall we compromise the standard of following Christ? Is there any wisdom in loving the world or anything the world has to offer? Should we waiver and become unfaithful to the vows that we took when we were baptized into Christ? The answer to each of these questions is a resounding NO! Let us be completely faithful to God and useful to him during our short life on earth.

1 John 5:6-8

1 Peter 3:21

Romans 6:1-5

Col. 2:12

Titus 3:4-7

Philip. 2:5-11



Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-10

The three parables in **Luke 15** all focus on something that was once lost and then was found. There are at least two possible angles to approach these three stories. Was Jesus intending to symbolize a person who was once in a right relationship with God (i.e. a disciple who had fallen away) and is being restored to the faith? The argument for this reading contends that the sheep was once in the fold, the coin was once in the possession of its owner, and the younger son was once a part of the family and will always be considered a son. The other possibility is that Jesus meant to portray those who are spiritually lost and in need of salvation being found and rescued from darkness. Perhaps both interpretations deserve merit, as we see these two trends occurring within the kingdom of God today.

To best determine the desired intention of these parables, we should look at the audience to whom they were directed. As usual, Jesus was surrounded by his loyal followers, which encompassed a diverse cross-section of Jewish society. This group included (but by no means was it exclusively comprised of) those Jews who were widely considered as misfits to the traditional Jewish society. The fact that Jesus not only welcomed these outcasts but also considered them his disciples brought on the critical eye of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Beginning in **Luke 15:3**, Jesus appears to be responding directly to the Jewish leaders and confronting their pride described in **vs. 1-2**. They had become self-

righteous bigots, unable to see their need of repentance, unaware that their relationship with God was severed. They did not imagine themselves spiritually lost, but instead they looked down upon those who were repenting and reconciling with God in numbers.

Certainly the lost sheep, coin, and son can represent anyone who is spiritually separated from God, not just the outcast Jews or even the lost Gentiles and Samaritans. Jesus had come to a lost world to seek and save those in darkness and to train his disciples to do the same. Each individual who responded to their message with true repentance and devotion would find salvation and would be the cause for rejoicing in heaven.

The point that all of these lost items were in fact restored to their rightful owner should not be ignored. We must understand that every human being was created by God in his image and was born in a right relationship with him. Only when a person matures and begins to deliberately rebel against God and their conscience do they sever this bond with their Creator. As a person begins to live in sin, they start to build a wall of separation between themselves and God and are left in spiritual darkness. Consequently, when a lost soul comes to Jesus for salvation he or she is in fact restoring that relationship with God and reconciling all of their years of rebellion and hurt towards him. All have been led astray and misguided by Satan, but we can be rescued if we return to God – our Creator, our rightful owner, and our heavenly Father.

Isaiah 59:1-2
1 Peter 2:9-10
Col. 1:13-14
Acts 26:16-18

Col. 1:21-23a
Romans 5:8-11
2 Cor. 5:16-20



The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-24

The story of the prodigal son (recorded only in Luke) is one of the most recognizable parables of Jesus. It is a vivid portrayal of a father's love for his long lost son, even though the son had treated his father and his inheritance with contempt. To start with, the younger son asked for his share of the inheritance before his father's death, a selfish and disrespectful request. This type of rebelliousness would have become common knowledge in a Judean town or village, bringing dishonor and humiliation to the father of such a wayward child. The son continued to show a lack of reverence as he foolishly squandered away that which his father had worked a lifetime to save. He lacked character and moral discretion. He was a disgrace. He was lost.

As time passed and the money ran out, the younger son was left with nothing. He was humbled and sank to the lowest form of menial labor. Jesus knew how to paint a picture of squalor for the Jews considered pigs to be unclean and detestable – much less the slop that they were fed. Only when stripped of

everything including his pride and self-respect did the rebellious son consider returning to his father. He rehearsed his speech, agreeing to come back only as a worker in his father's fields. It appears that the one-time rebel was willing to take responsibility for his iniquity and did not even feel worthy to remain a son in his father's house. He was willing to live separately in his father's servant quarters. He only hoped for a second chance to rebuild his life and regain some sense of dignity.

The father's love and unexpected compassion towards his disobedient son is perhaps the most striking aspect of this parable. Even though the son had brought disrepute to their family and had scorned his father's estate, he was met with open arms and a kiss. As planned the son asked only to become like one of his father's servants. Despite his request he was immediately decked with the finest clothes and jewelry. Though he had become a disgrace his father honored him as they celebrated his return with a feast. The feast theme was often used by Jesus to represent those who were being welcomed into the kingdom of God.

In the father's own words (as told by Jesus), his youngest son was for all practical purposes dead and was now alive again. This same Greek word *nekros*²¹ used earlier to describe the widow's physically dead son in [Luke 7:15](#) is used again to illustrate the condition of the wayward son. Jesus makes this verbal association in [Luke 15:24](#) as the father is depicted saying, "*For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*" When someone is lost they are spiritually dead. They are separated from God and remain in total darkness – completely cut off from the living. When they are found they become spiritually alive. They are now unified with God as they are brought into his wonderful light.

Unfortunately, the parable of the prodigal son represents a vast majority of the world. Billions of wayward souls are suffering the consequences of a lifetime filled with sin and selfishness. They continually sink down into the mire of spiritual depravity that they've created. A chosen few eventually they become disillusioned with the hype and the lie that is sin. Deep within their hearts is a small flicker of conscience – even a hope that somehow God is watching over them and still cares for them. By their own initiative they come to their senses and step out on faith. Humbled and broken, they begin to seek after a merciful God. They discover at long last that the only truth in this world rests within God's word and the only real hope in life is found within his promises. What a mountain of sin God is willing to pardon when we come to him with remorse and a willingness to take responsibility for our many transgressions!

A much smaller fraction of the population – those who have fallen away from God and find themselves in the pit of despair – might also find consolation in this parable. We can maintain that this parable is likewise directed to a wayward believer only if we concede that a disciple who rejects their walk with God and returns to a life of sin has once again become lost and spiritually dead. They are once more separated from God and have reentered a state of spiritual darkness. If they die in this state they will not have the blood of Christ to atone for their sins. Nevertheless, if they get a grip on their sinful nature, repent and

²¹ Greek 3498; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

renounce their immoral behavior, and return humbly to God then they too are permitted to place their trust in God's compassion and great mercy. Their hope is that they too will one-day feel the gentle weight of the Father's best robe, to be given a ring on their finger and sandals on their feet, and to have a chair at the Great Banquet reserved for them.

John 5:24-25
Romans 6:23
Romans 7:11
Ephes. 2:1-5
Ephes. 5:14b

2 Tim. 2:25-26
Hebrews 10:26-27
James 5:19-20
2 Peter 3:9



The Disgruntled Son

Luke 15:25-32

Certainly the older son in this parable personifies the Jewish nation and their general attitude towards God and those who were soon to be welcomed into his kingdom. When the older son heard the news of his brother's return he refused to go to the celebration. Jesus had earlier accused the experts in the law of refusing to enter the kingdom, even going so far as preventing others from entering. The Pharisees also criticized Jesus for welcoming those outcast Jews that they had considered as unclean and unfit for doing good. Jesus found room for them in his ministry because they came to him as the younger son did – as unworthy servants. Even as the churches of Christ began to welcome the Gentiles the reaction from the Jews and even many Jewish Christians would also be one of skepticism and discrimination.

Despite the eldest son's obstinate behavior, Jesus depicts the father coming out to plead with his son. God demonstrated his extreme patience with the Jewish people as Jesus ministry was almost exclusively presented to these guardians of the Mosaic Law. They were offered the first opportunity to join in the fulfillment in the God's kingdom. Jesus visited very few Gentile cities and his ministry to Samaria was likewise limited. He spent the majority of his life pleading with his own people, the Jews, to come to him for salvation. He is never seen rejecting an invitation to socialize at the house a Pharisee. Instead he used these opportunities to reveal to these religious leaders what type of heart God required of them. Years later when the disciples begin to carry the Gospel to distant cities and provinces they would consistently commence their preaching in the synagogues and offer the remnant of displaced Jews a first glimpse of the message of Christ's resurrection. Many of these Jews welcomed their preaching and became believers. But many more refused the good news altogether and even persecuted the disciples as they then took their message to the Gentiles.

The answer given by the disgruntled older son to his father precisely captures the attitude of the religious leadership existing during the time of Jesus' ministry. Although the youngest son came to his father simply wanting to

become a hired hand, he was reinstated as a son. His brother had always been a son in his father's house yet he considered himself like one of the hired hands! His lack of gratitude is obvious as he expresses, *"All these years I've been slaving for you"*. Throughout the Old Testament God dealt with the contempt shown him by the priests and religious leaders. God has always desired that our commitment to him be the willing result of our love and appreciation for him and the goodness and security he provides for us. When we begin to regard our service to God as a burden, we become like hired hands looking back at our many years of labor with dissatisfaction.

To his father the eldest son claimed he *"never disobeyed your orders"*, which accurately personified the Pharisees line of thinking. As we've mentioned earlier in this commentary, the Pharisees equated upholding the Law as true righteousness before God while any infraction of the Law was to be dealt with seriously. They intensely studied and did not disobey the letter of the Law. But in doing so they failed to see the big picture contained within God's covenant with Israel. God unequivocally desired that his people would learn to love him with all of our hearts, to extend genuine love to their fellow man, and to care for those in need. Obedience to his commands was and is nothing more than a demonstration of love and trust in him and his words.

Throughout the centuries, God's people wavered in their commitment and love for him, seeking refuge in the Lord in times of disaster and forgetting God's covenant during times of prosperity or calm. As seen in the eldest son's expression *"you never gave me even a young goat"*, God's people were often ungrateful and oblivious to the many blessings they had received from their heavenly Father until they were stripped of them. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law were not alone in their hardened attitude towards Jesus. Instead, they were simply a continuation of a reoccurring pattern endured by God many times before. And now they stood as stumbling blocks to God's true movement in Christ as they scorned both the return of the wayward sinners and the "undeserved" forgiveness and compassion given them by the Lord. In just a few sentences, Jesus masterfully captured the essence of God's vast love for fallen man and displayed the difference between a heart that is pleasing to him and one that is unacceptable.

God's people continually wavering, burdened, and ungrateful

Psalm 78:34-39

Malachi 1:11-13a

Malachi 2:5-8

Jesus' ministry to the lost sheep of Israel

Matthew 10:5-7

Matthew 15:24

The Jews (older son) – "hired hand" mentality and refusal to enter the banquet

John 10:12-13

Matthew 22:2-3

The invitation to the kingdom opened up to all

Matthew 21:31a-32

Rev. 22:17

Ephes. 2:11-19

The Shrewd Manager

Luke 16:1-13

The sixteenth chapter of Luke consists almost entirely of two parables of Jesus regarding wealth, the proper and improper use of money, and a warning against the love of riches. The first parable is a peculiar story of a dishonest manager that is commended. The story begins as a certain rich man informs his manager that he was being fired because he had not been trustworthy in handling the man's possessions. This is the first lesson of the parable, as pointed out by Jesus afterwards in **vs. 10-12**. Jesus expected his disciples to be accountable and trustworthy with the things entrusted to us, even the things of this world. Though he commanded them to avoid love of money, Jesus did not promote fiscal irresponsibility, laziness, or a half-hearted effort in secular careers.

Let us not forget that the manager put himself in this predicament in the first place because he was not reliable with the responsibilities given him. In fact, he had a reputation of being wasteful that came back to haunt him. Perhaps that is the reason why he does not seem to own any wealth of his own. **Proverbs 12:24** states, *"Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor."* The rich man in the parable is most likely the one who obtained a strong business and a good store of wealth through diligence and hard work. Often, those individuals who own almost nothing of value don't understand or appreciate the hard work involved in gathering and maintaining an abundance of goods. They fail to understand the value of ownership and the burden that is placed upon the owner to care for and maintain his belongings. Again **Proverbs 12:27** accurately describes this habit: *"The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions."* As we move on to discuss the other lessons in this parable, let us not disregard the value of diligence in all of our endeavors and the importance of trustworthiness in handling the material things of this world.

The Bible teaches that we must be able to provide for ourselves (**2 Thess. 3:12**), our immediate family, and our relatives (**1 Timothy 5:8**), if they are truly in need. Our character is often revealed by the way we apply our hearts, our minds, and our talents to our profession. And the degree that we are reliable and trustworthy in dealing with our income speaks volumes about what lies within our inner self. A sure qualification for leadership in the kingdom of God must certainly be a person's financial stability and reliability. For if they do not have the competence to deal faithfully with their money how will they be able to demonstrate integrity and grit when confronted with the pressure of leading others in the spiritual battle?

Read Proverbs 10:4, 12:11, 12:14, 13:4, 13:11, 14:23, 21:5
Eccles. 2:24-25
Matthew 25:23
Col. 3:22-24
2 Thes. 3:10-12

Jesus then explained to his listeners that money can be used for godly purposes and thus advance the kingdom. Money certainly has the ability to

influence people, gain favor and good standing, and even win friends. Whether done in an upright manner (as those who are children of the light should do) or through dishonesty, money has impact in this world. Even though the manager was a cheat, his master was not handed a total loss. His master was undoubtedly left in good standing with those whose debts the manager reduced, for they now owed him a favor. Furthermore, those who are wealthy often admire the legitimate power of money. The rich man seemed to appreciate the manager's shrewd act of self-promotion – even if it cost him a bit. And though he was about to be unemployed, the manager had made a few friends that he could now fall back on.

Jesus commanded his disciples to use their money and our possessions to build relationships that will advance God's purposes on earth. As we display a generous spirit and offer hospitality to others we will no doubt build up our reputation and good standing in our communities. We must constantly search for avenues to use the material blessings entrusted us by God to establish new friendships and strengthen existing ones. Even if you feel that you have very little to offer, God will allow those you serve to see the outpouring of your heart and will multiply any material shortage to the brink of overflowing. There is also a right time to receive the hospitality of others, giving honor and appreciation to them as they serve you and your family. However, we should never tire of giving generously to others without expecting a material return. Instead, the spiritual reward will be great for those who have used their wealth to refresh others. As we continue to open our lives and our homes to the world, God is able to open up hearts and minds to see and understand his kingdom. What a joy it is to be a living-breathing example of the Gospel to the lost world.

Read Proverbs 11:25, 13:7, 14:20, 14:24, 19:4, 22:1, 22:7, 22:9
2 Cor. 9:10-11
1 Tim. 6:17-19

In **Luke 16:8-9** Jesus explained a couple more lessons from this parable. The first is that the world is very shrewd when dealing with money. The rendering “shrewd” is taken from the Greek word *phronimos*, which is defined as follows:

phronimos, *fron'-ee-mos*; from Greek (phren); *thoughtful*, i.e. *sagacious* or *discreet* (implying a *cautious* character; while Greek (sophos) denotes *practical* skill or acumen; and Greek (sunetos) indicates rather *intelligence* or mental acquirement); in a bad sense *conceited* (also in the comparative) :- wise (-r).²²

Thus, we see that the world, because it loves and cherishes wealth, approaches dealings with caution, wisdom, skill, and practicality. This is to be commended and should not be ignored by God's people. There's nothing inherently wrong with using caution and discretion when it comes to financial

²² Greek 5424; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

transactions, investments, purchases, and paying off debts. As disciples we strive to be free from greed and the love of money, yet we still live in a world in which the need for money and the use of financial resources is unavoidable. As disciples the way we manage our finances is an important facet of our spiritual lives. In some aspects, the world can teach us how to handle our fiscal dealings with wisdom, shrewdness, and watchfulness lest we get burned and swindled because of our naivete.

Jesus even addressed the handling of money within the kingdom in this short parable. It is not uncommon to see the borrowing and lending of money between disciples (*the people of the light* – vs. 8). However, these transactions are often carried out with an embarrassing lack of wisdom, accountability, and sound financial advice. Consequently, many believers have been burned when sin is committed against them by an irresponsible brother or sister in the Lord. The lender must assume at least a share of the blame because so often they did not see the need to use a reasonable element of shrewdness in the said matter (and usually it is done with a good heart and good intentions).

Why does this negligence find its way into the church so frequently? Perhaps it is simply because these transactions occur between believers and thus we are compelled to give more freely and ignore the same measures of shrewdness we would use when dealing with those in the world. Nevertheless, we must beware of such negligence, for a financial loss is not the only thing at stake when such transactions go bad. If we refuse to employ some degree of caution when dealing fiscally with our brothers and sisters harm can be done both to those who are giving and to those who are given to. Christians who are already unwise and careless in their sinful nature are further weakened in character if we allow their financial dereliction to increase. Reliable believers who are more equipped to give may exhaust their generosity if it is not appreciated but instead treated with contempt by untrustworthy disciples.

In the church, we often overlook the necessity of using good judgment in these types of matters. Think of how many predicaments would have been avoided if they were handled with the same degree of discernment as would be used if the situation involved a non-believer. Perhaps it is because we feel that the Bible has no precedent for shrewdness in these matters. However, I believe Jesus instructed us here in **Luke 16:8** not to forsake good sense and fair diplomacy in the fellowship. True, those who are able are commanded by the Lord both to lend freely and to give generously to those who really are in need. Lending means that money has been given and repayment is an understanding, while giving requires no further action from the receiver.

I have sometimes heard it said in the church that giving freely is the only acceptable transaction among believers. However, borrowing also has its uses and is not unbiblical (**Matt. 5:42**). To prevent divisions in the church, those who lend to other believers are not to add on exorbitant interest or exact usury and they must even be resolve in their hearts that they may never be repaid in full (**Luke 6:34-35**). That does not absolve the borrower of their responsibility to repay the debt or excuse their wickedness if they take advantage of their brother or sister in the Lord. Ultimately, we must employ greater caution and shrewdness to better

protect the borrowers, the lenders, the givers, and the needy within the fellowship. Hopefully we can prevent altogether the potential divisions within the brotherhood of believers that these types of episodes can so easily produce.

Those in the kingdom who are blessed with sound economic sagacity should assume some responsibility in training others to deal responsibly in fiscal matters. They should employ their talents in the church to advise those that are truly in need. Perhaps others need to be challenged to overcome their sin of greed and neglect in this area. Let us not turn a deaf ear to the poor and needy within the church. Neither should we lecture those who fall on hard times unexpectedly, for time and chance can catch up to us all. Rather as children of the light let us take heed of Jesus' words and apply shrewdness and good common sense – along with compassion and generosity – within the church when dealing with the money that God has entrusted us.

1 Thes. 5:12-15

Ephes. 4:28

Psalm 37:21

Psalm 112:5

Neh. 5:9-10

Matthew 5:42

Luke 6:34-35



The Law

Luke 16:14-18

As Jesus spoke about money the Pharisees were again put on the hot seat. They immediately began to justify themselves and stopped listening to his parables altogether. They even began to sneer at Jesus who was seldom seen handling money and seemed to have few possessions if any. Thus, they refused to be advised about their use of money from this vagabond teacher.

Jesus paused between parables and challenged the Pharisees. He first identified their lack of insight into the truly important things of God. Though they claimed to have a thorough knowledge of God's laws and an understanding of the means to please him, their thinking had become fruitless. In fact, their application of the Law revolved around the very things that justified their own heartless service to God and God's people. They claimed to have deep convictions in all the significant matters of God's covenant through Moses, yet they failed to hold true even to the most black and white issues such as divorce. If they had compromise their convictions about divorce what about the less definitive and more heart-level matters of God's law? Surely these leaders had become nothing more than blind guides leading many into the pit of darkness without even knowing it.

Since the time of John the Baptist the message of God's advancing kingdom was preached and the covenant of Moses would soon expire. However, the written record of the Law would remain as a part of God's complete and inspired word for all time. Jesus explained here that the words of the Mosaic covenant would never pass away even though the day would soon come where it

was no longer binding on God's people. Born a Jew, Jesus made sure to adhere to the commands of the Mosaic Law during his lifetime. In fact, he is the only one to uphold God's entire law to perfection! The Law and the entire Old Testament are essential to the message of the kingdom preached by John, Jesus, and soon the disciples throughout the Church Age. They forever stand as conclusive proof that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the many prophecies contained within their verses. They also point to the fulfillment of God's plan for the Church to be established as God's kingdom on earth until the faithful are escorted into his heavenly kingdom.

The Law would also remain to judge those who lived and died under God's covenant through Moses. Jesus' blood will atone for those who adhered to the Law. For those people who fell short of God's commands and even led others astray – i.e. the Pharisees and teachers of the Law during the time of Christ – the same written Law will survive until the end of time to judge them. And God is able to decipher between those who appear righteous and those who are truly righteous, for he knows the hearts of every man and woman.

Truly, the preservation of the Old Testament is a wonderful story in its own right²³, as well as the fulfillment of Jesus' promise in [Luke 16:17](#). We have conclusive evidence that affirms that the Old Testament of Jesus' day was identical to the one we use today, the only exception being the order in which the books occurred. Jesus referred to the divisions of the Old Testament in [Luke 24:44](#) as the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (often called "the Writings"). This coincides with the divisions of the Jewish Old Testament that consisted of 22 book-groups. Whereas our modern Old Testament contains 39 separate books, these books actually match the original 22 books that were collected and canonized about the time of Ezra (400 BC). The comparison of the Hebrew Bible and our modern Old Testament is as follows:

ANCIENT HEBREW BIBLE: TOTAL 22 BOOKS (GENESIS – CHRONICLES)

I. THE LAW OF MOSES

1. GENESIS
2. EXODUS
3. LEVITICUS
4. NUMBERS
5. DEUTERONOMY

B. THE LATTER PROPHETS

10. ISAIAH
11. JEREMIAH-LAMENTATIONS
12. EZEKIEL
13. THE TWELVE (MINOR PROPHETS)

II. THE PROPHETS

A. THE FORMER PROPHETS

6. JOSHUA
7. JUDGES-RUTH
8. SAMUEL
9. KINGS

III. THE WRITINGS

14. PSALMS
15. PROVERBS
16. JOB
17. SONG OF SONGS
18. ESTHER
19. ECCLESIASTES
20. DANIEL
21. EZRA-NEHEMIAH
22. CHRONICLES

OUR OLD TESTAMENT TODAY: TOTAL 39 BOOKS (GENESIS – MALACHI)

I. THE LAW OF MOSES

1. GENESIS
2. EXODUS
3. LEVITICUS
18. JOB
19. PSALMS
20. PROVERBS

III. BOOKS OF POETRY

²³ See *How We Got the Bible, 2nd Ed.* by Neil R. Lightfoot; a primary source for this chapter

4. NUMBERS 21. ECCLESIASTES
5. DEUTERONOMY 22. SONG OF SONGS

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| II. BOOKS OF HISTORY | | IV. BOOKS OF PROPHECY |
| 6. JOSHUA | 24. JEREMIAH | 23. ISAIAH |
| 7. JUDGES | 25. LAMENTATIONS | |
| 8. RUTH | 26. EZEKIEL | |
| 9. 1 SAMUEL | 27. DANIEL | |
| 10. 2 SAMUEL | 28. HOSEA | |
| 11. 1 KINGS | 29. | JOEL |
| 12. 2 KINGS | 30. AMOS | |
| 13. 1 CHRONICLES | | 31. OBADIAH |
| 14. 2 CHRONICLES | | 32. JONAH |
| 15. EZRA | 33. MICAH | |
| 16. NEHEMIAH | 34. NAHUM | |
| 17. ESTHER | 35. HABAKKUK | |
| | | 36. ZEPHANIAH |
| | | 37. HAGGAI |
| | | 38. ZECHARIAH |
| | | 39. MALACHI |

Much of the credit for the preservation of the Old Testament is due to the Massorettes. They were a group of Jewish scholars assembled on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee at Tiberias. They began their work around 500 AD and continued for some five hundred years. Their painstaking attention to detail as they strove to accurately restore and preserve the original text was extraordinary. To eliminate scribal errors they meticulously counted every word and letter of the Hebrew text and employed the concept of numbering the verses within their written text.

The following is a list of some of the most authoritative Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament that have survived through many centuries to ensure the accuracy of our modern text.

Cairo Codex – Dated 895 AD and contains the Former and Latter Prophets

Leningrad Codex of the Prophets – Dated 916 AD

British Museum Codex of the Pentateuch – Dated between 10th –11th Centuries and contains the Five Books of Moses

Complete Leningrad Codex – DATED 1008 AD

Aleppo Codex – Copied in the first half of the 10th Century. It was at one time the entire Old Testament although some portions of the manuscript were destroyed in riots. Currently located in Jerusalem.

Many other sources of the Old Testament exist today and are extremely helpful in restoring our modern text. The Samaritan Pentateuch is traced back as early as 400 BC, around the same time that the Samaritans separated from the Jews. They accepted only the five books of the Mosaic Law to be divinely inspired. The Septuagint – a Greek word meaning “Seventy” – is the Greek

version of the Old Testament traced back to around 250 BC. It was widely circulated during the Roman Empire and would have been the “Bible” of the early church. The Septuagint is the version quoted most often by the Apostles and the New Testament writers. Of all the direct quotes and allusions to the Old Testament found in the book of Luke, all but **Luke 7:27** are based on the Septuagint²⁴. Latin manuscripts of the Old Testament are also numerous. The Septuagint was translated into Latin in around 150 AD and the Latin Vulgate – a direct Hebrew to Latin translation – was the work of Jerome (390-405 AD). Other versions of the Old Testament exist in part in many languages including Aramaic, Syraic, Arabic, Armenian, and others.

Around 1947-48, the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in and around the caves of Qumran. Contained in one of the original finds was a 24-foot long scroll of the book of Isaiah. Other works of the Essene sect that lived near the Dead Sea were also included in this acquisition. The scrolls were dated as far back as 200-100 BC, a monumental discovery. Soon after this original find, the surrounding area including the wilderness of Judea and Masada was combed for additional scrolls and manuscript fragments. From almost every book of the Old Testament some type of fragment was discovered, whether small or substantial. On average, these scrolls pre-date our most reliable Hebrew manuscripts by nearly 1,000 years. Yet when the Dead Sea Scrolls are compared with our existing authorities, it is found that the actual text of the Old Testament has undergone very little alteration during those ten centuries!

With regards to the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings, every stroke of the pen has been preserved as Jesus foretold. Our modern Old Testament text is unrivaled in its historical accuracy, far above any other ancient writing including the New Testament. For the disciples that carried the Gospel to the first century world, the Old Testament writings were their scriptures. And they adamantly proved to their listeners that Jesus was the Messiah, the one whom the prophets foretold. Without using the New Testament, they showed that he rose from the dead on the third day as prophesied.

Disciples in the 21st Century must likewise embrace and utilize the Old Testament as we carry the kingdom message to today’s lost world. We cannot simply rely on the New Testament if we want to remain deeply rooted in the truth of God’s Word. All the events recorded in the New Testament are the fulfillment of God’s eternal promises made to Abraham in the book Genesis and are foreshadowed through the establishment of God’s temporary covenant through Moses. How can we confidently preach the perfect fulfillment of the ages when we don’t recognize or understand the very prophecies in which they were originated?

Psalm 119:89

Isaiah 40:8

John 1:45

Matthew 5:17-18

John 5:45-47

Luke 24:44

Acts 3:19-25

Acts 24:14

Acts 28:23

1 Cor. 10:11

²⁴ From John A. Martin’s Introduction to Luke, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*; Wordsearch5

Luke 24:25-27

1 Peter 1:10-12

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

Within the first two sentences of this parable, we are given the most significant difference between the rich man and the beggar – God knows one of them by name while the other remains nameless. Compared to this, the many other differences between the two characters – their wealth or lack thereof, their personal health and hygiene, their clothes, their social status, etc. – are trivial matters.

Jesus used the rich man in this parable to characterize the Pharisees and the Jewish elite who assumed that God’s favor shone brightly on them and their wealth and good status attested as such. They could easily absolve themselves of the responsibility to care for the sick and the poor within their society by concluding that these individuals had most certainly sinned against God in some way and were receiving their just punishment. His parable smashed the Jewish stereotypes regarding prosperity and poverty as it related to God’s favor and punishment. As the parable unfolds, we find the rich man sitting in agony, begging Abraham to allow Lazarus to touch his tongue with cool water. Jesus keenly described this act of desperation that would have been unthinkable while both were living. Coming in contact with the disease-ridden Lazarus during their lifetime would have made the rich man unclean. Again, the Pharisees justified their lack of concern for the sick and the poor with their stubborn allegiance to the Law in such matters.

The story also presents a vivid portrayal of Abraham – the father of the Israelite nation and most esteemed among the patriarchs – refusing to comply with the rich man’s tormented appeals. The central theme of the parable was a reprimand that Jesus had just given the Pharisees in [Luke 16:14-18](#). Although they claimed to hold tightly to the Law and the prophets, the Pharisees were in fact guilty of breaking God’s covenant on many counts – including the command of Moses with regards to caring for the poor and needy ([Deut. 15:7-11](#)). They would be held accountable for violating the Law of Moses as proclaimed by Christ in [John 5:45-47](#) and in [Luke 16:18](#). As he preached the truth, Jesus was in fact pleading with the Pharisees to repent and turn to God. But they would justify their rejection of his ministry based on their own form of godliness and understanding of the Law and the prophets concerning the Messiah. Jesus now explained to them in this parable that a day would come where they too would plead with God and face rejection – not only from God but also from their father of faith Abraham and from Moses.

The Pharisees could not have realized the true implications of their rejection of Jesus. They were cutting themselves off from the fulfillment of God’s promises made to Abraham. All those who placed their faith in Jesus would become the true heirs to these promises. Those who rejected him would no longer be considered as God’s people, even if they were physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham even addresses the rich man as “son” in [vs. 25](#) to affirm that this man was indeed a physical descendant of Abraham, one of God’s chosen people, and yet he had still been condemned. Secondly, in spurning Jesus they were in fact rejecting Moses, for the Moses himself spoke about the

Christ and the danger of dismissing his words in **Deut. 18:15-19**. Lastly, the Pharisees were rejecting the prophets who together pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection would fulfill God's plan for the salvation of all mankind, as foretold by the prophets. However, the vast majority of influential Jewish leaders and teachers would explain away this miraculous act of fulfillment as well, as Jesus predicted here in **Luke 16:31**.

As the rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to his family, he was given the same reply that Jesus often gave to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. The Jews were already given sufficient evidence from Moses and the prophets to affirm that Jesus was who he claimed to be. Furthermore, they were given irrefutable proof of Christ's divinity in the many miracles he performed. Ironically, Jesus would even raise a man named Lazarus from the dead! (Perhaps he had already raised Lazarus by this time, depending on how the Gospel of John is harmonized with the events here in Luke). This miracle would become widely known among the Jewish people and among the chief priests, but it would not soften their hearts. Instead they would plot to kill both Jesus and Lazarus, as many were putting their faith in the Lord because of this astonishing report. Thus, the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Pharisees, scribes, elders, and chief priests, and was in fact a rejection of all that they claimed to hold as sacred. They were altogether rejecting Abraham, rejecting Moses, and rejecting the prophets.

Deut. 18:15-19

Isaiah 5:24

Isaiah 53:3

Matthew 21:42, 45

Mark 8:31

John 5:45-47

John 12:9-11

Acts 7:51-53

Acts 13:26-27

Let us now take a moment and look at another aspect of this parable, one that concerns the afterlife. The rich man and Lazarus were both taken away after their deaths to very different places, but indeed they were taken to actual locations within the spiritual realms. Although their bodies had been buried and left behind, they were now abiding in a conscious, disembodied state. Neither person is recorded to have appeared before God to receive a judgment, yet we are left to assume that a definite judgment now awaited them both. Thus, we could call their present location an intermediate place of the dead rather than their eternal home. The rich man was taken to a place of fire, agony, and torment. Lazarus was taken to Abraham's side, a place of comfort. Although a great chasm was fixed between both locations, it is possible to see from one to the other and even to communicate through this chasm.

The location described by Jesus as a place of torment and in the words of the rich man a place of fire and agony is the Greek *Hades*, which correlates to the Hebrew *Sheol*. The definitions for these words are as follows:

haidēs, *hah'-dace*; from Greek 1 (a) (as a negative particle) and Greek 1492 (eido); properly *unseen*, i.e. “*Hades*” or the place (state) of departed souls :- grave, hell.²⁵

sh^e'owl, *sheh-ole'*; or **sh^e'ol**, *sheh-ole'*; from Hebrew 7592 (sha'al); *hades* or the world of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*), including its accessories and inmates :- grave, hell, pit.²⁶

According to the scriptures, Hades is an actual place within the spiritual realms; it is not simply the state of death. Although both Hades and Sheol are sometimes referred to as “the grave”, it is apparent by the predominant usage of both terms in the scriptures that a physical grave or tomb in which a dead body is placed is not the desired meaning. The definition that best fits is a place where disembodied spirits are kept – an actual location separate from the physical world. Additional Greek and Hebrew words are used to describe the physical grave in which the bodies of the dead are buried. The Hebrew word is **qeber** or **kever** and the Greek word is **mnema** or **mnemeion**. Their definitions are as follows:

qeber, *keh'-ber*; or (feminine) **qibrah**, *kib-raw'*; from Hebrew 6912 (qabar); a *sepulchre* :- burying place, grave, sepulchre.²⁷

mnema, *mnay'-mah*; from Greek 3415 (mnaomai); a *memorial*, i.e. sepulchral *monument (burial-place)* :- grave, sepulchre, tomb.²⁸

Hades is not synonymous with hell either. Hell is the final home of Satan, the spiritual forces of evil, and the souls of all unsaved men and women. It is a place of everlasting punishment. Hades it is often erroneously translated ‘hell’ in many English Bibles, as it is **Luke 16:23** in the NIV Bible. The Greek word **Gehenna** is used in the New Testament to distinguish the second death and the everlasting place of the damned (which we call hell) from the intermediate place of the dead, Hades. The name Gehenna corresponded to a location within the physical world – the valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem. However, the word is most certainly used to describe a location within the spiritual realms as well. The definition is as follows:

geenna, *gheh'-en-nah*; of Hebrew origin [Hebrew 1516 (gay') and Hebrew 2011 (Hinnom)]; *valley of (the son of) Hinnom*; *gehenna* (or *Ge-Hinnom*), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figurative) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment :- hell.²⁹

²⁵ Greek 86; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

²⁶ Hebrew 7585; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

²⁷ Hebrew 6913; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

²⁸ Greek 3418; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

²⁹ Greek 1067; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

The distinction between *Hades* and *Gehenna* is made clear in **Revelation 20:13-14** as death and Hades shall relinquish their dead to be judged and they (death and Hades) are subsequently thrown into the lake of fire, the second death. The lake of fire is a definite reference to Gehenna (**Matt 5:22, Mark 9:43, James 3:6**).

The scriptures describe yet another chamber within the spiritual realms separate even from Hades and Hell. While Hades is a temporary place for the souls of unsaved man, the Abyss or ‘Tartarus’ is a place of confinement for evil spirits and fallen angels. Their Greek definitions are as follows:

abussos, *ab'-us-sos*; from Greek 1 (a) (as a negative particle) and a variation of Greek 1037 (buthos); *depthless*, i.e. (special) (infernal) “abyss” :- deep, (bottomless) pit.³⁰

tartaroo, *tar-tar-o'-o*; from **Tartaros** (the deepest *abyss* of Hades); to *incarcerate* in eternal torment :- cast down to hell.³¹

It is possible that the Abyss denotes another chamber within Hades although it is certainly a separate location from where the souls of men are confined. Whenever those who exist entirely in the spiritual world are imprisoned prior to their appearance before the great white throne of judgment, they are ordered into the Abyss. Satan is locked up for a time in the Abyss in **Revelation 20:1-3**. Likewise, the beast of **Revelation 11:7** and **17:8** was bound in the Abyss. The legion of demons begged Jesus not to send them into this spiritual prison in **Luke 8:31**. According, the angels who rebelled against God were sent to Tartarus or the Abyss. (In the NIV, **2 Peter 2:4** reads, “*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment*”; using the English rendering “sent to hell” for the Greek verb *tartaros* is not very precise considering Tartarus is not Gehenna but is synonymous with the deepest Abyss within Hades.) The final destination for all the inhabitants of Hades and the Abyss shall be Gehenna – the lake of fire, the second death, or hell.



Sin, Repentance, and Forgiveness **Luke 17:1-4**

Jesus recognized the frequency of sin and the natural tendency of mankind to stumble into iniquity. He was not absolving us from sinning nor was he downplaying the seriousness of sin – far from it. On the contrary, if we cause others to sin we are guilty of a serious offense that carries a spiritual consequence so severe that even a horrible, tortuous death in the physical world cannot

³⁰ Greek 12; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

³¹ Greek 5020; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

compare. Jesus simply acknowledged that his followers would have to learn how to deal with sin in the church and thus he taught on this very subject.

Jesus first spoke about the need to confront sin within the brotherhood of believers. When sin is witnessed in the fellowship it is to be challenged, even rebuked, not ignored. The purpose of confronting one another's wrongdoings is to eradicate the damaging effects of sin before they contaminate the body of Christ. If we tolerate sin in the church we become guilty of an even greater wrong according to the words of Jesus because we are allowing (perhaps even causing) our brothers and sisters to stumble.

Jesus then commanded us to forgive our brother or sister no matter how severe or how often they sin. It doesn't really matter whether the sin is intentional or unintentional, personally directed at you or someone else, major or minor, frequent or rare; we are still called to forgive one another from the heart. We are to forgive even if their repentance does not seem genuine (as would be the case if you were offered an apology seven times in a single day for the same repeated sin). God will hold us accountable not only for the sin that we have committed against others, but also the measure of forgiveness we did or did not extend to our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

In [Matthew 18:15-17](#), Jesus described the proper steps for dealing with our brother's sin in love.

Matthew 18:15-17

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

When you recognize sin the first step is to deal with it swiftly just between you and the brother or sister that sinned. The goal of this confrontation is a victory over Satan – to win your brother or sister over so that they might overcome their sinful nature. Accordingly, the discussion must be born in sincere love for your fellow disciple. We are to present the truth humbly with the intent to settle the matter quickly and forgive any personal hurts. Your aim is not to prove the other guilty of wrong but rather to point out the wrong and call them simply to repent. As Jesus said, the things that cause us to sin are bound to come. So these private meetings should not be uncommon in the fellowship nor should they amount to anything more than a gentle restoration, a brief acceptance of responsibility, and an extension of heartfelt forgiveness.

If a victory over Satan is not attained during this one-on-one encounter another meeting is commanded by Jesus to ensure that the unity of the fellowship is preserved. Both disciples should agree to come together again with two or three more trusted brothers or sisters (depending on the situation). This objective of this second meeting is to bring the guilty party (or parties) to repentance and to

see to it that genuine forgiveness has been granted. In many cases, this second meeting will reveal that both disciples must accept some responsibility for sin, whether it is the initial sin in question or sin that led to the deterioration of the first talk. Oftentimes the original confrontation was not offered in humility or sincere love. It may be that the zealous brother or sister was able to correctly identify the sin of their fellow disciple but because they did not approach the situation in love both parties built up their walls of pride. And once the pride comes neither disciple is willing to deal sensibly. They often become blind to their own iniquity and this prevents an immediate resolution.

It is also quite possible however that an appropriate amount of wisdom and sensitivity was offered in the first confrontation but the issue was still not resolved. The second meeting may simply reveal that the brother or sister in question is not only guilty of the sin in question but they are also out of touch spiritually and thus unable to accept personal responsibility for their wrong. Either way, the ultimate goal of this second meeting remains the same as the first: to overcome Satan, to restore the wayward disciple back to the body of Christ, and to maintain unity within the body of believers.

Jesus explained that further steps might even be necessary. The need for this type of church discipline should arise seldom in a fellowship of faithful brothers and sisters. However, if someone has been talked to several times about his or her sin and they are still without compunction, Jesus commands that such a person be brought before the church and publicly called to repent (assuming they wish to remain in the body). Deliberate sin in the church should not be tolerated, excused, or ignored. A case of church discipline at this level should not be exercised without soliciting the advice and the prayers of elders and evangelists within the congregation or a neighboring congregation of disciples. Again, this gathering must be carried out with an appropriate measure of love and wisdom to help the individual(s) in question and the entire body of Christ. The believers must continue to treat the struggling disciple as a brother or sister in Christ. In fact, now is the time to love them and pray for them all the more.

Bringing a brother or sister before the church is not done exclusively to rescue the sinner from their waywardness. It is also a measure of protection for the rest of the believers against the destructive forces of sin. It should be made clear at this public call to repentance that the Bible commands such individuals to be removed from the fellowship of believers if a failure to repent is once again exhibited. This pattern of church discipline that exposes the consequences of sin in full view of the disciples serves as a warning for the entire church as to the seriousness of unrepentant sin. It reminds us that we are all susceptible to Satan's schemes as he squares off against us.

The final step is to put out of the fellowship those individuals who refuse to repent even after several attempts to call them back to a life of godliness. It should not be argued that because every disciple is guilty of sin we must learn to tolerate an individual who appears to be unwilling or "unable" to repent. The expression, "*There is no difference, for all have sinned*" in **Romans 3:22b-23a** does not imply that all sin is to be treated equally. There is an obvious difference between stumbling and into sin and quickly repenting versus deliberately sinning

and hurting other disciples and polluting the fellowship. A brother or sister who fails to repent of deliberate and ongoing sin must be separated from God's people. The faithful should continue to pray for their wayward brother or sister to come to their senses and radically repent. However, they must respect the advice of the church leadership and purposely distance themselves from the disfellowshipped member, as Jesus instructed in [Matthew 18:17](#). Perhaps this sobering reminder of sin's harsh reality and Satan's swift destruction is the only thing that will wake up a spiritually dull person.

The body of Christ must be kept pure. How is that possible when even the Lord is aware that sin will be present in every gathering of disciples? Part of the solution is found in [Matthew 18:15-17](#) and [Luke 17:1-4](#), which has been discussed here. Another part is found in [1 John 1:6-9](#), a simple instruction for disciples to remain in the light and to be purified by the blood of Christ through exposing and confessing their sin. With these scriptures in mind, it is not sin that should be commonplace in the church but rather confrontation, confession, repentance, forgiveness, and brotherly love. These qualities should dominate the fellowship and set the tone for relationships within the body.

Jesus promised that the gates of Hades would never overcome the church. However, Satan has been given the authority to make war against the saints and even to conquer them ([Rev. 13:7](#)). Individuals who stray from the body and engage in sin are likely candidates to be devoured by Satan ([1 Peter 5:8-9](#)). If we remain deeply united with the fellowship it is Satan who will be crushed under our feet ([Rom. 16:20](#)).

[Romans 3:22a-23](#)

[1 John 1:6-9](#)

[Matthew 16:18](#)

[Rev. 13:7](#)

[1 Peter 5:8-9](#)

[Romans 16:20](#)



Increase Our Faith

Luke 17:5-6

It was now the apostles turn to present Jesus with a request. They wanted the Lord to somehow (miraculously?) increase their faith. Jesus did not grant this request. Instead he challenged them to have at least a mustard seed of faith and they would tap into the power of God themselves. The apostles did not need a miraculous boost of faith – a shortcut to spiritual strength. They needed only to believe in what they had already witnessed during their travels alongside their revolutionary Lord and teacher. By that time they had observed even the dead brought back to life. The deaf had been given the ability to hear. The blind could see, the lame walked, and the unclean were restored. The apostles had taken in hours of inspiring sermons and had even received extensive personal instruction and attention from Christ, the likes of which no one living before them or following would ever be given. Should this not have produced in them great

faith? Even a mustard seed? Yet it is apparent by their request that the apostles were still wrestling with doubts that tugged at their hearts and minds.

Above all, faith is a gift of God (**Eph 2:8**). However, faith comes from hearing and understanding the word of Christ (**Rom. 10:17**). So to the extent that we apply ourselves to God's word and make decisions to believe it and place our full weight on its truth we are able to direct ourselves down the road to increased faith. In other words, the burden of having faith rests not on Christ alone but on our resolve to rely upon God and his promises unveiled within the scriptures.

All too often we want that spiritual shortcut. Like the apostles who asked Jesus to simply increase their level of faith, we too fill the heavens with such requests. If God could only make us more faithful then we'd believe in him and be more effective spiritually. If only his powers could miraculously make us more loving then we wouldn't struggle with selfishness as much. If only the Spirit would take control of our lives it would make up for our lack of self-control. If only...if only...if only... God has deposited the Holy Spirit inside of us, the fruits of which shall bring about in us a miraculous transformation through time as we serve God faithfully. We play a key role in this transformation. We can either rely on God's spirit through faith or we can quench his spirit through sin and unfaithfulness. Let us firmly decide to be more faithful, to be more loving, to be more hopeful, to be more self-controlled, and to be more like Jesus. Let us then rely on the scriptures and on God's power to uphold and advance these resolutions as we strive daily to keep up our end of the agreement.

“Let us” scriptures to show that we must take an active part in our personal spiritual growth, our fight against sin, and our capacity to be faithful.

Romans 13:12-13

Hebrews 4:14

Romans 14:19

Hebrews 6:1

2 Cor. 7:1

Hebrews 10:22-25

Galatians 5:25-26

Hebrews 12:1

Galatians 6:9-10

1 John 4:7

1 Thes. 5:6-8



Serving According to your Faith

Luke 17:7-10

In this four-verse parable Jesus tied together the measure of a person's faith with serving God. After he challenged the disciples to be more faithful he illustrated the humble mindset of a person with great faith. A servant who has been bought or hired at a price and is now obliged to serve his master. The servant strives to please his master and is concerned about himself last. He is not burdened by the work set before him nor does he have to force himself to complete the duties that each day brings forth. He simply recognizes his assigned tasks and sets his mind each day to finish them.

Likewise, a person with great faith recognizes that he or she has been bought at a price – the blood of Christ. They are now obliged to please God with their lives and they do so willingly. They do not serve because of outside compulsion, for they are compelled inwardly by Christ's love. According to their faith they are able to serve God's kingdom with unselfish motives. They are not looking for credit or a pat on the back. They do not seek to be recognized or praised by men. A faithful servant knows that they are unworthy even to serve God's kingdom in the capacity that they have been allowed. But they also know that God watches over them and so they continue to give of themselves in quietness and with great earnestness. They offer themselves wholeheartedly to meet needs of the church and build up the body of Christ.

As a church it might be argued that we have been guilty of violating the spirit of this parable in some ways. We frequently offer a generous amount of praise and encouragement to those who serve in the church. Although this is appropriate in certain situations, it also can bring forth some negative repercussions if we go overboard in our “lifting-up” of people. Without intending to we can sometimes convey that the road to honor and recognition is paved with serving and meeting needs. Disciples who do not understand “unworthy servants” principle are prey to Satan's manipulation. Instead of giving as a result of their faith, they can begin to serve for impure motives. Whether they are conscious of this or not, they can give and serve while expecting to be recognized and commended for their efforts. Along with this expectation comes discouragement if their assistance to the church has gone unheralded or seemingly unnoticed. They can even become resentful of the credit given to others if they feel like their efforts have been ignored.

Another mistake made in the church is allowing people to serve out-of-proportion with their faith. It is not uncommon to see various disciples and even young Christians giving to the body of Christ and serving their brothers and sisters over and above the normal call of duty. They seem quite enthralled by the many opportunities to serve. They recognize the various needs in the church and generously donate their time, their money, their houses, their cars, etc. to meet these demands. And when such a person is willing to freely give, we can sometimes fail to consider whether their faith can handle their amount of sacrifice. Paul makes it clear in [Romans 12:1-8](#) that we are all given different gifts and talents so that we can together offer ourselves to God and meet the needs of the body. However, Paul also warns that each person should do so in accordance with the measure of faith that God has given. When someone gives

beyond their level of faith they run the risk of “burn out” and may feel that they are being used by the church. Satan may tempt them to feel taken advantage of by their brethren or by the leadership. Those who serve and see themselves as unworthy servants can then give of themselves accordingly.

Lastly, we can err as a church by tolerating people who clearly should be serving and giving of themselves more than they are. Sometimes we allow the most useful and mature Christians to fall prey to stinginess and greed. Satan begins to convince these disciples to live in self-preservation mode – to be wary of offering their services to help meet the needs of the body of believers. This too is serving out-of-proportion to your faith (to the other extreme). We mentioned the perils of giving over and above your measure of faith, but it is equally dangerous and detrimental to be a spiritual underachiever. A believer who grows lukewarm and spiritually lazy over time has effectively forgotten that he or she has been purchased by the blood of Christ. They no longer see themselves as unworthy servants before the Lord’s table. Neither do they fully appreciate the opportunity that has been given them to advance God’s kingdom and build up the body of Christ.

As we read Paul’s charge in Romans, let us call all the members of the body to offer themselves as living sacrifices to serve God and his kingdom according to their faith. For you disciples who recognize the many needs of the church and have an appropriate measure of faith to embrace them, the task before you is considerable. Millions of lost souls cry out from the depths of darkness and await a messenger of God. Weak Christians are being stalked by Satan and require a leader with a shepherd’s heart. New disciples full of zeal and idealism are looking for someone with a revolutionary spirit to demonstrate the passion of Jesus. The next generation of believers – the children being raised up in the church – are in desperate need of an inspirational role model to silence the boisterous allure of the world. To the men and women who have the faith to see themselves as unworthy servants of God, the church for you doth wait. No hype, no recognition, and no pat on the back can replace faith. It is the essential ingredient for a servant of God. To you is written **Luke 17:7-10** to be read, understood, and lived. To you are given the heart-moving words to the song, “Rise Up, O Men Of God”. Whenever it is sung in the congregation, let it be a reminder that your participation is essential to meet the needs of the church and God will remember your service to him.

Hebrews 6:10
Galatians 6:9-10

Rise Up, O Men Of God³²

William Merrill, 1911 / William Walter, 1894

*Rise up, O men of God! Have done with lesser things;
Give heart and mind and soul and strength to serve the King of kings.*

³² Text taken from *Songs of the Kingdom*; Discipleship Publications International, 1994

*Rise up, O men of God! His Kingdom tarries long;
Bring in the day of brotherhood and end the night of wrong.*

*Rise up, O men of God! The church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task; Rise up, and make her great!*

*Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where his feet have trod;
As brothers of the Son of Man, Rise up, O men of God!*

The Ten Cleansed

Luke 17:11-19

Jesus continued southward along the Jordan River towards Jerusalem. Upon entering an unnamed village ten men with an infectious skin disease called out to him, appealing to Jesus' well-known compassion for the sick. They stood at a distance in obedience to the Levitical regulations concerning skin disorders. Jesus made no spectacle of his miraculous power at this time but simply sent the ten men to the priests as he had done with the leper in [Luke 5:12-16](#). As discussed in the notes corresponding to this previous incident, Jesus desired for these men to serve as a testimony to the religious leadership of his inexplicable power to heal and make clean those who once suffered. Imagine the weight of the testimony of ten men who were instantaneously healed and freed from their miserable state of disease and uncleanness.

Luke continues to highlight the response of the “foreigners” or non-Jews to Jesus of Nazareth. Even while the rejection of his ministry by the Jewish leadership spread, we still see those who were accepting his message and placing their faith in his power. Before the crowd of Jewish pilgrims Jesus recognized a Samaritan (a man that even Jesus recognized was to them a foreigner or stranger) as an example of faith and proper appreciation of God. With overwhelming expressions of humility, gratitude, and unbridled joy the healed man praised God and fell prostrate at Jesus' feet to honor and thank him – a fitting response for one whose flesh had been caressed by the healing finger of God. He did not seem to care that the crowd surrounding Jesus despised his presence and secretly scorned his enthusiasm.

It is interesting to note that Jesus was still in the appearance of a man (according to [Philippians 4:6-7](#)) and he was not claiming his equality with God at this time. Even the Samaritan made this distinction. His praise was given to God for the healing (to whom Jesus often directed it) but he gave thanks to Jesus for his compassion.

Surprisingly, Jesus did not even claim that his own God-given power had cleansed the man. Instead Jesus credited the Samaritan's faith as the origin of his healing. The Jews certainly took note of this for Jesus had commended one of their loathsome, half-breed cousins. As they made their way to Jerusalem the distance between those who accepted Jesus and those who rejected him was growing wider and wider. The percentage of undecided spectators began to dwindle away as each person was being challenged to take a side. Many who opposed Jesus began to hate him and wish him dead. The stage was being set for the final showdown between Jesus and the Sanhedrin – between the righteous and the hypocrites, between the Lord's anointed and those whom God had rejected, between good and evil, between Jehovah God and Satan.

Jesus would soon prove once and for all that he was the Son of God, the light of the world, and the hope for all mankind. The Samaritan and Gentile readers of Luke had reason to praise God and rejoice in the fact that they too were known in the heavenly realms and a savior had been sent to them. It is appropriate for those who once stood at a distance from God (like the unclean Samaritan) to praise the Lord and fall prostrate before his throne with

thanksgiving when they are restored. Thanks be to God for the cleansing he has given us! Our many sins once separated us from God so that we too stood at a distance. We once lived in darkness, unable to approach his throne because of our impurities. Yet at the waters of baptism we are able to wash away our uncleanness in the precious blood of Christ. It is here that the blood, the water, and the Spirit work in unison (**1 John 5:7-8**) to bring about a cleansing – a complete restoration of our soul, mind, and body. At one’s baptism it is absolutely appropriate to praise God with a loud voice, to honor the Lord with singing, to share expressions of joy and excitement, and to thank Jesus for his compassion.

Romans 15:8-13

Acts 8:38-39

Acts 16:33-34

1 John 5:7-8

Titus 3:4-7



The Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21

By now the Pharisees had for all practical purposes rejected Jesus’ message and his ministry. So during the weeks and months that preceded the crucifixion they began to ask Jesus questions in order to build a case against him to present either before the Sanhedrin or the Roman government (or both). Perhaps this question about the coming of the kingdom of God was just such a scheme. If Jesus made public any intention to launch a new earthly kingdom and claimed his authority to do so was from God the Pharisees could have had him arrested by the Roman government for insurrection. Surely his followers were loyal to him beyond measure and were ready more than once to take up their swords. They had left homes, jobs, and families to follow him. They believed him to be the Messiah and submitted themselves to his leadership. Jesus would have been a threat to the Romans had he announced plans to initiate a kingdom in his lifetime. Such plans would be reason enough for Herod the Tetrarch or Pontius Pilate the Governor to detain Jesus and force him to answer to such charges. If they were found to be true he could have been publicly executed as a warning to the Jewish radicals and other insubordinate factions.

Jesus was not misleading the Pharisees by his answer; neither was he avoiding the question. He was aware of their “careful observation” of him, and he cleverly assured them of his perception in his reply (**vs. 20**). To be sure, Jesus was the one who would sit on David’s throne as king over the true remnant of Israel as prophesied. But what the Jewish leaders (and even his own disciples for that matter) did not know was that he would not ascend to this position on earth. God’s will for Jesus was to be crucified as a sacrificial lamb, unblemished and without sin. A crown of thorns, a wooden scepter, and a mock robe would be the

only symbols of royalty he would see during his lifetime. Only after his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven would he be crowned King of kings. It is then that Jesus would once and for all be seated on the throne at the right hand of God. Then and only then would his kingdom be established on earth.

The scriptures reveal that after Jesus' ascension into heaven his followers (the apostles and a remnant of faithful disciples) would be commissioned to usher in the kingdom of God on earth. This would be accomplished through the unveiling of the church occurring just days after Christ's ascension into heaven. The Jewish holiday of Pentecost would see a flock of more than 3,000 believers added to the 120 faithful in Jerusalem. This new fellowship of believers would be called the body of Christ and would continue to serve as God's kingdom on earth until the second coming of Jesus. It was and is a spiritual kingdom, so that no one can point to its physical location and say, "there it is." And just by looking at two people, one might not be able to tell based upon physical appearance which one was a part of God's kingdom and which one was not. For entrance in God's kingdom is not a matter of what lies outside but what lies within. It is not a question of wealth, status, achievement, or birthright. Instead, those who possess the spirit of God through a new birth possess the kingdom. This new birth requires a decision and will on the part of each individual to submit himself or herself to the lordship of Christ, to repent of all sin, and to offer a pledge to God of a good conscience. This inward change must be genuine and rooted in absolute faith that Jesus is Lord, the Son God, and that God raised him from the dead. We are then united with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection at baptism, which is the specific hour of our new birth and entrance into God's kingdom. Ultimately, our conversion is initiated and then consummated by God's incredible love, mercy, and grace through the blood of Christ offered freely to the faithful.

The establishment of the church of Christ in Jerusalem and throughout the known world in the first century (and following) fulfilled the many predictions concerning the coming of God's kingdom on earth. Here is an overview of some of these prophecies.³³

1. **In the last days** (*Isaiah 2:2, Hosea 3:5, Micah 4:1*) – The church was established as the covenant with Moses began to see its final hour. The Temple was the focal point of worship under the Mosaic covenant and its destruction would effectively nullify Judaism in its purely scriptural form. The ability to adhere to the Levitical regulations came to a halt during the exile but resumed when the temple was rebuilt under the supervision of the Zerubbabel the priest in 516 BC. When the Temple was burned and destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, God's covenant through Moses would become obsolete. The generation that saw the church established during the Pentecost celebration would also witness the conclusion of a covenant that had been binding for more than fifteen hundred years. These were the last days of physical Israel and the beginning of what would be the remnant of the true spiritual Israel (**Romans 9:6-8**). Those who are baptized into Christ would

³³ *First Principles: Second Edition* by Kip McKean; Discipleship Publications International, 1997 used as a reference throughout selected portions of this section

now be considered as God's chosen people, the true descendants of Abraham ([Galatians 3:26-29](#)). [Note: The "last days" are quite different from the end times and not to be confused as the same era.]

2. **All nations will stream to it** (*Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1*) – Although the Jews were given first passage into the new covenant the church would not be exclusive to any one race, nation, or people. Even Pentecost would draw representatives from every nation under heaven for the initiation of the new church ([Acts 2:5](#)). These were Jews who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate. Within a few years the power of the Gospel message would take root in the non-Jewish communities as it was preached to the farthest reaches of the Greco-Roman world and beyond. In [Matt. 28:18-20](#) Jesus commissioned the apostles to go into every nation, to baptize, and to teach them to obey his commands. The gospel message would forever be the source of light to every people, every tribe, and every language on earth.
3. **He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths** (*Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2*) – The kingdom of God would not be established through conquest but by the preaching of God's. The world would receive the teachings of Christ regarding righteousness, love, faithfulness, and godly living. They would hear the good news of their redemption because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Those who entered the kingdom did so in response to this message and continued to live according to Jesus' words. The Jews read [Isaiah 2](#) and [Micah 4](#) quite differently. They expected to see the kingdom established through an execution of God's judgment on all the nations around them. They assumed that the re-establishment of the throne of David meant a true rise to power of Judah and Israel promoted by the hand of God. They would not have to "train for war" for God himself would fight this battle. Nevertheless, Jesus brought a kingdom that was not of this world was established through teaching and instruction about spiritual new birth and spiritual living.
4. **The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem** (*Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2*) – Jerusalem was a likely candidate for the inauguration of the coming kingdom, and the scriptures concur. The church was first revealed in the city of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The believers remained within the Holy City almost exclusively for the first few years after its inception. They eventually scattered after the martyrdom of Stephen and the wave of persecution that ensued ([Acts 8:1-4](#)).
5. **Established by peaceful means, not by war** (*Isaiah 2:4, Micah 4:3*) – The Jews were waiting for the hand of God to raise someone up from the line of David who would have military success even more comprehensive than that of Alexander the Great. Yet Jesus made it quite clear that his disciples should put their swords back in their places. He warned them in [Matthew 26:52](#) that "All who draw the sword will die by the sword." The church would see converts from all walks of life and would bring peace and unity to those who were once enemies in the world. Reconciliation would occur between the rich and the poor, the intellectual and the unschooled slave, the Centurion and the servant, the jailer and his prisoner, the virgin and the prostitute, and even the

Jew and the Greek. In the body of Christ, these one-time adversaries would embrace one another as a spiritual family.

6. **In the time of those kings** (*Daniel 2:44*) – The new movement of God would begin during the fourth kingdom prophesied by Daniel in response to the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar (ref. [Daniel 2:31-34](#)). The gold kingdom represented Babylon, which saw its end around 539 BC. The chest and arms of silver represent the Medes and the Persians who were together able to overthrow Babylon and establish their reign until around 330 BC. They were brought down by Alexander between the years 334-330 BC, represented by the torso and thighs of bronze. Finally the Roman Empire would overpower the Greece in 63 BC. This fourth kingdom, the one of iron and clay, would dominate the world unlike any other prior. Yet it remained party brittle as political corruption, moral deterioration, and disunity caused weakness within the Roman dominion. It was during this time period that a rock was cut out by God shattering the entire statue. Not even the dust of those kingdoms remained. The rock grew and became a mountain that filled the whole earth. As predicted the church built on the rock of Jesus Christ would fill the earth rapidly. The generation that included the apostles would witness the dream of world evangelism.
7. **It will itself endure forever** (*Daniel 2:44*) – Today we are able to visit ruins dating back to the time of Babylon, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. However, we can be sure that the church of Christ is still going strong – it has seen all those kingdoms come to an end. And when earth someday passes away, those who sought first Christ’s kingdom during their lifetime shall inherit an everlasting kingdom with God in heaven.
8. **The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom** (*Daniel 7:18*) – Easton’s 1897 Bible Dictionary defines a **saint** used in general terms as “*one separated from the world and consecrated to God; one holy by profession and by covenant; a believer in Christ.*”³⁴ Paul addressed many of his letters to the “saints” in the various places in which he had ministered ([Rom. 1:7](#), [2 Cor. 1:1](#), [Eph. 1:1](#), [Philip. 1:1](#)). He was simply referring to the believers of that city that comprised the church of Christ. Death then is a not a requirement for sainthood nor is it necessary in order to inherit God’s kingdom. Rather, the title of saint is achieved by a life devoted to holiness through faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently, the fellowship of believers are the very saints who are able to receive the kingdom of God on earth and thereafter.
9. **Some who witnessed Jesus’ ministry will see the kingdom of God come within their lifetime** (*Matt. 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27*) – The apostles were not able to fully comprehend the magnitude of Jesus’ words when he said to them, “*blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it*” ([Matthew 13:16-17](#)). Jesus was not exclusively referring to the prophets desire to see and hear the Messiah. Many of the prophets spoke about the return of God’s kingdom and the restoration of the righteous remnant within

³⁴ Taken from WORDsearch5 Discipleship Library, NavPress Software

Israel. This they longed to see and hear but were not able to do so in their lifetime. Jesus attempted to explain to the disciples that they would indeed see the kingdom of God established prior to their deaths. In fact, the only apostle who forfeited this blessing was Judas Iscariot who committed suicide before the church was revealed. Jesus did not say that he himself would not taste death before the kingdom would come, but that many of his followers standing beside him would not. Jesus would indeed endure a brutal death before the actual church that bore his name arose. Jesus' death left his disciples befuddled, still wondering when or if the kingdom might come. And after they witnessed their Lord's resurrection they still provoked him to give them a specific hour of its coming ([Acts 1:6](#)). A little more than a week later the remaining eleven apostles along with the faithful 120 would witness firsthand the fulfillment of the ages – the beginning of the Church Age.

- 10. You will see the kingdom of God come with power** (*Mark 9:1*) – The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (a demonstration of God's power) was long seen as an essential component in the coming of the kingdom (reference *Isaiah 32:15-20; 44:3-5, Ezekiel 39:28-29, Joel 2:28-3:1; Zech. 12:8-10*). When Jesus tells his disciples that they would soon be immersed in the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:5](#)) – that in fact they would be sent power from on high ([Luke 24:49](#)) – they immediately understood this to signify the arrival of God's kingdom ([Acts 1:6](#)). The morning of the Jewish holiday of Pentecost (around ten days after Jesus' ascension) brought with it a violent rumbling from heaven and the promised outpouring of the Spirit upon the apostles. Empowered by God with uncanny boldness and the miraculous ability to proclaim the gospel message in every tongue under heaven, Peter and the Eleven stood before the astonished crowd of Jewish pilgrims. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they proclaimed the very message God had brought them all together to hear ([Acts 2:1-41](#)). The new converts continued to be amazed at the awesome way in which God's spirit was working powerfully through the apostles ([Acts 2:43](#)). Even as the kingdom was given to the Gentiles, it was accompanied by an outpouring of God's spirit on the household of Cornelius ([Acts 10:44](#)).
- 11. No one can enter the kingdom of God, unless he is born of water and the Spirit** (*John 3:5*) – The method of entrance into the kingdom of God is a key element that helps to show that the church is the fulfillment of the kingdom prophecies. Entrance into the church was clearly defined by Peter from the beginning. Following the message of the risen Christ every believer was commanded to repent of his or her sins and then be baptized. This water baptism was for the forgiveness of sins as was the water baptism prototyped by John the Baptist ([Luke 3:3](#)). Unlike John's baptism however, the baptism instituted by Jesus in [Matthew 28:19](#) and restated by Peter in [Acts 2:38](#) brought with it the promised Holy Spirit. Those who accepted Peter's message were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and they received forgiveness and the promised indwelling of the Spirit. They had been born again of water and the Spirit. They had entered the kingdom of God. They were members of the one and only church. They had been welcomed into the body of Christ.

- 12. On this rock I will build my church** (*Matthew 16:18*) – “Who do you say I am?” Jesus asked. Peter then made a confession of faith that would forever serve as the rock upon which the family of believers would take their stand. God had revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Although the Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, he was in fact the capstone (**Psalm 118:22**) and the perfect cornerstone by which the entire body of believers based their lives (**Ephesians 2:20**). Let us not understand the rock of Jesus’ promise to be referring to Peter, a fallible man. We shall discuss Peter’s significance next. Rather, the church is anchored entirely upon the conviction and faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus alone qualifies as the perfect cornerstone by which we all might hold our true.
- 13. I will give [Peter] the keys of the kingdom of heaven** (*Matthew 16:19*) – As mentioned, Peter was an imperfect man whose weaknesses and lapses of faith are well documented in scripture. Nevertheless, he was chosen by the Lord to unlock the very kingdom anticipated by the entire Jewish nation. Peter would unveil the Church Age first to the Jews at Pentecost and then to the Gentiles beginning with the household of Cornelius (**Acts 10:25-48**). He was a significant instrument of God, pivotal in the unfolding of both events. He helped bridge the gap between Jew and Gentile as his argument before the circumcised believers in Jerusalem persuaded them to accept those once considered as unclean (**Acts 11:1-18**). Although Paul was eventually used by God to transform the Gentile world with the Gospel, it was Peter who was given the honor of unlocking the door and witnessing first hand God ushering in the kingdom to both Jew and Gentile.
- 14. A two-fold message is to be preached: 1) Christ’s suffering and resurrection and 2) Repentance and forgiveness of sins** (*Luke 24:45-48*) – Recall that Isaiah prophesied that all nations would stream to Jerusalem to hear the word of the Lord. A new message (not a new war) would be used to restore God’s kingdom to the remnant of faithful Israel. Jesus now gave the apostles the crux of this message. First, they would preach about the suffering of Jesus at the hands of the Jewish leaders and the Romans. They will tell of his crucifixion, his death, and his burial in a tomb. They will then describe his resurrection for they had seen the dead body of their Lord and had only days later witnessed his resurrection. On one occasion he appeared to more than five hundred believers at the same time (**1 Cor. 15:6**). This was the first part of the kingdom message: The eyewitness account of a crucified man who rose from the dead. This would be preached as often as the disciples had an eager audience (**Acts 2:22-32; 3:13-15; 4:2; 4:33; 5:29-32; 10:39-41; 13:26-31; 17:2-3; 17:18, 26:22-23, 1 Cor. 15:1-8**). The second component of the kingdom message is repentance and forgiveness of sins. Those moved by passion of Christ must respond appropriately. As defined by Peter in **Acts 2:38**, the appropriate response starts with repentance – a total turn around from a life of sin and self-focus to a life of righteousness and self-denial. Repentance was also preached whenever the good news message rang out (**Acts 2:38; 3:19, 5:31; 11:18, 14:15; 20:21; 26:17-20**). Those who repented

were eager to receive forgiveness of sins as promised by God. In order for this remission to occur, each penitent believer is required to be baptized or fully immersed in water as first taught by John and then practiced by Jesus and his disciples. Following the resurrection Peter laid it out clearly that a new baptism done in the name of Jesus Christ (may also be worded: “*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*”) had come and was necessary for everyone. Make no mistake; this command is not optional. Even those baptized by John were required to submit to the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (though not for forgiveness of sins, but for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – [Acts 19:1-5](#)). Baptism is an exercise of our faith ([Col. 2:12](#)). It is not a denial of God’s grace. Rather, it is the very means by which God has chosen to exert his grace upon us, granting us an eternal pardon from the sum of our iniquities. Baptism signifies one’s entrance into God’s kingdom, a new birth into the church of Christ. It is essential in completing the Gospel message, as seen in the scriptures as the first-century disciples preached to the lost world ([Acts 2:38-41](#); [8:12-13](#); [8:36-38](#); [9:18](#); [10:47-48](#); [16:15](#); [16:33](#); [18:8](#); [19:4](#); [22:16](#); [1 Cor. 12:13](#)). This is the whole Gospel message – the kingdom message – centering on Jesus Christ from start to finish. It begins with an appeal for all to accept the fact that Jesus suffered and rose from the dead. We must then respond to the cross and turn away from sin and embrace the calling of Jesus. It ends with our union into Christ’s death at baptism ([Romans 6:1-8](#)).

There are other kingdom prophecies from both the Old and New Testaments fulfilled by the establishment of the Christian church. The ones listed here are arguably the most conclusive, showing that the church is in fact the kingdom of God on earth. We are no longer awaiting the coming of the kingdom but rather the second coming of Christ where he shall return to gather up the living and the dead to appear before the throne of judgment. At that time the saved will inherit a heavenly kingdom. Until then the living, breathing body of Christ serves as the culmination of God’s plan for mankind.

[Acts 8:12](#)

[Acts 28:23](#)

[Col. 1:12-13](#)

[Hebrews 12:28](#)



The Church Age

Luke 17:22-25

Jesus had been indicating the nature of the forthcoming kingdom and was just asked about the time of its arrival. As discussed, the inauguration of the Church Age would usher in the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus then drove home the point that he would not be physically present when this occurred (or even

afterwards). It would all happen subsequent to Jesus' suffering at the hands of the Romans, as stated again in [vs. 25](#). Obviously the disciples did not grasp what he meant as they became exceedingly discouraged following his death on the cross. They were soon consoled as they saw the resurrected Lord many times during the forty-day period that followed that Sunday morning miracle.

At one point, Jesus promised that he would be with them always as they went about the monumental task set before them ([Matthew 28:20](#)). However, the Lord would no longer be walking with them, breaking bread with them, and training them the way he had been doing these past few months and years. Instead, the apostles will be clothed with God's spirit and "sent out" to accomplish the task of world evangelism. His presence would be an inward one – a piece of God himself deposited inside each disciple of Jesus. The few years they spent under his leadership would be greatly missed and they would long to enjoy the sweet fellowship they once had with their Messiah. As they began to face the constant pressure of the ministry and the call of spiritual leadership, they would finally appreciate the majesty of Jesus and desire his presence all the more.

As Jesus ascended into heaven the Messianic Age ended. A few days later the Church Age would begin. Jesus made it quite clear that the two ages would never overlap (as the Mosaic and the Church Ages did). Any talk of a Savior, Messiah, or a Son of Man being physically present on earth during the Church Age would be a sham. Disciples of Jesus should not be deceived by any such claim. This type of manipulation would come from false prophets used by Satan. They would prey on the widespread human desire to see the Messiah or some physical incarnation of God. If the apostles would long to relive their time spent with Jesus, what about those of us who simply received the Good News message without ever laying eyes on its founder? Who wouldn't want to witness God, whom even the heavens cannot contain ([1 Kings 8:27](#)), being found in the appearance of a son of man? Haven't we all wished we could have been there to see the virgin birth, the feeding of the five thousand, the clearing of the Temple courts, the crucifixion, and especially the resurrection? Can you imagine if you were chosen to witness this sliver of history? We must accept the simple fact that we shall never see the Messianic Age – the time where God became man and made his dwelling among us. In truth, we have been chosen to live in an equally crucial period. Jesus promised that the Church Age would see even greater things than the wonders seen during the days of the Messiah's appearing in the flesh ([John 14:12](#)).

Many naïve people have been lead astray by individuals who claim to be the Chosen One of God, the Messiah, the Son of God, and even the reappearing of Jesus Christ himself. Other biblically illiterate persons have been deceived by religious sects whose entire core system of beliefs stems from their claim that the Messiah or Son of God has returned in the flesh and now walks among them. Should this even spark our curiosity? After all, didn't Jesus first enter the world through very subtle – even outlandish – circumstances? Couldn't his return be equally as inconspicuous? Definitely not. Jesus answered that question in the same breath used to warn us of those who would try to misguide the saints with such foolish allegations. Jesus declared that his return will not be obscure at all,

but will be as sudden and as obvious as a massive sheet of lightning raging across the whole sky. The Church Age will end abruptly upon Christ's return. Its conclusion will bring with it the termination of our present universe, the existence of physical matter, and all life as we know it.

Matthew 24:10-11, 23-24

2 Thes. 2:1-4

2 Cor. 11:3-4

2 Cor. 11:13-15

2 Peter 3:10-13

1 Thes. 4:16-17

1 Cor. 15:52



The Son of Man

Luke 17:26-37

Throughout the latter half of **Luke 17**, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man several times. The term is rarely used in the Old Testament outside of the book of Ezekiel. When it is used, it appears to be referring to a human being – simply one born of human propagation. The reason Ezekiel is referred to as a “son of man” (90 times) is not stated, although we might be sure that it was used to emphasize his inherent human weakness and his unquestionable need to rely on God. The Old Testament passage that links the son of man to the Messiah and the Savior of Israel reads as follows:

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. ¹⁴He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

When Jesus began to refer to himself as the Son of Man he was making a bold claim. The Israelites knew that according to the scriptures the scepter of world supremacy would be handed to this individual. He would even accept the worship of people from every nation and every language. This quality serves as a direct link between the son of man and the God of the Bible, for the scriptures are clear that none other than the true God of Abraham was to be worshipped (**Luke 4:8, Deut. 6:13**). Thus the son of man and the Ancient of Days are simply manifestations of the one true God – there is no division between the two. The son of man will be condoned by the Ancient of Days and will be given authority, glory, and sovereignty by him. When Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven before the Sanhedrin (an obvious reference to

Daniel 7:13), the crime assigned him by the High Priest was blasphemy, punishable by death (ref. **Matthew 26:64-65**).

The following excerpt of the Holman Bible Dictionary discusses the major categorical usages of the term “Son of man” in the New Testament.³⁵

The New Testament

The “Son of man” sayings of Jesus fall into three distinct types.

(1) Apocalyptic Sayings The largest number of Son of man sayings deal with the final times when the Son of man will descend to earth to gather the elect and to judge. The picture of the Son of man in these passages is strongly reminiscent of Daniel 7:13 (quoted in Matthew 24:30; Matthew 26:64; Mark 13:26; Mark 14:62; Luke 21:27; Luke 22:69). The Son of man will come in glory with His angels and take His seat on His throne (Matthew 25:31). His coming will be sudden and unexpected (Matthew 10:23; Matthew 16:28; Matthew 24:27; Matthew 24:38-39; Matthew 24:44; Luke 17:22-27). He will come as judge to condemn the unrighteous (Matthew 13:41; Matthew 16:27; John 5:27) and to take as His own those who have faith and confess Him (Luke 12:8; Luke 18:8; Luke 21:36). Faithful disciples are to join the Son of man in this judgment (Matthew 19:28), which perhaps reflects the dual role of the Son of man and saints of the Most High found in Daniel 7:13; Daniel 7:27. These sayings could be taken as referring to another than Jesus, but the Gospel writers unquestionably saw Jesus as referring to Himself and connected these events with His second coming.

(2) Passion Sayings The second largest group of Son of man sayings are connected with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Three times Jesus predicted that the Son of man would be rejected and killed by the priests and scribes but would rise on the third day (Mark 8:31; Mark 9:31; Mark 10:33-34; Luke 24:7). Just like John the Baptist, the Son of man would be treated with contempt (Mark 9:12-13; Matthew 17:12-13). He will be betrayed (Matthew 26:24; Matthew 26:45; Luke 22:48). Death would be followed by victory, the resurrection from the dead (Matthew 17:9).

In his own way, John highlighted this dual emphasis on the humiliation of the cross and the glory of the resurrection. The Son of man is to be “lifted up” on the cross, but this “lifting up” is in reality His exaltation, leading to His ascension to the Father (John 3:14; John 8:28; John 12:34). As with a seed, death must first come for there to be new life, and thus Jesus’ death became His hour of greatest glory (John 12:23-24; John 13:31).

Nothing in Jewish messianic expectation connected the Son of man with suffering and death. In the Old Testament, one finds that only with the Servant of Isaiah 53. That connection is clearly made in this group of Son of man sayings, and it is explicitly made in Mark 10:45 (Matthew 20:28). The Son of man, the messianic Judge of the final time, is also the Suffering Servant of God. That connection is unique to the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

³⁵ Holman Bible Dictionary, writer *John Polhill*, text taken from Wordsearch5 DL, NavPress

(3) Sayings Connected with Jesus' Ministry The third group of Son of man sayings is the most heterogeneous, but all refer to some aspect of Jesus' earthly ministry. Many could be understood in the sense of the Hebrew idiom—"a man, this man, I." Yet, all have a deeper implication than any human *I*, for all point to some unique quality about Jesus' ministry. Even in these sayings, "Son of man" should be seen as a title pointing to Jesus' special role. He is the One who has authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24) and to interpret the meaning of the sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). In His preaching, He sowed the seed of God's kingdom (Matthew 13:37), for He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Blessed is the disciple who suffers for His sake (Luke 6:22).

Some of these sayings reflect an incarnational emphasis. The Son of man in His earthly humiliation had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58). He was misunderstood and rejected (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34), but such personal rejection is forgivable—it is only the rejection of the work of the Spirit that is beyond forgiveness (Matthew 12:32; Luke 12:10). John's Gospel especially highlights this incarnational emphasis. The Son of man is true flesh and blood. One must accept that humanity to find true life (John 6:53). The Son of man is also Son of God, the One who came from above, the Ladder which links all humanity with God (John 1:51).

(4) The Rest of the New Testament "Son of man" occurs only four times in the New Testament outside the Gospels. All four reflect understandings of the title already found in the Gospels. In Acts 7:56, Stephen beheld the ascended Son of man standing beside the throne of God to receive him. In Rev. 1:13; Rev. 14:14-16, the Son of man appears as Judge. In Hebrews 2:6, the reference to Son of man in Psalm 8:4 which originally applied to humanity in general is specifically applied to Jesus as the unique Son of man and representative of humanity. In the context of Hebrews 2, all the Gospel emphases on Son of man coalesce—a strong incarnational emphasis on His real flesh and blood, a vivid depiction of His representative suffering, and the note that by that suffering He acquires His glory and honor and leads many to glory.

It seems likely that Jesus in this passage of Luke ([vs. 26-37](#)) was referring to the actual time of his return to the earth rather than the era containing the Church Age. Jesus paralleled two events to the day that the Son of Man is revealed, both of which were decisive judgments of God that carried with them the absolute destruction of the wicked. When the flood came in the days of Noah the righteous were spared and the wicked were completely obliterated. When Sodom and Gomorrah received their punishment the same held true. The only exception was Lot's wife – she would have been spared if she had not disobeyed the Lord's command. She tried to hang on to a small piece of her old life and it cost her everything. In the same way, those who are chosen by God must be wary of clinging on the world and the sin they left behind. In both catastrophes only a miniscule remnant escaped death. They were prepared for these judgments only because God had provided them with specific instructions and ample forewarning that led to their salvation. The rest were ignorant of God's message and were

caught by surprise when his swift judgment was revealed. They lived their lives free from the yoke of godliness and were quite unprepared when they were taken from the earth.

According to Jesus this unfortunate pattern of history will be repeated on the day of his return. The majority of the people living on earth at that time will be unprepared. Their lives will demonstrate an unwillingness to heed the words of God; nearly all will refuse to relinquish self to live under the yoke of Christ. The same warning that will be heard by the faithful will be ignored by most. Jesus does not say whether or not the ones taken in [vs. 34-35\(36\)](#) are the righteous or the wicked. In the two examples given it was actually the wicked that were taken from the earth, not the righteous. Jesus would later reveal to Paul that the coming judgment shall see the righteous rising to meet the Lord in the clouds ([1 Thess. 4:17](#)), a likely site for our rendezvous with the Son of Man ([Dan. 7:13](#)).



Perseverance and Prayer

Luke 18:1-8

I have often read this passage as a parable meant to encourage the disciples to never give up on their desired prayers – a story with a single moral. If you persist with God (or pester him enough) he will eventually grant your request. However, if we read [vs.1](#) in a slightly different manner, it brings new light to the possible intention of Jesus. It is just as likely that this parable has a two-part message quite different from the one previously suggested. Read [Luke 18:1](#) as follows: *“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should [1] always pray and [2] not give up.”* The first point is that disciples must be consistently in prayer. The second is that we must persevere no matter what. We must always pray and always persevere. That doesn’t mean that we are to just pray the same prayer over and over again and in due time we are guaranteed the positive answer. On the contrary we are to remain faithful in prayer and willing to persevere even when we don’t see immediate justice. That is quite possibly the gist of this parable.

The widow was crying out to the authorities because of her adversary. Her persistence gives us the impression that she too was being pressured constantly by her foe. Her petition was for justice rather than personal gain. In the same way we must cry out to God as we face the constant oppression of Satan’s attack. Our prayer life should reflect the pressures of the spiritual battle as we earnestly seek refuge in our God. We must remember that we are coming before a good and just God. Unlike the indifferent judge in this parable, God is very interested in our struggles and he will not let justice go unserved. But even if we do not see an immediate showing of God’s judgment we must be willing to persevere.

Despite the unjust predicament we may find ourselves in Jesus encourages us to endure it and remain strong. God is more than able to bring about justice, but we must be willing to persevere and wait upon his timing. One thing is

for sure, the Son of Man shall return and justice will ring true. Perhaps then and only then will you and your adversary receive your due. Are you willing to persevere until the very end if that's what it takes to see the justice of God reign? Or do we demand of God that our prayer requests be brought to the forefront? Do we become bitter when we are required to wait a little longer – even a lifetime? We are only guaranteed to see justice brought forth if we persevere in holiness and walk faithfully before God in prayer. The last day will bring about salvation for the righteous remnant and judgment against the attacker. Our adversary the devil and his demonic realm will be brought down with a tremendous blow.

Those who are unwilling to wait upon God and his timing and show signs of giving up will become an easy target for the enemy. Many will grow weary of the spiritual battle and thus forfeit the reward that is theirs to have and God's to give. The Bible warns us that prior to the return of the Son of Man giving up would become a popular trend (**Matt. 24:12-13, 2 Tim. 4:3-4**). This prompts Jesus' question following this parable, "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*" (**Luke 18:8**). Rather than wait a little longer for God to prove himself faithful and just many will decide to fall away and abandon the faith, allow their love to grow cold. I believe that this parable was given to those disciples who will see oppression and persecution throughout the majority of their lifetime even as they faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ. They are commanded to remain faithful until the end, to persevere through injustice, and to endure through misfortune. They must come before the throne faithfully in prayer and know that God is just and good. We cannot hold God hostage and demand immediate answers to our supplication. Even if we are in constant petition we may be bucking against the designed will of God. We must instead be surrendered to God's careful timing and immutable sovereignty.

Some portion of this parable's meaning is contained in every book and letter in the New Testament. Whether it is the call to faithful prayer, the warning to never give up, standing firm against the adversary, waiting upon Christ's return, or perseverance under trials and injustice this theme is as biblical as salvation itself. It might easily be argued that this is the central theme to the book of Revelation and the two letters of Paul to the disciples in Thessalonica. The Christians of the early church faced indescribable injustices and fierce spiritual battles. The scriptures reflect this as they are often encouraged and commanded to pray and to never give up on the faith. The message of the persistent widow speaks to all of God's faithful servants throughout history even up to this present day.

1 Thes. 3:7-10

2 Thes. 1:4-11

Rev. 2:3

Rev. 2:10

Rev. 2:13

Rev. 2:25

Rev. 3:8a-11

Rev. 14:12



Walk Humbly with your God

Luke 18:9-14

Let us be reminded that Jesus and his entourage were making their way to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. Surrounding the Lord were many devoted followers, the apostles, the committed women, many pilgrims who were still just spectating, and not a small number of Pharisees, teachers of the Law, Rabbis, and other religious leaders. The vast information and many parables included in this portion of this narrative ([Luke 9:51-19:27](#)) beg the question: Who was Luke's primary source for this segment? Was it one of the apostles or faithful disciples? Was it one of the women? What is one of the Pharisees or Jewish leaders – like perhaps Nicodemus – who eventually accepted that Jesus was the Christ? Luke most likely had access to any one of these selected eyewitnesses. Although his narrative was scripted from a collaboration of sources, I would guess that this portion of the book was generated from a single but very reliable first-hand observer. He or she had certainly been impressed by this journey and the events that transpired, for they recounted a great number of remarkable details to Luke some twenty-five to thirty years after they occurred.

Jesus did not let up on the Jewish leaders. If anything the challenges were becoming more specific and more blatantly directed at their intended targets. Jesus continued to call out the Pharisees on their pride, their lack of faith, their lack of insight into the true nature of God, and the right heart behind God's laws. Jesus even used a Pharisee as the spiritual derelict of this parable. Jesus did not challenge them on their obedience to the law or their knowledge of scripture. These were the very things that enabled them to appear justified as they compared themselves to the rest of the Jewish community. Instead he exposed their disguised weaknesses – pride, overconfidence, and self-righteousness. . His words cut deep, penetrating past their outer layer of self-assurance and into the darker issues within their hearts.

In the tax collector Jesus illustrated God's perpetual desire of for mankind to walk before him in meekness and holiness. The message of this parable was revealed to the prophet Micah at a time when Israel had likewise become burdened with God's laws. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the prophet writes in [Micah 6:8](#), *"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."* The tax collector in this parable portrays the heart of Micah's message. He did not even feel justified to approach God's holy temple but remained at a distance. He did not raise his eyes to the heavens, for he saw himself as unworthy even to call on the Lord. Instead he beat his breast and appealed to God for mercy. He was broken. The major difference between the tax collector and the Pharisee was this intangible quality that draws God closer to man than any other – brokenness. To a heart that is humble and broken before the Lord the sum of God's commands becomes unmistakably simple. Spirituality makes perfect sense when a heart is cut. A broken man or woman recognizes that the only thing they need from God is his mercy. And they are more than willing to extend mercy to others, for they recognize that all of mankind is likewise flawed.

The Holy Spirit was now speaking through Jesus the same message he taught Israel through Micah more than four hundred years prior. Yet they would no sooner listen to Jesus than they would heed the words of the prophets. Micah in his day appealed to his countrymen showing them how uncomplicated were the requirements of God – justice, mercy, and humility. These are the very same essentials that the Pharisees and teachers of the law had abandoned as depicted in this parable. They justified themselves rather than relying on God's justice. They refused to be merciful to those whom they scorned as unclean and unrighteous. And they prided themselves in their legalistic obedience to the Law. How readily Jesus would have accepted them if only they had been broken by his prophetic words.

Psalm 34:17-18

Psalm 51:16-17

Psalm 147:3

Isaiah 61:1

Luke 20:18



Like a Child

Luke 18:15-17

Entire families were on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover and many eager parents were bringing their children to Jesus of Nazareth. As a young boy Jesus himself had traveled with his parents and siblings at least yearly down this same stretch of road near the Jordan River. It was surely during these times when Joseph and Mary recounted to the Christ child the story of Moses, the very first Passover in Egypt, and the Israelites' exodus through the Red Sea. Jewish parents were to pass on this great story as commanded by God.

Exodus 12:24-27

"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. ²⁵When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. ²⁶And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' ²⁷then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.' " Then the people bowed down and worshiped.

The scriptures clearly call parents to impress upon their children the knowledge and fear of the Lord. There is perhaps no greater defined responsibility surrounding parenthood than to train a child using biblical principles and instill in them a faith in God and a love for his commands. With this in mind it is quite understandable why so many parents pressed forward to be near Jesus. And knowing the determination and aggressive nature of a parent

when their child's best interest is at stake, they were almost certainly not as polite or as reverent as the disciples deemed necessary.

Jesus brushed aside the disciples' misplaced rebuke and welcomed the children – even condoning the parent's desire to bring them forth. It was good and right for these parents to advance the spiritual welfare of their children for the scriptures certainly commanded it. Jesus declared that these very kids were the future of the coming kingdom of God. Even if their parents rejected the Lord, as many would soon do during Passover week in Jerusalem, these children would soon reach an age where they could decide for themselves what they believed about Jesus, whom many called the Messiah. The generation that witnessed the Messianic Age would be judged most severely for their rejection of Jesus. The few that did believe would start a movement that would extend a welcome hand to the next generation of maturing young men and women. Perhaps the Lord wanted to make an impression on these children, if only for a moment, that would take root and someday and develop into saving faith.

As disciples who are also parents, we face the joy and the rather weighty responsibility shared by those same parents on the road to Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago. We are to bring our young children to Jesus to be touched and impressed by him. We must give them a faith in Christ that is real – something they can see, hear, and feel. They will never be able to physically rest in the arms of the Lord but they must learn to find their refuge within his grasp. The cry of the world grows ever louder and more appealing. To think that we as parents can deafen our children's ears to Satan's manipulative flattery is foolishness. If we expect to forever shelter them from the constant pull of sin we are deceived. Did they not inherit the same sinful nature that we did? Do they not inwardly burn to gratify the cravings of this nature? Are we so naïve as to think we can raise a child so spiritually exceptional that their instinctual response will be to resist sin rather than to give in to it?

I guess our only hope is that found in [Proverbs 22:6](#) that tells us to “*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*” What a heavy burden God has laid on men – especially on parents! The degree of this challenge I hardly know. Mine is not yet two years old and I cannot fathom the depths of joy and sorrow I shall face in the years to come. I only know this: I've got to get this child to Jesus and hope that he touches her. We shall take her to see the Lord and his kingdom. But a day will come when she must choose for herself. I only hope that when that time comes she will remember what it felt like to be held in the arms of Christ.

Read [Deut. 6:6-7](#)
[Deut. 11:18-21](#)
[Proverbs 4:3-4](#)
[Ephes. 6:4](#)

After Jesus blessed the children, he used the opportunity to continue his instruction to the crowds about the kingdom of God. He offered some valuable and well-needed instruction about the heart and mindset required by all who wish

to enter it. The example he used was a child. There are many possible conclusions that we can draw from this analogy, and maybe that is what we are supposed to do as Jesus did not further specify his meaning. We can learn from their purity of heart, their innocence, their simplistic faith, and their open minds. Perhaps the best way to uncover the main intention of this lesson is to focus on the main reasons why people were rejecting Jesus' ministry and would not enter the kingdom and then find the child-like reaction that would have saved their souls.

Children possess an unmistakable willingness to believe most things they hear. Although kids can be stubborn they are incredibly curious and are neither set in their ways nor convinced of their own explanations to the world around them. The Jewish leaders however were quite satisfied by their own understanding and held many preconceived notions about the nature of the coming kingdom and the characteristics of its rightful king. For this reason they missed the subtle glory that was right before them, for Christ did not come adorned with external beauty or majesty. He did not fit the mold created for him by most Jews nor did the kingdom he would bring. Jesus would not lift a hand against his oppressors nor would he promise to overthrow the Roman government. Instead he would offer spiritual liberation to all, an inward freedom that would supercede the circumstances of any man's life.

Jesus faced many closed minds and hard hearts as he preached to his own countrymen. They were not open to this new enlightenment that he offered. They saw his followers as ignorant sheep, uneducated in the Law and thus unable to see through his heresy. Their diligent study of the scriptures had allowed them to become confident of their own knowledge and secure in their present righteousness – not even God in the flesh could sway them otherwise. Even those Jews whose hearts did flicker with a child-like curiosity were held captive by their fear of being put out of the synagogue (**John 12:42-43**). Unless they repented of their cowardice they too would fail to enter the kingdom.

Within the heart of a child is also the desire and willingness to be led. Of course they can also be unimaginably strong-willed. Yet most find their security when they broken, guided, and corrected with consistency and love. Children imitate – literally copy – those to whom they admire and are inspired by the role models they look up to. This is the same way that we are to receive the kingdom. We must possess a willingness to be led by God and by those who are over us in the Lord. If we are stubborn and refuse to be broken we will soon find that God will not place his will in competition with ours. We will simply not enter the kingdom unless we resolve to live in humble submission before God. As we continue to live as disciples we must allow the scriptures to guide us, correct us, and mold our characters according to God's purposes.

Even our brothers and sisters in the Lord should be able to offer guidance and correction without having our necks stiffen at their suggestions. We ought to be inspired by those who demonstrate areas of godliness that we lack and be willing to imitate their faith. We must all strive for unity in the body of Christ. This often requires us to compromise and relax on matters of opinion and policy where the scriptures do not hold precedent. All in all, those individuals who

strive for humility, who are able to control their will in broken submission to the Lord, and who appreciate correction that leads to godliness will thrive in God's kingdom.

In most cases children waste no time worrying about where their next meal will come from or who will provide clothes and shelter. They simply trust that their parents will furnish their daily needs. In the next passage of Luke we will find a rich young ruler who will have no such confidence in God's ability to provide. Those who refuse to give themselves over to God and sacrifice for his kingdom show that they are more secure in their own ability to provide for themselves than they are in the heavenly Father's ability to bless and care for them. Coming into the kingdom is a process that involves letting go of all that we hold tight, surrendering completely to God, and demonstrating faith in his ability to sustain us. Jesus appealed to us based on God's unfailing love for mankind, showing us that running after our security in the world is something done only by the ungodly (**Matthew 6:31-34**). We as God's children mustn't waste the opportunity to follow Christ because we are too busy worrying about our daily needs and building up a secure fortress here on earth. Yes, we must be responsible and disciplined so that we can provide for ourselves and our families. Yet we cannot use this as an excuse to shrug off the kingdom of God. We will all be called to trust in God and to step out on faith many times, especially as we count the cost to become disciples. And when we do step out, God relishes the opportunity to provide for us that our faith might be built up and forever strengthened.

How to receive God's kingdom like a child

Psalm 119:66-73	Matthew 11:29
Isaiah 66:2b	Luke 8:15
Daniel 10:12	1 Cor. 4:15b-16
Matthew 5:3	1 Cor. 11:1
Matthew 5:8	1 Thes. 2:13-14a
Matthew 6:31-34	

Examples and warnings about failing to possess a child-like heart

Isaiah 30:9	Matthew 13:14-15
Jeremiah 7:24	Mark 16:14
Hosea 4:16	Luke 24:25
John 12:42-43	Hebrews 5:11



One Thing You Lack

Luke 18:18-25

The journey towards Jerusalem afforded time for the people to strike up discussions with Jesus as they walked. He seems to have been quite approachable by those who were eager to learn while others stayed at a distance because of their

fear of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all described an instance where a young ruler approached the Lord. He was a wealthy man and he might have been risking his good standing with the Jewish elite by associating with Jesus and his followers. If he had been a local synagogue ruler the other religious leaders would likewise hold him suspect. At first the ruler appeared to have a child-like heart that Jesus desired. He seemed eager to learn and his question was aimed at the core of Jesus message – eternal salvation. From childhood he had been raised up with a knowledge and reverence of the Law, much the same as Jesus had been. Still, he seemed open-minded – willing to question his salvation rather than confiding in his own righteousness. Perhaps in this brief encounter, Jesus witnessed these same qualities and in no time at all was deeply moved to love him, as suggested in **Mark 10:11**.

Jesus made a subtle hint as to his own deity before addressing the ruler's question. The man had addressed the Lord as "good teacher." Jesus answered by making reference to **Psalm 14:2-3** (and **Psalm 53:2-3**), which states:

Psalm 14:2-3

²*The LORD looks down from heaven
on the sons of men
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.
³All have turned aside,
they have together become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.*

The point being this: Of the sons of men (all of mankind), not one is blameless or even "good" before God. Only God is truly good, while all men and women have strayed into sin. God has never found one that is without fault or one that has completely overcome evil with good. To become the perfect sacrifice for our sins Jesus would have to be without defect. He would have to live the perfect life and not be found guilty of a single sin. If Jesus was indeed good then he was not just a son of man. In no way did Jesus deny his goodness in this passage. He simply asked the man a question, perhaps as an effort to draw attention to the goodness of God. And perhaps Jesus was making a subtle claim to his own divinity.

So was Jesus indeed blameless and "good"? The scriptures state that Jesus faced all the same temptations common to man, yet he refused to be led astray into sin (**Hebrews 4:15**). This sets Jesus high above all who were ever born of women. It assures us that Jesus was not simply a son of man; he was the Son of God. Jesus was and is all the fullness of deity in bodily form. In other words, Jesus was good, because Jesus was and is God!

In answering the question about receiving eternal life, Jesus again demonstrated reverence for the Law of Moses and used the Ten Commandments to challenge the rich young ruler. It was right for Jesus to answer from the covenant still valid under heaven at this time, for the Ten Commandments and the entire Law of Moses was still in effect until the start of the Church Age. Jesus

quickly reviewed commandments five through nine with the ruler. These commandments dealt with sins that a man commits against another man.

Exodus 20:12-16

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³"You shall not murder.

¹⁴"You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵"You shall not steal.

¹⁶"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

If the ruler's reply was genuine, he had been obedient to these commands and treated his fellow man in a way that pleased God.

Jesus then dealt with the greatest of the Ten Commandments – commandments one and two.

Exodus 20:3-5a

"You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God

Wealth alone is not a violation of any covenant made between God and man. However, there are many sins that tempt the wealthy and this young ruler had apparently given in to one or more of them. In keeping with the Ten Commandments, it would appear that his wealth was accompanied with some level of greed, which is defined as idolatry (**Eph. 5:5, Col. 3:5**). Idolatry is a clear violation of the first and second commandments. Jesus' challenge seemed to catch him by surprise. He was most likely unaware that his wealth had become like a god to him. The security and trust that he was supposed to have placed in Jehovah God had been ever so deceptively replaced by his dependence on money.

We serve a jealous God – one that searches our minds and knows our hearts. God is aware when we have set up an idol in our lives that we hold more sacred than him. He knows if we truly trust and rely on our relationship with him or whether we've placed our dependence elsewhere. Anything can become idolatrous if we place it before God or if we are unwilling to give it up for his kingdom. We can draw our security from a relationship, from our family, from our money, or simply from ourselves and thus we thus forsake God. Idolatry can be the most delusive and entrapping of all sins. Satan loves to make God jealous by supplying us with whatever we will accept as a substitute for relying on the one true heavenly Father.

As stated before, the process of entering the kingdom of God involves letting go – surrendering completely and offering yourself wholly to God. Jesus was able to lock-in directly at the one thing that this man needed let go of and completely submit to God. Jesus did not challenge every would-be disciple to sell

all their possessions and give them to the poor. But this man's refusal to let go of his wealth confirmed that this was indeed the one area in which his faith was weak. When confronted the man was saddened, which revealed his lack of trust in God. He was given one specific assignment that would guarantee him eternal life and treasure in heaven that infinitely surpassed his present wealth. But he failed the test.

Likewise every man and woman when confronted with the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God will be faced with a major challenge, a test of faith that outweighs all the other requirements to put God first. Our issue may or may not be the same kind of idolatry that controlled the rich young ruler. Nevertheless, we will all be asked to loosen our grip and let go of that one thing in life that has brought us security. As each of us surveys our life and counts the cost to become a disciple, the stumbling block in our way seldom boils down to more than one sacred treasure that Satan has eagerly lavished upon us. The one thing we lack might be a worldly relationship that needs to be dissolved. Or we might be called to sacrifice our time to be committed to the fellowship of believers. We may even need to offer up our job or career to God if it prevents us from seeking first his kingdom. Perhaps our fear of persecution and our people pleasing nature is the one thing that must be laid on the altar before the Lord. There are numerous sins and distractions that compete for our souls and we will be called to give them up that we might make the sovereign Lord our refuge.

Jesus declared to both the rich young ruler and the crowd how difficult it is – in fact nearly impossible – for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Because wealth brings such esteem, power, and security on earth, those who possess it are placed at a great disadvantage as they are faced with surrendering it all for a kingdom that is not of this earth. How could something so powerful in this world be so powerless within the spiritual realms? Why is it that something so useful and dependable in life be so worthless in the afterlife? Satan is often able to deceive the rich into believing that they have everything to lose by coming into the kingdom. Those who have little to nothing of value on earth are overjoyed by the same opportunity, for they have everything to gain.

Perhaps the most relevant passage in the Jewish scriptures that testified against this young ruler's sin is found in **Psalm 49**. He had no doubt sung this psalm during many a worship service in the synagogue. If only he had given heed to its words and displayed the understanding that God intended him to receive he would have not been saddened by Jesus words. The **Proverbs** warn not of the perils of wealth, but of trusting in wealth and depending on it over and above God. Though you can be sustained by wealth throughout your lifetime on earth only God can rescue you on the day of judgment. This is the warning that needs to be heeded even by today's disciples who have been blessed with prosperity.

Ephes. 5:5

Col. 3:5

Psalm 49:1-20

Proverbs 11:4

Proverbs 11:28

Salvation = Perfection

Luke 18:26-34

When the disciples witnessed a man who seemed so eager to learn and obey God's commandments now walking away sad and dejected, it made them wonder if anyone could live up to the standard specified by Christ. Jesus had once proclaimed, "*Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" – **Matthew 5:48**. Could he have possibly been serious? Is perfection the prerequisite for salvation? In support of this supposal, Jesus' appeal of the rich young ruler as recorded in **Matthew 19:21** was, "*If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*" The man had asked what he must do to inherit eternal life and Jesus replied by instructed him how to achieve perfection. His failure to live up to this challenge is symbolic of every man and woman's inevitable failure to uphold God's commands to perfection. If this is the requirement for eternal life, how could any person be saved?

Jesus' response in **Mark 10:27**, "*With man this is impossible*", sheds light on the very flaw inherent within the Law of Moses that required this covenant to be a temporary one and gave rise to God's new covenant in Christ. The flaw is simply this: Based on the Law of Moses salvation was and is impossible. If you were found guilty of the slightest infraction of this law you were guilty of breaking the entire law (**James 2:10**). Considering that not a single man or woman has walked before God without fault, all men were sure to fall short of the glory of God (**Rom. 3:22a-23**). Furthermore, the blood of goats and rams sacrificed as sin offerings under the covenant of Moses could not actually atone for the sins of the lawbreaker (**Hebrews 10:4**). Thus all who lived and died under the covenant of Moses would stand before God and be found guilty of sin. So salvation could never be attained exclusively through the covenant of Moses because it was based on man's best effort to uphold the laws of God to perfection (which, as Jesus pointed out, is an impossible task). And besides this, we understand from **Romans 9:16** that God's mercy is in no way dependant upon man's desire or effort anyway. This built-in flaw would soon make the Law obsolete and no longer binding.

If indeed salvation was impossible, why then had Peter and the others forsaken their homes, families, and everything they once knew to follow Jesus? They were not given to greed (barring Judas) but surely they too were flawed; they had all fallen short in some way. Did that mean that they too would be unable to enter the kingdom of God? Jesus reassured them that their sacrifice would not go unnoticed or unrewarded. In fact, those who are willing to step out on faith and shed the distractions of the world for the sake of Christ will reap a harvest of blessing during their lifetime and certainly in the afterlife. Jesus had come that we might have life to the full (**John 10:10**). When we shall look back on the things that we gave up to enter the kingdom and compare it to the blessings we receive in Christ, we will be embarrassed to think that we struggled to let go of such rubbish.

Despite this promise we must return to the issue of salvation. We are not guaranteed to be saved simply because we make a sacrificial decision to repent

and follow Christ. There is still the issue of atonement for our sins that must be satisfied before anyone – including those who lived under the covenant of Moses – will be granted salvation. This was the crux of Jesus' words to the disciples in **Luke 18:31-33** as he again informed them that the fulfillment of the ages written about in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms would soon take place in Jerusalem. Although they did not comprehend his words Jesus was answering the disciples' earlier inquiry as to who could be saved. Jesus acknowledged that only through God is salvation possible. And soon Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, would be offered up as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of all mankind. Only through this suffering would Christ himself be made perfect (**Hebrews 5:8-9**). And only through his sacrifice can we be made perfect (**Hebrews 10:14**).

Following the resurrection of Christ mankind would now be offered complete atonement from sins through Jesus' blood shed on the cross as a sin offering. The flaw within the covenant of Moses was now resolved for all those who died under its jurisdiction. For those who came after the resurrection there is no need to return to the flawed covenant, as all the requirements of the law would be fully met in all those who are washed by his atoning blood as they receive the baptism into the name of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:1-4

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

The entire book of **Hebrews** is a masterfully written essay addressing this issue in its entirety. Paul is assumed by most scholars to have written the book (perhaps even as a joint effort with Luke), though in fact its author remains a mystery. What is not in question is the book's Holy Spirit inspiration. The book shows us that the Law was flawed from the beginning in that perfection through the law was impossible (**Heb. 7:11, 18-19**). We are told that the covenant of Moses was never intended to last forever but was in fact a physical foreshadowing of the new covenant to come (**Heb. 10:1-2**). The Hebrew author teaches us that the blood of animals was not able to atone for the sins of the people nor was it sufficient to clear the conscience of the worshipper (**Heb. 10:3-4, 10:11, 9:9**). Thus, another sacrifice for sins became necessary – a perfect offering whose blood would forever atone for our sins and clear our guilty consciences (**Heb. 9:13-14**). Because Jesus lived a sinless life he was able to offer his own body once and for all time as that sacrifice of atonement (**Heb. 4:15, 9:14, 10:19-20**,

7:27). When he was tortured and crucified Jesus was forever made perfect through this suffering and death (**Heb. 2:10, 5:8-9, 7:28**).

After Christ's death and resurrection the new covenant was put into effect and forgiveness through the blood of Christ made available (**Heb. 9:16-17, 22**). In addition to this, the atoning blood of Jesus allows sinful man to be made perfect and thus attain salvation (**Heb. 5:9, 10:12-14**). Jesus resurrected and later ascended to heaven where he now sits at the right hand of God (**Heb. 10:12**) as the mediator of this new covenant between God and man (**Heb. 9:15, 8:6-8**). We can never return in any way to the old covenant for it has become obsolete (**Heb. 8:13**). Neither should we expect another covenant or plan of God for the redemption of mankind (**Heb. 10:10**). Rather we merely await Christ's return and the salvation that only he can bring (**Heb. 9:27-28**). Until the day that Christ is again revealed the church which bears his name has been given to all men and women who have been cleansed with Jesus' blood and have entered into this new covenant of God (**Heb. 12:22-24**).

I shall include one last note regarding the passage in **Luke 18:31-33**.

Jesus revealed to his disciples the events that were soon to unfold surrounding his rejection, crucifixion, and his resurrection. In fact, he listed eight specific details that will occur at this time. We have already shown that many events from Jesus life and death happened as prophesied by the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the writings of the prophets. Yet we cannot ignore the many prophecies that Jesus made about himself. Throughout his ministry Jesus foretold events that would be fulfilled during his lifetime, at the time of his death, and afterwards. This too provides us with further proof that Jesus was from God, for his disciples lived to witness the fulfillment of many of these prophecies and testified as such.

The eight predictions Jesus made here in **Luke 18:31-33** would all be fulfilled at the upcoming Passover week. They are as follows:

1. His death would take place at Jerusalem – Fulfilled **Mark 15:41**
2. Handed over to the Gentiles – Fulfilled **Luke 23:1, Matt. 27:2**
3. Mocked by Gentiles (and Chief priests and teachers of the law) – Fulfilled **Matt. 27:29, Mark 15:20,31, Luke 23:11**
4. Insulted – Fulfilled **Matt. 27:39,44**
5. Spat upon – Fulfilled **Matt. 26:67, 27:30**
6. Flogged – Fulfilled **Matt. 27:26**
7. Killed – Fulfilled **John 19:33-34**
8. Raised to life on the third day – Fulfilled **Luke 24:21-23**



More Evidence

Luke 18:35-43

As they neared Jericho Jesus stopped to heal a blind beggar who called out from the roadside despite the attempts made to silence his cries. The blind beggar called Jesus the 'Son of David'. This was a direct reference to the prophesied

King of the Jews, a descendant of David who was to restore the kingdom to Israel (**Isaiah 16:5, Jeremiah 23:5, Ezekiel 37:24-25**). Jesus again credits the blind man's faith for his miraculous restoration of sight. It is remarkable to see that the news about Jesus, the reports of his miracles, and the debates over his significance had become so widespread throughout Judea that even those who sat begging in the streets were familiar with his name.

Before the eyes of the traveling procession Jesus continued to supply concrete evidence of his divine power. He would soon reach Jerusalem and it would be these men and women, those who had witnessed his many miracles, that would welcome Jesus into the Holy City with praise and loud adulation. Like the blind beggar they too would reach the conclusion that Jesus was the Son of David, the rightful King of Israel. But we shall see that a faith based solely on miracles and not deeply rooted in the teachings of the scriptures can be shallow indeed. For within a week's time the Pharisees, elders, and teachers of the law would successfully convince many within this same crowd that Jesus was a blasphemer and his power was given him by Satan to deceive the Jewish nation. Nevertheless, these miracles were performed and recorded in the scriptures to forever serve both as a testimony against all who reject Jesus as Lord and Savior and as a basis to build up the faith of those who put their trust in him.

Let us take a moment here to discuss the existence and purpose for the miracles performed by Jesus' followers. Jesus gave the apostles the commission to preach to the nations and he issued them the power to perform miracles as a sign to accompany the message (**Mark 16:15-18**). The message of the kingdom through the word of Christ is essential for saving faith (**Rom. 10:14-17**), whereas the miracles were used primarily to open up a door for that message. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were offered to men in three distinct ways in the New Testament: **1**) They were given by Jesus himself prior to his ascension into heaven (**Luke 9:1-2**), **2**) They were given as evidence of the Holy Spirit baptism that befell the disciples in the upper room at Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-4**) and the household of Cornelius (**Acts 10:44-46**), and **3**) They were passed on by the laying on of an apostle's hands (**Acts 8:17-19**).

The first of these means of distributing the miraculous gifts was available only during the Messianic Age. The scriptures do not record Jesus personally bestowing the miraculous gifts of the Spirit after he ascended into heaven. The second method was unique to the recipients it affected. The baptism of the Holy Spirit came upon both gatherings without warning and was intended to usher in the kingdom of God first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Again, the New Testament does not record another heaven-sent baptism of the Holy Spirit coming upon any person or groups of persons other than the two specific instances listed here.

The third method of receiving the gifts – the laying on of the apostles' hands – was used quite extensively in the early church. However, the scriptures are clear that an apostle had to be physically present to perform this function. Thus, the apostles would travel to fledgling churches – like the one in Samaria in **Acts 8** – to administer the miraculous gifts and strengthen the church. Those who received the gifts through the laying on of hands (like Philip, **Acts 8:5-13**) could

perform whatever gift they had received (for there were many gifts besides the ability to perform miracles) but they could never pass on this manifestation of the Spirit to others.

We see then a definite limit to the time period in which the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would be present in the church. Once the Apostolic Age ended (with the death of those commissioned by Jesus as apostles) the ability to pass on the miraculous gifts of the Spirit would end as well. Those on whom the apostles had laid their hands would be the last ones to receive this endorsement in the church. This does not mean that the miracles of God have become obsolete. In fact, faith in God and in God's mighty power is still available to believers today. Through faith we are left with the opportunity to see God move in inexplicable ways if we would only believe and not doubt. What has changed since the Apostolic Age is the avenue through which God moves, but God's power to do miracles has not been limited in any way. God will move in his timing and according to his will and according to our faith. The outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit given to men to perform miraculous signs has passed away. This avenue was opened up to men for a time in the early church and served its purpose until the infant church began to blossom into maturity (**1 Cor. 13:8-13**)

Should this alarm us? Should this cause us regret of any kind? Are we at a disadvantage because we are not able to witness the miraculous power of God working through the hands of men still today? Far from it. The early church was given miracles for the greater purpose of giving authority to the Gospel message. Throughout the book of Acts you see a demonstration of the miraculous gifts always accompanied by the Gospel message. Saving faith therefore is dependent on the message not the miracles. The completion of God's word through the addition of the New Testament scriptures actually gives us the advantage because our faith can rest secure in God and his unchanging word rather than men. The authority given us to back up the Gospel message today is the complete word of God – the Old and New Testaments, and that is superior to the outward miraculous displays done in years past.

Walking according to the word of the Lord builds up faith and godly character, while those who rely on what can be seen are prone to faithlessness. History has proven that men and women whose faith in God is based solely or largely on his miracles are easily swayed. Of the generation of Israelites who witnessed all the outstanding miracles God performed through Moses and Aaron, not one of them except Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter into the Promised Land. Despite seeing the wonders of God that led to their deliverance, the entire nation of Israel broke faith with God. They all died in the desert because of their unbelief. And what about the generation that witnessed the all-surpassing miracles performed by Jesus of Nazareth? They too will be judged most severely because of their widespread rejection of his ministry. These are the two generations throughout the whole of history in which God performed his most generous host of wondrous signs. In spite of this, the people of both eras proved to be shallow in their faith and slow in heart to believe in the power of God. What could have saved the people of both generations was a genuine faith in

God's promises, an unwavering belief in his words, and a willingness to trust and obey his messenger. Indeed we are at an advantage because we have the opportunity to base our faith in the perfect and eternal word of God whose existence is itself a miracle of astronomical proportions.

The Generations that rejected the miracles of God

Numbers 14:21-24

Matthew 11:20-24

Mark 8:11-12

Luke 17:25

The Gospel message accompanied by miraculous signs

John 14:11

Mark 16:15-18

Acts 3:11-16

Acts 8:12-14

Acts 14:3

Faith is dependent on the Word, not on miraculous signs or visible demonstrations of God's power

Romans 10:14-17

1 Thes. 2:13

2 Cor. 4:18

Hebrews 11:1

Paul explains that the infant church relied on miraculous signs. As the Apostolic Age begins to close, the full revelation of God and the completion of his word will bring the church to maturity.

1 Cor. 13:8-12

THE MARTYR

BREAKFAST WITH LUKE CHAPTERS 19 - 24

Saving Zacchaeus **Luke 19:1-10**

The southward route taken to Jerusalem passed through the frontier town of Jericho, which was the sight of a customs station. The taxes gathered in this town would have been extensive not only for its prime location, but also because of the Herodian palace positioned there. The chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, would have been a very wealthy Jew with subordinates under his charge. He would have likely been the one man who dealt regularly with the Roman government regarding the necessary quotas exacted from the merchants and the inhabitants of Jericho – Jews and otherwise. This frequent interaction with pagans and his collaboration with the hated Romans would have cast him well outside the bounds of acceptable Jewish society and all but eliminated him from synagogue participation. Even those Jews he associated with and befriended were certainly those that had forfeited strict obedience to the Law of Moses and the Levitical regulations regarding cleanliness. In a word, Zacchaeus was lost.

It is not known whether Jesus and Zacchaeus had any previous encounter that would have enabled Jesus to recognize him by name. The calling out to Zacchaeus could certainly be the result of a prophetic revelation, as the Spirit of God did rest on Christ to the fullest measure. However, Jesus had surely passed through Jericho during previous trips to Jerusalem. Perhaps Matthew the apostle and former tax-gatherer was acquainted with Zacchaeus and the group had spent time with him during a previous encounter. Maybe Jesus and Zacchaeus had a brief but meaningful discussion at some juncture prior to this day. This would explain Zacchaeus' uncharacteristic climbing of a tree in hopes of getting a glimpse of Jesus and maybe even catching his attention. Luke offers an enormous amount of attention to the miracles of Jesus in his Gospel, yet he does not give us the indication that Jesus' recognition of Zacchaeus was miraculous. We are given rather inconclusive information to support either assertion.

Regardless, Zacchaeus embodied the precise heart towards the kingdom of God that Jesus had been preaching about of late. With almost childlike enthusiasm, this dignified businessman had run ahead of the crowd and scampered up a tree just to see the Lord. When Jesus came to his house, he responded with even greater excitement and couldn't wait to prove his repentance. Jesus did not command or require anything of Zacchaeus; he really didn't have to. By his own initiative, Zacchaeus was more than happy to sacrifice half of his assets and give them to the poor. He was also determined to be right before God and make restitution for any sins he had committed as a tax collector. His change of heart was nothing less than miraculous – an act of God. Thus, Jesus had proven to his disciples that although it was hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, it was not at all impossible through God.

In **2 Corinthians 7:10-11**, Paul accurately defines the type of repentance that leads to salvation. As Paul lists the various characteristics of true repentance provoked by godly sorrow, we are able to see every element present in Zacchaeus. He was earnest (taken from the Greek **spoude, spoo-day**; meaning “*speed*”³⁶) and wasted no time with his radical response. He was eager both to clear himself and to see justice done; he promised retribution of four times the amount if he had cheated anyone. His indignation was unquestionable, as he quickly shook off the yoke of his greed and donated half of his wealth to the poor. Zacchaeus demonstrated a newfound fear of God, a longing to be right with him, and the zeal necessary to make such a drastic change in his life. And it was this response that enabled Jesus to call Zacchaeus a son of Abraham, an heir to all the promises made to the original patriarch of faith. Jesus now looked past all the obvious sins that had formerly separated Zacchaeus from God, and he saw a broken man taking responsibility for his sin. As seen in his excitement, his humility, and his willingness to respond and change rapidly, Zacchaeus received the kingdom with the heart of a child.

Jesus defined the purpose of his coming to earth when he stated in **vs. 10**, “*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*” One of God’s major points of contention with the Jewish leaders was that they had forsaken this very calling. God desired for the leaders of his people to be like shepherds over the flock. They were to seek and save the stray sheep and bring them back into the fold. Zacchaeus was just such a lost sheep that desired to be called back into the flock by the true Shepherd of Israel. The leaders were supposed to protect and provide spiritual leadership over God’s people. They were to show concern for the weak and regard for the sick. When they failed to live up to all these responsibilities, God promised through the prophet Ezekiel that the Sovereign Lord himself would take care of the sheep, gather in the strays, and attend to the weak. We again see proof that Jesus was God in the flesh and he had come in fulfillment of this prophecy in **Ezekiel 34:11-16**. (Read also **Ezekiel 34:1-6**).



Well Done

Luke 19:11-27

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, everyone began to anticipate whether or not this might be the crescendo of his ministry and if in fact the kingdom of God would now come to Israel. Although the parable of the minas was meant to clearly define the future of both Jesus and the kingdom, we can be sure that few if any of the disciples or hearers of this parable understood its true meaning at the time Jesus proclaimed it.

Jesus clarified one major misunderstanding at the beginning of the parable. The nobleman in this story was not crowned king in front of his subjects. Instead, he traveled to a distant country to be appointed and promised to return again someday. Likewise, Jesus had no intention of accepting a crown either

³⁶ Greek 4710; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

from the Jewish nation or from his loyal followers, for his kingdom was not of this world (**John 18:36**). Thus, it was necessary for Jesus to be taken far away into heaven following his resurrection and placed on the throne of God at that time. In heaven he would be given the title KING OF KINGS and God would impart all authority in heaven and on earth over to him. Paul describes in **Philip. 2:9-11** how the name of Jesus Christ has been exalted above all others and should be held in appropriate reverence. Like the would-be king, Jesus also promised to come back again and gather those who have been faithful to him. Those who acknowledge him as the true Lord and king of their lives will welcome his return.

To reject Jesus as the Christ or by your actions to deny his Lordship in your life, you are fulfilling the words of this prophetic parable. During his earthly absence, many will reject Jesus and will give no heed to his authority as he sits enthroned at the right hand of God. Most of the major religions of the world today have conceded that Jesus was a good man, a useful teacher, and perhaps even a prophet. This is far from acknowledging that the name of Jesus Christ has been exalted above all others. It is God's will that we be brought to complete faith in Jesus, bow before him as king over our lives, and confess that Jesus is Lord. Those that fail to do so will eventually be brought before his throne of Christ and destroyed (**vs. 27**). Make no mistake, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hindu, Bahai, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and so many other religious sects whether major or minor in size have altogether rejected Jesus as the one true King of kings, Lord and Savior, and God Most High. They will surely be swept away in the destruction that God has planned for the ungodly.

What is perhaps worse are the many people who call themselves Christians but allow no room in their hearts for the Lordship of Christ. They swear allegiance to him as savior, yet they are not obedient to the scriptures nor do they elevate the will of Christ above their own. They keep the message of the Gospel hidden away, like a mina in a piece of cloth. They make little or no effort to bring about a return on the investment that God has given them. These individuals will also be held accountable for their rejection of Jesus as Lord and king over their lives.

Read John 14:2-3
Acts 2:32-36

While the king in this parable was gone, he gave a portion of his treasures to several of his servants. Upon his return, each was called to give an account for the way they used the gift entrusted them. During the time that Jesus remains in heaven prior to his return, he has entrusted his servants – or disciples – with the message of the kingdom and the good news of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness offered to all through his blood. He has also given us the ability and the opportunity to deliver this message. Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a treasure in **Matt. 13:48**. Paul illustrated that we carry the treasure of the gospel message around in our mortal bodies in **2 Cor. 4:1-7**. This treasure is not just given us to merely believe and keep to ourselves. The expectation that Jesus

clearly communicated in this parable is that we must be reliable with the Gospel and multiply the knowledge and faith that was given to us.

Jesus is speaking this parable to those who have just heard him exclaim that his purpose for coming to earth was to seek and save the lost. While on the earth, Jesus set them an example with the profound impact he had on the lost world. He turned many from the darkness to the light. Jesus influenced people deeply by his love for them and his radical expectations of repentance. After approximately three years of ministry, he had transformed many lives and left behind a few hundred men and women who had become true disciples. Many within this number were men who had themselves been trained to preach the message of the kingdom and multiply the number of disciples. His impact should not solely be limited to those who committed their lives to him while he walked the earth. Jesus also planted seeds of faith during his many public sermons and various times of teaching and healing in homes and synagogues.

In this parable, Jesus clearly communicated to his disciples that they too would be expected to embrace this calling – seeking and saving the lost. Since the moment they began to follow the Lord they were told that they would one day become fishers of men. Nearly three years later, Jesus would soon depart and they would be expected to spread the message of the kingdom and utilize the training given them by the Lord. Jesus reassured them in [John 4:37-38](#) that the hard work of laying the foundation and sowing the seeds of faith had already accomplished. Surely he meant to give credit to all of the prophets who came before him and laid down their lives as they preached to Israel and foretold the coming of Christ and his kingdom (not to mention Jesus' own grueling mission of atonement). And as was just said, Jesus himself was responsible for sowing the word of God throughout Israel to provide much of the harvest that the early church would reap. The seeds he sowed would spring forth into saving faith as the disciples set forth to accomplish their mission, beginning in Jerusalem. Even as the remnant of Jewish believers began to convert to Christ, the message of the kingdom would then encompass the Gentile world as well.

As Jesus pointed out, the credit for God's inspired word and its power to bring a person to faith belongs to God and to those whom the Holy Spirit inspired. However, the first-century disciples would soon get their chance to prove trustworthy with this precious gift given them. In fact, many of them had already been sent out two by two to test the waters and had been quite effective. Like the king who went off to a distant country, Jesus could now leave and entrust those left behind with the Great Commission of [Matthew 28:18-20](#).

For those who wish to follow Christ today, this expectation has not changed. When God opens up our hearts to the truth and gives us insight into his Word and the faith to take a stand on the teachings of Christ, he is in fact entrusting us with something very valuable. We must put it to work! And to those who continue to prove faithful with this charge, the "he who has will be given more" principle discussed previously in this commentary applies. Upon Jesus' return, we will be called to account for the way we used this precious knowledge. If we lived by the Spirit and employed the message of the kingdom so that many more are brought to faith, our reward will be great. We will hear the

most desirable words ever spoken by our God: “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

But like the worthless servant, we also have the opportunity to quench the Spirit, succumb to our fears, and bury the truth away. Rising up within numerous “Christian” circles is an effort to minimize – even eliminate – the very clear expectations that Jesus places on his followers to evangelize, to share the message of the kingdom with others, and to multiply the number of faithful believers. They feebly concede that some are called to share the good news while others are simply obliged to accept it and do little else. They eliminate the call to fish from the title Fisher of Men. By using incessant, hyper-spiritual arguments they remove the **GO** from Jesus’ straightforward commands to **go** work the harvest field (**Luke 10:2-3**), to **go** and bear much fruit (**John 15:16**), and to **go** and make disciples of all nations (**Matthew 28:18**). These Sunday-only Christians attempt to explain away any time in which Jesus specifically assigned his followers to the duty of multiplying the number of faithful disciples. They make Christianity sound like an eastern philosophy focussed around self-enlightenment. They insist that bearing fruit is always meant to be an inward experience, not an outward multiplication. Faith in Jesus then becomes just another way of salvation rather than the one and only hope for a lost and dying world.

It is true that we do not have Jesus’ explanation of this parable either in **Matthew 25** or **Luke 19**. Do we really need it? I reckon if Jesus had not clearly explained the parable of the sower, this same group would have been telling more stories about how unfruitfulness is simply the condition of a believer who has stagnated in his spiritual walk, rather than a disciple who has forgotten the very purpose for which he was chosen by God – to proclaim the kingdom message and to reap a harvest among those who walk in darkness. When asked to explain the parable of the sower, Jesus went on to verify that the seed is the kingdom message, the very words of God, and the different soils are different types of persons with various reactions to that message. The good soil was the one that not only accepted the message but also persevered throughout their lifetime and multiplied what was sown in them thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times over – numeric growth not internal growth.

Perhaps no other group within Christendom more accurately personifies the wicked and lazy servant of **Luke 19** than the overwhelming number that simply refuse to open their mouths and extend an invitation to those living in darkness. Because he completely misjudged God and used his own fine-sounding argument to disobey the king’s distinct command to put his money to work, the wicked servant was stripped of his mina. Imagine God’s frustration with these numerous souls who spend a lifetime turning the pages of his inspired Word only to bury it away deep in their minds, never to be put to work and multiplied within the hearts of their friends and neighbors. They too rely on hollow and flimsy reasoning to spin a complicated web of self-deceit. The result is that the message of the kingdom remains dormant in their lives. In the end, the wicked servant of this parable was simply unable to overcome his fear. Likewise, those who skirt the responsibility to spread the message of the kingdom are simply hiding behind their fear of rejection and persecution.

As true disciples, let us not be found guilty of casting aside the very clear expectation to seek and save the lost. We must evaluate seriously the effort we are putting forth to prove trustworthy to our king with the invaluable treasure he has bestowed upon us. Let us not be held captive by our fear of the world, but let our love for the lost overcome our fears. The bottom-line issue with those who fear the responsibility of personal evangelism is not necessarily a fear issue, a faithlessness issue, or even a laziness issue. The root problem is lack of love for the lost world, for perfect love drives away all fear (**1 John 4:18**) and covers over a multitude of sins (**1 Peter 4:8**).

The Bible is God's inspired word and contains the power to change lives, to rescue those being led astray to spiritual death, to soften the hard-hearted, and to free those who are held captive to sin. When we decide to share our faith with these lost souls and open up the scriptures with them, we are able to harness this power and make an eternal difference on the world, as Jesus did during his earthly stay. And like Jesus, we too can have a profound impact on people's lives if we simply put to work the treasure given us by God.



Here Comes Your King

Luke 19:28-38

Jesus had reached Jerusalem in spite of threats from Herod, disapproval from the Samaritans, and mounting persecution against his movement. In the parable we just discussed, Jesus was represented by a king. The scene next recorded by Luke is his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem on a young donkey, which fulfilled the prophecy spoken through Zechariah regarding the coming of Israel's king. Luke makes no mention of the prophecy as do Matthew and John, who both include **Zech. 9:9** in their accounts. Luke was most certainly familiar with the said prophecy, but his aim was not to prove that Jesus was the Messiah as foretold by the Jewish prophets, for Matthew's Gospel already in existence at that time had done this. Luke is more concerned with showing that Jesus was the Savior for every man and woman. Thus, we see again the Gentile nature of his narrative.

Zech. 9:9-10

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion!

Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and having salvation,

gentle and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰*I will take away the chariots from Ephraim*

and the war-horses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

*His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

The fact that the disciples found the colt and the owner's response all just as Jesus had predicted again seems quite prophetic and we have no reason to question otherwise. However, the true miracle in this little story is the behavior of the colt itself. Luke makes it a point to mention that this foal of a donkey had never been ridden. A colt that had not been broken and trained would make it next to impossible to ride or even sit on the first try. Then add the commotion of the crowd on either side of Jesus shouting out the Psalms, lifting their voices in loud praise, and laying cloaks and palm branches on the road before him. Even a broken colt would have likely become jittery and frightened with such a surrounding. Yet in fulfillment of Zechariah's prophesy, Jesus' own gentle nature even had an effect on this animal as it proudly boasted the King of Israel – the Son of God no less – on its shoulders.

The crowd that had been traveling with Jesus during this most recent journey now ran ahead to welcome him as he rode into the Holy City. They bore witness to Jesus' most recent series of miracles as he made his final journey to Jerusalem. Many in this crowd had seen or heard about Lazarus, the friend of Jesus who had been raised to life more than four days after his death ([John 11:41-44](#)). They were compelled to praise him for they could not deny what they had seen and heard. From their choice of adulation it appears that they understood the kingly significance of Jesus' decision to ride on the foal of a donkey. A slight variation of [Psalm 118:26](#) ("Blessed is the **king**..." instead of "Blessed is he...") was chanted loudly by the onlookers. Though many in the crowd may have grasped the reference to Zechariah's prophesy, John makes sure to note that the disciples were unaware of its fulfillment until much later ([John 12:16](#)).

The tide would take a major turn as the Passover week continued on. Those who now hurled praise would soon hurl insults at this same Jesus. For at least a brief moment however, humanity was able to see and recognize their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ robed in peace, righteousness, and gentleness. This was his earthly glory. He held salvation in his right hand. The kingdom he would bring forth would offer spiritual peace and healing to the ends of the earth, as spoken about through Zechariah.

[Read Psalm 118:22-29](#)



Praise God

Luke 19:39-40

As the shouts of praise from Jesus' followers grew louder, the Pharisees went from concerned to indignant. The issue was not that they were just spoilsports unable to join with the others in their expressions of joy. To the Pharisees, their current dispute with Jesus was a question of blasphemy, a serious

offense to one who claims allegiance to the God of the scriptures. They were most certainly disturbed by Jesus' own self-reference to Israel's king as he purposely chose to ride into the city on a colt. But as the crowds began to offer up praises to God, the Pharisees attempted to point out to Jesus that this was completely inappropriate.

The Pharisees seemed to hold this whole scene suspect, believing that much of the praise being offered might even have been directed towards Jesus, who was to them just a man. They hoped that he would either refuse their adoration or forbid their borderline worship of him. This is typical of the confrontations that would be forthcoming in this Passover week that will eventually lead to Jesus' arrest and appearance before the Sanhedrin to answer to charges of blasphemy.

Nevertheless, Jesus accepted the praise of his disciples and did not refuse the messianic references they made of him. Contrary to the Pharisees' request, Jesus proclaimed that if his disciples kept quiet, the stones would have cried out in their stead. Jesus could have been referring to the stones of the temple, in which the name of the Lord dwelt throughout Israel's history. However, he might also be making a general reference to God's creation, concluding that if mankind remained so blind as to the time of God's coming to earth, then at least creation would have taken notice. In other words, praising God at this moment was so fitting that even nature itself was exalting the Lord as he entered the Holy City. The King of kings was at last approaching the hour in which his glory would be revealed to the earth. How good and fitting it was for the people to praise the Lord and Jesus would not discourage them from doing so.

Psalm 147:1

Psalm 148:1-14



O Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44

In truth, no one other than Jesus truly understood the significance of this hour. Although he rode into Jerusalem heralded as a king, he knew how quickly he would be forsaken once the events of the Passover week ran their course. Even his faithful disciples would be tested beyond their present level of faith as the yeast of the Pharisees began to spread, the persecution mounted, and finally the Roman government stepped forward to act. The Sanhedrin, the elders, and the Pharisees would soon convince the masses that Jesus was a blasphemer, a deceiver empowered by the forces of evil so that even his miracles (for which they gave him praise; **Luke 19:37**) could be explained away. The mob that seemed so ready to crown Jesus on this day would be the same voices shouting, "Crucify! Crucify!" The same crowds that ran ahead to welcome him into the city as a savior would also be there to follow him out of the city, taunting him as a criminal.

Jesus loved Jerusalem. Even with the foreknowledge of his own rejection there and after assigning blame to this same city for the killing of prophets and God's messengers ([Luke 13:34](#)), he still had compassion on those who lived there. No doubt filled with a range of emotions stretching for more than a thousand years, Jesus broke down and wept over this great city. This was not just a man in love with the city that represented his earthly heritage. This was the Ancient of Days – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – weeping over the darkness that had so often shrouded his chosen sons and daughters. God had set apart this small tribe of people out of all others on earth to raise up for himself a nation of people upon which he could shower his love. And now appearing as a man, the Lord God still loved Jerusalem – the city that once bore his name.

Rejection only hurts when it is done by someone or something dearly loved. Jesus would soon be escorted out of his beloved city and nailed to a cross with the full approval of the Jewish leaders and the majority of the city's inhabitants. Yet as Jesus looked to the future at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, there was no sense of retribution, no desire for payback, and no relief brought on by the judgment that would soon come. Even though his own people would soon reject him, it still pained him to think about those he loved so much having to suffer so greatly for their sins.

We are given some rather remarkable insight here into the very nature of God. He does not delight in the death or suffering of those who have sinned against him and have rejected him by their wickedness. He revealed this fact clearly to the prophet Ezekiel during the previous destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians ([Ezekiel 18:23](#)). After reading through the history of Israel and Judah prior to the exile, it becomes obvious that God patiently endured their wickedness and put off this judgment for hundreds of years in hopes that his children might repent. Had they repented, God would have certainly withheld the punishment that they received and would have spared himself the pain of watching his loved ones suffer.

God does not enjoy the punishment of the wicked. He simply wants them to repent and turn to him and live. God is even willing to grant a full pardon to the worst of sinners who simply repents and does what is right. Not a single offense will be counted against those who renounce their evil ways and come to him. As Jesus wept for Jerusalem, he only wished they could open their eyes and repent so that this painful chapter of history (the destruction of Jerusalem) would not have to repeat itself.

[Ezekiel 18:21-23](#)

[Ezekiel 33:10-11](#)



Jesus Clears the Temple

Luke 19:45-48

Mark 11:11 and following records that Jesus retired to Bethany in the evening after the triumphal entry and then returned to Jerusalem the next day. On this day, Jesus went to the temple with the explicit purpose to cleanse the whole area from the greed and corruption that had polluted it for many years. Caiaphas the high priest had given authority for the sale of items used in the temple sacrifices to be set up in the court of the Gentiles that surrounded the inner courts. Jesus had already driven out these moneychangers and salesmen once before as recorded in **John 2:13-16**. At that time, the Jews were not familiar with this Jesus of Nazareth and questioned him as to the authority that backed up his actions. This time, the Jews did not question him until they later found him teaching in the temple courts. Jesus quoted from **Isaiah 56:7** and **Jeremiah 7:11**, showing that the scriptures absolutely supported his behavior.

Jesus possessed a deeper regard for the holiness of the Lord's temple than did the high priest and Jewish leaders, for they had commercialized the sacred commands of God. Throughout his ministry, the Jews were hoping to catch Jesus in a blatant violation of the Law of Moses. How could they now question his loyalty to the Law after such an obvious display of passion for the sanctity of the Temple? Now, after purging these offenders from the Gentile courts, even the crowds would testify that Jesus revered the present covenant of God with faultless zeal. At the same time, those who claimed to hold on to the Law of Moses in its purest form fell short when compared to the convictions Jesus.

The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and even the leaders among the people had been embarrassed and were all on board now to oppose Jesus. They began to watch him very carefully. Their minds were made up and their aim was now clear and defined. They sought to destroy Jesus altogether. Yet the people were enthralled with him. This frustrated the Pharisees as they exclaimed in **John 12:19**, "*See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!*" Those seeking Jesus' life had to lie in wait for the precise moment. If they used their own temple guards to arrest him, a commotion might start among the people. They knew that the Romans had already assigned an extra delegation of their soldiers throughout Jerusalem during this Jewish holiday. Thus, any such outbreak among the people would certainly lead to a Roman intervention to detain Jesus. The Sanhedrin would then be unable to question him. Thus, they spread out their snares and patiently waited for Jesus to step into any one of them. Their hearts were now so full of hatred and deceit that they began to behave so typically of those bent on evil.

Psalm 10:2, 7-9

Psalm 35:19-21

Psalm 38:12

Psalm 41:5-9

Psalm 55:21

Psalm 57:4, 6

Psalm 140:1-5



Teaching in the Temple Courts

Luke 20:1-8

It quickly became obvious that Jesus was to be the focal point of this year's Passover celebration. People surrounded him and even hung on his words. Finally, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders together approached Jesus to confront him. They wanted to know who he claimed to be and who had given him such authority to disrupt the Temple courts the way he had. He had cleared out those involved in any type of commerce and had now set up in this same venue to teach the people. Did he consider himself a prophet? A teacher? A priest? It was clear that no ranking Jewish official or high priest had given Jesus permission to act in this way. Thus, they were hoping that Jesus would simply proclaim either that he was a prophet – perhaps even the Christ – or that the authority given him was from God himself. Either claim was a step closer to the blasphemy charge they wished to level against him.

Jesus' reply was another display of his quick-witted mastery over those who approached him with duplicity. Jesus posed a question to his opponents regarding the validity of John the Baptist. Herod Antipas, the tetrarch over Galilee and Perea, had earlier beheaded John. His martyrdom enabled the Jewish people to remember him with great respect and reverence, for he stood up to the Romans based on Jewish principles. Consequently, John was a prophet and a hero in the eyes of the people. But the chief priests and teachers of the law had rejected John by refusing to repent at his teaching and to submit to the baptism he introduced.

Those who revered John now looked on as Jesus' opponents huddled together and discussed this very situation, but they remained at an impasse. They attempted to give a neutral reply. However, their response certainly appeared irrational to the people. If these were men of God, how could they not have a conviction one way or the other about one of the most radical preachers of their day? Defeated and humiliated, they would be forced to go back to the drawing board to further scheme against the Lord.

[Psalm 35:4](#)

[Psalm 70:2-3](#)



The Parable of the Tenants

Luke 20:9-19

Jesus continued teaching in the temple courts. He illustrated in this next parable the manner in which the Israelites had treated the prophets of God throughout their history. God had given them the Promised Land and had entrusted them with his commandments. He had also made a covenant with them, promising to provide them with prosperity and blessings as they in turn devoted themselves to obeying the Lord. When they rejected his commandments, the prophets were sent to restore the people to faithful standing in their covenant with

God, for God wanted to show Israel his love for them. However, the prophets were treated harshly, as the Hebrew writer recounts:

Hebrews 11:35b-38

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- ³⁸the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

Now it was time for the owner of the vineyard to send his beloved son to those he entrusted with his property. Jesus clearly exposed the chief priests, the elders, and the teachers of the law as he depicts the tenants discussing amongst themselves and plotting how they might kill the owner's son. They easily recognized Jesus' portrayal of them in this story, which infuriated them all the more. What they had plotted in secret had been proclaimed in the Temple courts. They now looked desperately for some way to arrest Jesus, but would have to wait for another opportune moment. That time would soon come. As Jesus specifically predicted, he would be taken just outside the city of Jerusalem to be killed.

Let us not think that Jesus was afraid to frankly profess that he was the Son of God. This parable is an obvious claim of that fact and was surely understood as such by his opponents. However, Jesus was choosing his words wisely. He was not going to give the Sanhedrin any legitimate case against him, which is what they so eagerly desired. Instead, they would have to resort to half-truths and lies to bring forth their charges. Even at his upcoming trial, not a single infraction of the Mosaic Law could be found.

Another reason why Jesus used parables and quoted from the prophets was that his words would forever serve both as a testimony for those who would believe in him and as a judge for those who shall reject him. Due to the Jewish leaders' rejection of God, his messengers, and now even his son, the present covenant between the God and the Israelites would soon become obsolete. The new covenant that God was making through Jesus would include the Gentiles, the Samaritans, and those within the Jewish community that had become all but excluded from the present system of worship. Again, those who heard the parable of the tenants understood this message. Their reaction was simply, "May this never be!" In other words, "May God never abandon the covenant he made with Israel!" This was their inevitable response. However, it was the nation of Israel as a whole – including its kings, priests, and false prophets – that was to blame. They abandoned God's covenant time and time again throughout the previous 1,300+ years.

For this reason, Jesus looked at his audience directly and quoted from the same psalm that was lifted up in praise as the people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem (**Psalm 118:26**). **Psalm 118:22** predicts Israel's rejection of the rock upon which God would establish his new covenant with his people. The Jewish leaders would cast Jesus aside as an insignificant stone in the grand scheme of God's people. Yet he would be given supremacy over the heavens and the earth and would become the cornerstone of the church. Henceforth, the faithful in Christ would comprise the church, which would thereafter serve as new and living temple of God, the place in which God's name would dwell through the Holy Spirit. Lastly, Jesus referred to the prophets Isaiah and Daniel as they also described Christ and the establishment of his kingdom in terms of the rock.

Luke 20:18a "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces"
Isaiah 8:14-15

Luke 20:18b "but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

Daniel 2:34

Daniel 2:44

With this, the chief priests and the teachers of the law had heard enough. They were amassing charges of blasphemy against Jesus of Nazareth as he spoke. However, they could not deny the influence he had on the people and realized that they would be unable to arrest him during his daily appearances in the temple courts (**Luke 21:37-38**). They hoped to somehow misdirect the people's admiration and curiosity of Jesus but they continued to embarrass themselves with each public confrontation. What they needed was to separate Jesus from the people. Again, this time would soon come as Satan had already begun to work on the heart of one close to Jesus, one within his inner circle of apostles. Only after removing Jesus from the masses would the chief priests, scribes, and elders be able to persuade them that Jesus was neither a prophet nor a man sent from God. They would argue and convince many that Jesus had set himself up as an equal to God, a charge requiring death under the Law of Moses.



Giving to Caesar

Luke 20:20-26

Not only were the religious leaders spying on Jesus in hopes that he might violate the Law of Moses, they were now resorting to a possible infraction of the Roman law. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on the colt was a sure reference to the anticipated king of Israel. Any type of spoken claim Jesus could have made regarding such a title would carry the charge of insurrection against Rome. Although the Romans tolerated the Jewish religion, they would certainly not allow an uprising of Jewish nationalism among the people. They would quickly strike at the head of this movement, and for this the chief priests and the teachers of the law now placed their hopes. Jesus had made no admissible declaration to

any kingship up to this point. The Jewish leaders knew that Jesus had indirectly made such a claim at his triumphal entry, but interpretations of the Jewish law would carry very little weight in the Roman courts. Thus, they sent forth their henchmen with a scheme they thought would be a lock.

Disguised as honest men from among the festive gathering, these infiltrators presented Jesus with a catch-22 situation. If Jesus went on record condoning the payment of taxes to Caesar, they could easily spin such a response among militant Jewish nationalists to stir up opposition against him. Certainly there were many among the Jews that despised and lamented every penny they paid to the Roman government. They might even go so far as to say that Jesus was rejecting the will of God to once again establish David's throne and place the scepter of world power back into Israel's hand. If Jesus opposed the payment of the required taxes to the government, they would be able to present a solid case before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor over the region of Judea. Because he had such a considerable following that listened and obeyed his words, any attempt Jesus made to discourage his flock from heeding to the Roman law would be dealt with seriously.

Jesus' response was nothing less than brilliant – astonishing even to his adversaries. He removed the stigma associated with paying taxes to the Roman government, showing how insignificant that issue was in light of every man's duty to give himself wholly to God. We are to give to God our very lives, our hearts, our devotion, and our souls, for God has given us life and breath and everything else (**Romans 12:1, Acts 17:25**). Jesus had already explained to his flock how valuable they were to God; every hair on their heads was numbered. They needn't consume their lives amassing and preserving worldly wealth. According to Jesus, God's people shouldn't set their hearts on such things and waste their time worrying about them (**Luke 12:29-31**).

Jesus' answer remained consistent with his ministry. At the same time, the chief priests and teachers of the law were given no room to twist his words before the High Priest or the Romans. Eventually, they would try to pin on Jesus the insurrection and subversion charges hoping the Roman government would do their dirty work for them. Not surprisingly, they would resort to complete misrepresentation before Pilate on this very topic, saying that Jesus opposed paying taxes altogether (**Luke 23:2**). It is certainly apparent why Jesus had to choose his words with such precision based on their willingness to distort the truth.



The God of the Living

Luke 20:27-39

Next in line to test Jesus were the Sadducees, a Jewish sect with perhaps the very highest social status in Palestine. They recognized only the books of Moses (the Torah) to be inspired of God. They rejected any doctrine concerned with the resurrection of men, including the existence of angels and evil spirits.

Their question of Jesus was a mockery of the whole notion of men and women raising from the dead. And Jesus answered them appropriately.

Jesus first accused them of being in error due to lack of knowledge of the scriptures ([Mark 12:24](#)). He went on to expose their lack of insight into the resurrection, explaining that the age to come would not resemble the age in which they were living on earth. Men and women who were considered worthy to share in the next age would be raised up in a new and spiritual form. Surely the Sadducees felt the subtle yet intentional rebuke within the first portion of this answer. Because they proved faithless concerning the resurrection from the dead, they obviously did not consider themselves worthy of sharing in the coming age. Despite being challenged, the Sadducees would have likely sneered at Jesus reply up to this point, for they were convinced that angels and spirits were imaginary.

So Jesus continued, using the very writings of Moses upon which they stood to point out the flaw in their false doctrines. Throughout the five books of Moses, God refers to himself (and is called by Moses and others) as the God of the patriarchal fathers such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Since he is the God of the living, as Jesus pointed out, then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must still be alive at least in spirit, even though their earthly existence had long since expired. Jesus' answer won approval even among the teachers of the law, as they had no doubt exhausted this resurrection argument countless times with the Sadducees. Paul would use a similar tactic to divide these Jewish sects when he stood before the authorities ([Acts 23:6-8](#)).

Not only were the Sadducees ignorant as to the meaning of the scriptures, they were also oblivious to the all-surpassing power of God ([Matt. 22:29](#)). Jesus himself has already displayed the ability of God to raise the dead. A widow was given back her dead son ([Luke 7:15](#)). A father was given back his deceased daughter ([Luke 8:55](#)). Two sisters were recently given back their brother, long after he was dead and buried ([John 11:44](#)). Many Jews witnessed this last miracle, and they continued to testify throughout this Passover week about what they had seen. And soon, Jesus himself would be raised from the dead and afterwards taken into heaven. Thus, a denial of the resurrection was a complete denial of God, his power that manifested itself in Jesus, and his sovereignty over death. In the end, the Sadducees still clung to the Law, the covenant that represented the power of sin and death. They refused to come into the covenant offered by Christ that brought power over sin and victory over death.

Read [1 Cor. 15:50-56](#)



Lord of All

[Luke 20:40-44](#)

Jesus' opponents were silenced and no one presented him with any more questions. Thus, Jesus continued to teach and posed his onlookers with a two-part query. He quoted from a psalm of David ([Psalm 110:1](#)) and pointed out that David was referring to the Messiah as his Lord, and that the Christ was to be

seated in prominence at the right hand of God. At the same time, the Christ was prophesied to be a physical descendant of David. If the Messiah is to be a descendant of David, why then does David refer to him as his Lord – clearly acknowledging that his descendant was to be his superior? Only through the resurrection would the Messiah, the Son of David, be lifted up and given a title far greater than that of David the king. Jesus continued to firmly state the scriptural evidence of the resurrection, despite the Sadducees lack of faith. Peter would quote this same psalm in [Acts 2:34-36](#) as he declared that Jesus had risen from the dead and now reigned as the supreme authority at the right hand of God.

Again, Jesus had given his opponents very little to make a case against him. Still, the implications of his words here were monumental. Jesus, whom many believed to be the Christ, was saying that the Messiah would be given superiority even over David, the most revered of all of Israel's kings. At another instance in Jerusalem perhaps during this very same week John records Jesus clearly referring to himself as having even surpassed the prophets and the patriarchs. He affirmed that before Abraham was born, he was in existence. Jesus also plainly referred to the God of Israel as his Father. This maddened the Jewish leaders, as these statements all pointed to Jesus as one superior to all those that comprised the foundation of the Jewish faith.

[John 8:53-59](#)

[John 1:1-2](#)



Teachers Beware

[Luke 20:45-47](#)

Within earshot of the people, Jesus exposed the sin of the teachers of the law as a warning to his disciples. These men were supposed to be God's mouthpiece to the Jewish nation, yet their personal example brought disrepute to his laws. Jesus called them out on their vanity, for they loved to be noticed and thus wore long robes to signify their importance. Because of their pride and insecurity, they craved the reverence of the people and loved to be saluted in public. They cherished the honor that was given them at gatherings, feasts, and even worship services in the synagogues. Loaded down with greed, they even took advantage of widows and benefited financially from their solemn situation. They lifted up lengthy prayers in view of the crowds, moved by an immeasurable amount of self-righteousness. It would have been better if they had never assumed the role of teacher.

The teachers of the law personified of the fool in the book of Proverbs. Yet as Israel's teachers, they were supposed to be an example of God's wisdom. For this reason, Jesus promised that they would be punished most severely. James the brother of our Lord affirmed that those who assume the responsibility to teach God's people face a more stringent judgment. In spite of that, we are all called to imitate Christ, the teacher of teachers. He was able to effectively instruct his followers and present a life that backed up his words. That is the key

for us as disciples. We are all called to teach in some capacity, be it great or small. Thus, we must first examine our own lives and make sure that we are putting into practice the very things we are calling others to follow. We must check our motives and make sure that the same vanity, pride, insecurity, and self-righteousness that so plagued Israel's teachers are continually purged from our hearts. If we're not careful, we will be caught playing the fool while our judgment mounts.

Those of us who lead and preach in a public role within the kingdom are perhaps the most susceptible to these sins. We can fall in love with the respect and the honor that can be offered us by others, causing our pride to swell. As leaders we can grow accustomed to the many welcomes and the warm greetings we receive from brothers and sisters in the fellowship. We forget that we are unworthy servants only doing our duty and we begin to think of ourselves with high regard. We even look for others when it comes time to serve. We can get caught up in materialism and place too much weight on our presentation – the way we dress, the car we drive, the things we own, etc. – and we struggle with vanity more than we think. Satan even tempts us to put on a show in our sermons, lessons, and public prayers instead of sincerely preaching God's word with the passion and conviction of a prophet. We compare ourselves with other leaders, instead of measuring ourselves to Christ. We quietly lie in wait expecting that pat on the back when we feel it's been earned, forgetting that it is only by the grace of God that we've been given the opportunity to contribute to the church.

All of these sins are snares that lie in wait for everyone who sets forth to lead and teach in God's kingdom. The only way to overcome them is be open about them with our peers. Even when our pride, vanity, and selfish ambition have reached embarrassingly dark levels, we must come into the light. You will most likely find that the sins and temptations that plague you as a leader are commonly used by Satan to take down even the most established ministers throughout the church. Those of us who presume to lead must heed the warnings given us by Jesus and also by James. Don't get faked out and assume that you don't struggle with such weaknesses. At any given time, we are all probably guilty of at least one of the same sins that Jesus confronted in the teachers of the law. Let us instead strive to lead by example. May our lives back up the very things we are teaching, lest we give our hearers an excuse to discount the Gospel.

James 3:1

James 3:13-17

The sins of the teachers of the law, and a warning for disciples in leadership

Proverbs 3:7, 10:19, 11:2, 12:9, 13:7, 14:31, 16:5, 16:19, 18:2, 18:12, 22:16

Proverbs 25:6-7a, 26:1, 26:12, 27:2, 28:10, 28:13



A Widow's Offering

Luke 21:1-4

All eyes were still on Jesus and by now no one was willing to interrupt his teaching with a question. From his position in the temple courts he was able to notice the offerings being made to the temple treasury. Many wealthy Jewish pilgrims had come to Jerusalem with a portion of their yearly earnings that they had devoted to the Lord. No doubt there were some sizeable donations made and the people tended to take notice of such benefactors, as did Jesus. They had given much, but sacrificed little. The Law required their donations, but it required of them very little faith. A poor widow and her meager offering also stood out to Jesus. Although the widow's contribution added up to less than a penny, her willingness to sacrifice was commendable. Such a donation would have gone unnoticed by those who ministered at the temple, yet her faith in God to provide even her next meal caught the attention of the Lord.

We can get uncomfortable when this passage is used to measure our level of sacrifice and faith in terms of our financial contributions to the ministry. The New Testament clearly teaches that we are to be responsible financially (**Luke 16:10-11**), to provide for our immediate family (**1 Tim. 5:8**), and to buckle down and earn the bread we eat (**2 Thess. 3:11-12**). So how are we to imitate this widow's level of sacrifice? For us to simply give our entire paycheck to the church only to become a burden to the family of God as they are compelled to take care of us seems like foolishness. Let us not get caught up in this kind of reasoning. Instead, let us examine what this widow did to make an impression on Jesus. As mentioned earlier, her willingness to give sacrificially and her faith in God's ability to provide for her must convict our hearts.

Are we giving out of our wealth or are we giving to the point of sacrifice? It is futile to justify yourself by comparing your level of giving to that of anyone else. Instead, you must monitor yourself and be able to answer this question honestly, for God has already taken notice. Are we faithful in God's ability to provide for us even as we seek first his kingdom and sacrifice to see it grow? Indeed, our level of financial sacrifice is a measure of our faith. Don't be so quick to simply say, "God knows my heart", and thus absolve yourself from giving above and beyond what is required or what is viewed as acceptable. Be neither unwise nor unfaithful in your level of sacrifice. Instead, let us simply give faithfully and sacrificially as is pleasing to the Lord.

2 Cor. 8:1-5

2 Cor. 9:6-11

Matthew 6:25-34



Various Warnings

Luke 21:5-36

Before the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great had begun erecting a temple complex consisting of several buildings. It was an impressive structure in the ancient world and its construction continued even during the ministry of Jesus. His disciples were impressed by its grandeur and marveled at the intricacy of the

craftsmanship. As was just mentioned, many wealthy Jews contributed large sums of money to see its completion.

Let us recall Jesus entering Jerusalem just days earlier – how he was moved to tears because he foresaw the destruction that awaited this once sacred city. He decided to share this prophecy now with his disciples. It was two days before the Passover, the day in which he would be crucified (cf. **Matt. 26:1-2**). As he revealed the impending future of the temple and the residents of Jerusalem, he also began to warn his followers about the trials that also awaited them. He then made reference to both the impending arrival of the kingdom of God and the eventual advent of the end times – when the Son of Man shall return and all of mankind will stand before him to face judgment.

Let us not get too carried away in the interpretation of these sayings, assuming them to describe the precise events of the 20th and 21st centuries. The entire passage contains a collection of warnings consistent with the whole of Jesus' teachings. Most are relevant to every disciple of Jesus regardless of the era in which they would live. True, some of the events depicted here by Jesus are date-specific and were directed to the generation present during Jesus time. These sayings were recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke prior to 64 AD (approx.) and they were fulfilled almost immediately thereafter. The residents living in Jerusalem at that time suffered in the dreadful siege and the destruction of the city at the hands of the Romans ('Gentiles' **vs. 24**). However, Jesus also described some scenarios that are valid for disciples living throughout the Church Age – from the first century until the present day.

As just mentioned, Jesus made a brief reference to his return and the signs that will precede this event. Unfortunately, many stargazers within offshoot Christian circles get caught up "looking intently into the sky" for signs of the second coming of the Son of Man. They ought to instead come back down to earth and set about the purpose for which we are called in Christ. In fact, that was the same wake up call that the disciples needed when Jesus first ascended into heaven. They were so busy looking up into the sky to catch a glimpse of the Lord that they lost sight of the commission that he left behind for them to fulfill. Luckily for them, two angels were there to get their eyes out of the clouds and back to the earth and the task at hand.

Acts 1:9-11

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

As we break down the various warnings given in this passage, we will see how those who live in the light need not spend their days worrying about the end

times. It is simply unbiblical in light of **Luke 21:8** to predict the last day and to assert confidence in the precise time of the Lord's return. Disciples of Jesus (then and now) must be compelled to take a stand each day for Christ, to persevere during times of hardship and persecution, to testify before the authorities regarding our faith in God, and to always be prepared for death and the day of judgment. We must strive to live in the light by confessing and renouncing our sins continually. We must be ever-prepared to appear before the throne of judgment purified from all unrighteousness. Most choose to discard the many warnings of Jesus recorded in the Bible and thus live in darkness. These are the ones who should worry about the exact time in which the final trumpet sounds, for they are living on borrowed time.

The various warnings in Luke 21:5-36

Warning: *Within the generation that witnessed Jesus of Nazareth, the Gentiles will destroy the temple in Jerusalem following a period of siege; this will be a time of distress and suffering for those who live in this city.*

Luke 21:5-6, 20-24, 32

These words were spoken about 30 AD. The siege that would eventually lead to the destruction of the temple complex (70 AD) and the city of Jerusalem would begin in 66 AD. Taking a generation to be 40 years, as it is often understood in the Old Testament, this prophetic warning was fulfilled as predicted. The siege would take its toll on Jerusalem's inhabitants, just as Jesus pledged. Like all times of war and suffering, these circumstances would be especially hard for the mothers, for newborn children, for those unable to defend themselves, and for those already in need.

Jesus' reference to the generation present during his day in **vs. 32** does not necessarily apply to this and every warning found in Luke. It should instead be taken to refer to the destruction of the temple and the coming of the kingdom. Both would take place within that generation.

The implications of the temple's destruction were paramount to Judaism as it is described in the Torah. In effect, the absence of the temple renders the Mosaic Law impossible to carry out. The burnt offerings and various sacrifices could no longer be offered as prescribed. Priests could no longer intercede for the people for the Most Holy Place was demolished. Sin could no longer be atoned for under the old covenant. The destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem confirmed the end of God's covenant with the nation of Israel. Although the Jewish laws and traditions remained present within Christianity for many years, the Spirit revealed to the disciples that the aging covenant of Moses was obsolete and most traces of it would eventually disappear (**Heb. 8:13**). The Jewish Christians saw the destruction of the temple as a firm declaration of God's approval passing from the old Law and its customs to the new covenant in Christ. God was unwilling to dwell any longer in a temple built by hands. Disciples of Jesus, individually and collectively, would become the temple in which God dwells through the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 3:16-17

1 Cor. 6:19a
Ephes. 2:19-22

Warning: *False prophets will come into the world and play on people's fear of the end times. Do not be led astray by their message.*

Luke 21:8

Nearly all of Jesus' parables, sermons, and predictions were straightforward and meant to be understood and obeyed. Still, Jesus knew that there would come those who would twist his words and distort his prophecies to their own gratification. Jesus warned against movements that claimed the Messiah was in their midst or had already come. He also spoke against those that alleged to know the exact time of the end of days. These factions would sometimes preach a message of preparation for the rapture through self-preservation. They would often exclude themselves from everyday society. This isolation would be taught as a means to save themselves from the evil within the world.

This separatism theology was not the intended result of Christ's commands for his followers and for the church. Jesus promised to always be with his disciples as they remained in the world and took the message of repentance and forgiveness to the Jews and the pagan nations. His words were meant to instruct his followers and those who were spiritually lost how to live as children of the light amid a dark age. Jesus promised to his disciples a life to the full without conforming to the pattern of pleasure and selfishness offered by Satan. He wanted his disciples to draw all men to the truth by the example they set in their daily lives. They were to be set apart from the world, not isolated from it. Nevertheless, Jesus warned that some factions claiming the name of Christianity would distort the end times prophecies and lead people astray.

2 Thes. 2:1-3
1 Thes. 5:1-8

Warning: *Humankind will witness a terrible array of wars, famines, plagues, and natural disasters that will befall the earth throughout history; this does not necessarily mean the end is near.*

Luke 21:9-11, Matthew 24:6

Jesus did give some insight as to the necessary duration of time between his ascension and his second coming. Although we are not given the exact date, we know that the earth will see quite a wide variety of historical events transpire throughout these years. Everything Jesus said would happen has happened repeatedly down through time. Wars on a global and civil scale have been commonplace up until this day. Since the time of Christ, no century has passed without sustaining casualties of war. Neither has one ended without witnessing their share of natural disasters. Floods, earthquakes, fires, hailstorms, droughts, and other life-taking catastrophes have been a part of recorded history since before the time of Christ and have continually altered the course of human events. Mankind has certainly seen its share of widespread plagues and diseases. Even

with the rapid advancement of medical technology, sickness and disease continue to take lives by the millions and new epidemics are constantly evolving.

The ongoing occurrence of these types of events does not necessarily mean we are in the end times, as many Bible teachers claim. Again, Jesus spoke these words to prepare us for such harrowing times so that we might not be overly alarmed or led astray when they come. He reassured his disciples that these were not the types of signs that pointed to the Son of Man's return, but instead that they would be prevalent throughout history. And as time rolls on, Jesus' words continue to ring true.

Warning: *Jesus' disciples will face a wide variety of persecutions from religious authorities, civil authorities, family members, and friends. In order to withstand the test and be counted faithful, they will be expected to endure physical mistreatment, to persevere when falsely accused, and to boldly testify before their adversaries regarding their belief in Christ.*

Luke 21:12-19

Jesus had warned his disciples several times about his own approaching tribulation and about the persecutions that would come upon them because of their commitment to his teachings. He now warned them once again to further prepare them for what they would have to face in the future. For Jesus, his time of testing was only days away and he would endure its shame. His disciples however would fail miserably. They would desert Jesus, unable to stand firm in their faith. However, each of them would get a second chance to carry the cross and suffer for the name of Christ. Jesus' words here were not only intended for the apostles and the first-century Christians. His admonition stands for every man and woman who confess Jesus as their Lord, for persecution is promised to everyone willing to live a godly life (**1 Tim. 4:12**).

Disciples of Jesus can count on disapproval, whether it comes from the religious world or the government, or from family members, friends, and neighbors. We may even face the betrayal of someone closest to us. We should not be surprised when slander is heaped upon us. If we are brought before religious and governmental councils, we should not be alarmed. In fact, what we might call persecution from the enemy is in fact the hand of God arranging for us to testify before these men and women of influence. At these times, Jesus promised that the Spirit of God would speak through his faithful witnesses as it did the prophets of old. Therefore, we are allowed no room to back down from our faith but will be expected to stand firm in the midst of public defamation, false imprisonment, shedding our blood, and even death. Jesus assured his disciples here that if they stood firm in their faith, they would be protected from the second death and shall taste the bliss of life everlasting.

Matthew 10:17-21

Ephes. 6:10-13

2 Tim. 3:12

Hebrews 10:32-33

Rev. 2:10

Warning: *The Son of Man will one day return to the earth just as he was taken up. Fear will grip the ungodly while redemption will be given to the faithful disciples.*

Luke 21:25-28

Whether literal or symbolic, Jesus promised that there would be signs that precede the Son of Man's return to earth. He spoke of astrological signs, the roaring and tossing of the sea, and the shaking of the heavenly bodies (likely pertaining here to the physical elements like the sky, the atmosphere, and space rather than the spiritual realms). These signs will bring fear to many; entire nations will be anxious as they occur. Yet for disciples, this is again time to stand firm, to testify about the Lord, and to rest assured that their redemption is drawing nearer. Suddenly, the Son of Man himself will appear descending on the clouds of heaven, just as he was to be taken up after his resurrection. That day will come to most like a thief in the night, for they will be unprepared to face judgment. For disciples of Jesus who are still alive and waiting, they will rise and be caught up together with those who are already asleep in Christ.

Matthew 24:30-31

John 14:1-3

Acts 1:9-11

1 Thes. 4:16-17

Rev. 1:7

Warning: *All the present signs are pointing to the restoration of God's kingdom on earth, so make sure that you understand the times and the beginning of this new movement of God.*

Luke 21:29-32

After discussing the Son of Man's return, Jesus spoke about the forthcoming arrival of the kingdom. As we have previously pointed out in this commentary, the establishment of the church fulfilled the prophecies concerning God's kingdom on earth. The inaugural date for Church Age can be placed at the Pentecost celebration, fifty days after the Passover weekend in which Jesus was crucified. However, the first signs of this new age began much earlier.

Jesus pointed to the fig trees and other annuals that were now beginning their seasonal bloom and would soon produce fruit. In the same way, the coming of John the Baptist and then Jesus were the beginning of a completely new movement of God, and this generation of people had been chosen to take part in it. Like the sprouting of leaves after a dry winter, these two men of God followed a period of spiritual dormancy of more than four hundred years – the time in which the word of the Lord was last declared by the post-exilic prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Indeed, this very generation had witnessed the greatest of all men born among women in the prophet John and they had seen firsthand the Spirit of God in its fullest measure displayed in Jesus of Nazareth. These were clear signs that God was breathing life back into Israel again after a long period of barrenness. But Jesus left it up to the men and women of his era to

understand the times and realize the time of God's coming to them. Soon, these same Jews would see the outpouring of the Spirit again as the apostles ushered in the Church Age. Those who recognized this modern movement of God were the first to repent of their sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus, becoming the newest members of the body of Christ.

Acts 1:3-8

Acts 2:36-42

Warning: *The heavens and the earth will most certainly be destroyed. However, the words of Christ shall remain forever.*

Luke 21:33

Jesus clearly warned his hearers regarding the tremendous importance of his message. The day will come when the heavens and the earth will pass away. They will be destroyed by fire – all of the elements melting in the intense heat. The only items that shall survive this first all-surpassing destruction will be the spiritual things: God himself and the angelic hosts, Satan and his demonic realm, the souls of all the men and women who lived on earth, and the eternal Word of God. At this time, each person will be judged according to what they have done. For those that rejected the words of God, they shall be condemned by those very same words. For them, the second death awaits. They shall be swept away for all time along with the devil and all those who did his bidding. For those that obeyed the Word and held firmly to the commandments therein, they already know the path that leads to eternal life and they shall be taken to be with God forever.

We must strive to know the Word of God thoroughly and obey it with all of our hearts. Each person must make the decision to place the Bible as the absolute standard for his or her life, setting it above all else. When everything is said and done, you shall stand before God and face his eternal Word. Thus, God has revealed to mankind exactly what is required of them.

Psalm 119:89

Isaiah 40:8

John 12:47-50

2 Peter 3:10

Rev. 19:11-13

Warning: *Sinners beware! It doesn't really matter whether you live in the Messianic Age, the Apostolic Age, the end times, or anywhere in between. Judgment will come to each and every person that lives and dies, and no one knows when his or her day will come.*

Luke 21:34-36

After giving warnings to both the generation that witnessed the ministry of Jesus and the one that would be alive on earth to see the Son of Man's return, Jesus concludes by issuing a sweeping admonition to all who shall ever live on the earth. From now on, the generation you are born into no longer makes much of a difference. Men and women would now have the opportunity to either obey

or reject Jesus' commands. Each person must be very careful how they choose to behave, for everyone must stand before the Son of Man and give an account for the things done during their days on earth. When the Lord returns, those who are left shall be taken into judgment; their fate is sealed once the final trumpet blast rings forth. In the same way, those living throughout the Church Age who died have sealed their fate and are simply awaiting their judgment on the last day. So whether you meet your end through death or through Christ's return, you still have no sure way of knowing when that end will come.

Therefore, each person's judgment will be based on the life that he or she lived. For those who walked faithfully before God in prayer and daily readiness, they will be able to stand before the Son of Man. For those who put off the will of God and filled their life with sin and selfish pursuits, they will be caught unsuspectingly like an animal stepping into a deadly snare. Everyone will rise and face judgment with only two possible outcomes: eternal life or everlasting disgrace.

Daniel 12:2

Luke 12:35-40

Rev. 20:11-15



Judas Sells Out

Luke 21:37-22:6

Jesus kept a routine schedule during the week leading up to the Passover. He arrived early each morning to the temple courts to teach the multitudes of people that gathered to hear him. In the evenings, he would retire to the Mount of Olives to be alone with his disciples, to sing hymns, to pray, and to rest. The meeting at the garden on the night he was betrayed was typical of their nightly sojourns to what must have been for Jesus a special place. From the garden of Gethsemane (name meaning *olive-press*³⁷, for an olive grove existed here), Jesus could easily overlook Solomon's temple, the temple courts, and the tightly packed city of Jerusalem that was no doubt bustling well into the night during this festive week. When Judas agreed to arrange a meeting place away from the crowds, he needed to look no further than Jesus' preferred location of spiritual rejuvenation.

John 18:1-2

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.

²*Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples.*

³⁷ Greek 1068, Hebrew 1660 (Gath), Hebrew 8081 (shemen); Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Luke 22:39

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.

The Gospel of Luke goes along with Matthew (and Mark also conforms) in recording Judas' agreement with the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard after the prophetic warnings just discussed. They do not follow strict chronology here, but instead insert this event just prior to the Judas' betrayal itself, positioning the two events together. John is the only one to place Judas' initial decision to betray Jesus in its proper timeline, six days before the Passover and prior to the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This type of grouping is simply a style of writing, not at all an oversight by the Synoptic Gospel writers.

The actual event that finalized Judas' decision was the dinner at the home of Simon the Leper recorded in **Matthew 26:6-16**, **Mark 14:3-10**, and **John 12:1-8**. Judas was the disciple who seemed to initiate the disciples' objection to Mary's display of affection for Jesus as she broke her jar of perfume and poured it on him. This Mary was the sister of Lazarus, whom Jesus had recently raised from the dead. She obviously was showing the Lord her unrivaled devotion and profound appreciation for what he had done for her and her family. Judas called such an act a waste, using the presence of the poor and needy to bolster his accusation. Yet Judas was simply feigning piety and the duplicity in his heart was exposed. His pride welled up as Jesus confronted him, for he really did not care for the poor. It was this very dispute that allowed Judas to harden his heart towards Jesus and the other disciples. Certainly Satan had planted seeds in Judas much earlier, as it was somehow discovered that Judas had long since been dishonest with the collective purse they kept (**John 12:6**). However, this event pushed him over the edge and soon after the dinner he met with the chief priests and they began making arrangements to hand Jesus over.

At the root of Judas' disloyalty was certainly a lack of belief as to who this Jesus of Nazareth really was. Early on in his ministry, Jesus seemed to divert praise and he silenced those that called out to him with cries such as "Holy One of Israel", "Son of God", and "Son of David". He discouraged his disciples from publicly proclaiming to others that he was the Christ. Now these days had come to an end. Jesus in the last few days of his earthly life had begun to accept the acclaim and the adulation of his followers. He endorsed Mary's display of adoration towards him and rebuked his disciples for their misguided spirituality. The next day he would ride into the city of Jerusalem amid psalms of praise and shouts of joy, heralded as Lord and king.

Apparently Judas did not agree with this new aspect of Jesus' leadership. Perhaps he had come to expect that theirs would be a social revolution or political movement, instead of a messianic one. This transition was difficult for several of the apostles, not only Judas. They had become accustomed with Jesus as their teacher and their friend, and knew him certainly to be a prophet with power from on high. But to begin to look at Jesus as their Messiah, the Savior of the World, and the Son of God was quite different. Even after the resurrection, which

provided conclusive proof of all the titles just mentioned, many continued to doubt. Thomas is perhaps most famous for his disbelief (**John 20:25**). Jesus rebuked the Eleven for their lack of faith and refusal to believe the testimony of those who had seen him after he had risen (**Mark 16:14**). Peter and the others even seemed hesitant to recognize Jesus in his resurrected state (**John 21:12, Luke 24:38-43**). Even as some began to worship him on the mountain in Galilee, others doubted as to whether or not they should offer such reverence (**Matthew 28:17**). While the other apostles were able to suppress their doubts and eventually conquer them, Judas was overcome by his disbelief and he became a prime target for Satan's attack.

As disciples of Jesus, we will invariably contend with our doubts to some degree. We may struggle with doubts about whether or not the Bible alone is the inspired word of God, doubts about whether Jesus really existed and was the Son of God, or doubts about the church and its leadership and whether the Spirit of God is truly leading us. We may encounter self-doubts about our salvation, our faithfulness, and our ability to overcome sin and temptation. Our doubts may only be a fleeting thought that springs up from time to time. Or they may exist in the back of our minds – some lingering question so faint that we may not be able to easily identify it as doubt. Nevertheless, Satan will certainly pinpoint and use this buried skepticism as an inroad to destroy our faith. Our doubts may even grow to the point where they cloud the forefronts of our minds completely. We are then prone to the any form of confirmation that will justify our betrayal of God.

We may look at Judas and speculate as to what brought him down. What is his pride? His greed? His deceit? Any or all of these sins could have been the cause. Yet most of us struggle with pride, greed, and even some level of deceitfulness, but that does not mean we are going to deny the faith. But when you combine doubt with any of these iniquities, the combination becomes lethal. We must make a commitment to be open about our doubts, no matter how subtle or prominent they may be. Allowing just one doubt to linger in our minds is the same as leaving just one door in our house unlocked when we know that a burglar is about. The thief will eventually find the way in and steal the most valuable things in the house. In the same way, Satan is always prowling around looking to steal away your faith. He will never tire until he finds the way to get to your faith and destroy it.

Read James 1:5-8
1 Peter 5:8-9
Jude 1:22-23

It is worthy of speculation as to the reason why Luke did not record Jesus' most crucial visits to Bethany during and near the end of his ministry. Jesus issued his most decisive miracle of all by raising Lazarus from the dead, four days after he had been sealed in his tomb (which means he could have been dead several days more). The murmur of this phenomenal act still carried into the final Passover week causing many Jews to put their faith in him. The dinner at the

house of Simon the Leper (apparently a friend of Lazarus and his two sisters, for all were present and Martha was serving the men, cf. [John 12:2](#)) and Mary's memorable offering were excluded only by Luke. Luke had such a detailed account of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and we would expect to see these rather monumental events included in his book. He gives us every indication that his Gospel was meant to be a longer and more detailed version even than the one Matthew had offered around 50 AD. Based on the almost ten chapters of writing that documents the Lord's journey from Galilee to Jericho, we might assume that Luke was planning on scripting quite a bit more as Jesus then entered Bethany. Yet it appears that at some point he was forced to cut to the chase and jumped to Jerusalem, the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, and the resurrection – spending less ink on these events than on Jesus' southward journey along the Jordan River. It is possible that word of Paul's release from his captivity in Caesarea had come and thus Luke needed to finish up his work. Perhaps another deadline was imposed upon him. Assuming that some new time constraint existed, Luke might have concluded that Matthew's account of the events in Bethany would have to suffice.



Preparations for the Last Supper

[Luke 22:7-13](#)

Again, we have no reason to assume that Jesus' instructions to meet a man carrying a jar of water were miraculous in their origin. Jesus states in [Luke 22:15](#) that he had been eagerly anticipating this meal with his disciples. Would it not simply be practical then to have made prior arrangements with a man (likely a believer) whose house they could use? The upper room in which they were to eat was within the city walls and Jerusalem was certainly saturated with Jewish pilgrims all looking to participate in the Passover customs. Isn't it also reasonable that Jesus would have discussed with the owner of the house some type of rendezvous that would enable Peter and John to locate the right house? With so many narrow and winding streets with thousands of tightly packed houses, it would be next to impossible for Jesus to have described the exact location simply by giving them directions. Instead, it seems as if he set up a plan for a man to meet the disciples as soon as they entered the city to lead them to the prearranged location.

This assumption in no way weakens our stance that Jesus was the Son of God and possessed miraculous power. I'm just proposing the notion that Jesus was on a mission and thus he was constantly thinking, planning, and staying one step ahead of both his followers and his adversaries. This was the second time in less than a week that the disciples were sent ahead to carry out a plan that Jesus had seemingly preplanned – the colt and now the upper room. In neither situation does Luke give us any indication that the disciples reacted in such a way that would lead his readers to conclude that a miracle had occurred. We might instead be looking at the practical, organized, and purposeful side of Jesus rather than the supernatural side.

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) refer to the meal shared here by Jesus and his apostles as the Passover. The Gospel of John calls it simply the evening meal and apparently does not associate it with the official Passover. Scholars have proposed several possible solutions as to the actual date of this meal and whether or not it coincided with the actual Passover meal observed by most Jews, the Pharisees, and the High Priest. Some have proposed that perhaps two separate Jewish calendars were being observed at that time. We shall now discuss the possible date of this Last Supper and its bearing to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

God had given specific commands to Moses and Aaron regarding the observation of Passover (**Exodus 12:1-20**). The Passover lamb (or goat) was to be chosen on the tenth day of the month of Nisan and then slaughtered at twilight on the 14th day (early evening to allow for preparations to be made). On that same evening, the 14th of Nisan, the Passover meal was to be eaten. On the next day, the 15th of Nisan, the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread would begin and continue until the 21st. It is quite possible that the meal shared by Jesus and his disciples occurred on the 13th of Nisan, one day prior to the traditional Passover feast. I shall discuss next the evidence for the claim that the Last Supper shared by Jesus and his disciples occurred on the evening of the 13th of Nisan and that Jesus was crucified the next day, the 14th of Nisan.

Scriptural evidence for this hypothesis stems from a few passages in John's account of the events surrounding the Passion Week. **John 13:1-2** clearly states that the Last Supper occurred just before the Passover feast. Again, this meal that Jesus and his disciples shared is simply called "the evening meal" (**vs. 2**). **John 19:14** and **John 19:31** state that Jesus' crucifixion coincided with the Preparation Day, the customary time for the slaughtering and roasting of the Passover lamb. The Synoptic Gospels likewise place Jesus' execution on the day of Preparation (**Matt.27:62, Mark 15:42, Luke 23:54**). This would put the day of Jesus' crucifixion, the 14th of Nisan, the day in which the traditional Jewish Passover was to be eaten, which was in that year a Thursday.

Further evidence of Thursday the 14th of Nisan as the crucifixion date occurs when you consider **John 18:28**. Here John records that on the morning of the crucifixion the Jews refused to enter the palace from which Pilate governed because they wished to share in the Passover meal later that evening. Such a commingling with Gentiles on this day would have led to ceremonial uncleanness and would have prevented them from partaking in this most sacred Jewish ritual. Thus, Pilate had to come out from his palace and address the Jewish leaders. They were of course quite eager to get on with Jesus' execution, which would eventually take place later that afternoon.

As recorded in **John 18:39**, Pilate stated that it had become customary to release a prisoner to the Jews at the time of Passover. It makes sense then to assume that Barabbas' release occurred on the day that the Passover meal was being prepared. Later that same day, Jesus was crucified.

Placing Jesus' crucifixion on the 14th of Nisan makes perfect sense from a spiritual point of view as it coincided with the day and hour in which the Passover lamb was to be slain. Jesus lived without sin and offered his body unblemished to

God (**Heb. 10:5-10**). He was destined to be the sacrificial lamb for all mankind. Paul would later write in **1 Cor. 5:7b**, “*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*” This parallelism shows that God’s ultimate plan to sacrifice his only Son was foreseen since the very first Passover night, wherein the firstborn of the Egyptians were destroyed and the Israelites were saved by the blood of the lamb. Jesus had stated that he did not come to abolish the Law but instead to fulfill it (**Matt. 5:17**). How better to fulfill the Law and the Prophets than for the Lamb of God to be crucified at the very hour in which the residents of Jerusalem were slaughtering their Passover lambs to commemorate God’s salvation of Israel?

Further evidence that the Last Supper was not the traditional Passover meal arises when you consider the bread eaten by Jesus and his disciples as the communion service was instituted. God had instructed the people through Moses that the Passover meal was to be eaten with unleavened bread. From the evening on the 14th of Nisan (Passover) and continuing through the Feast of Unleavened Bread (15th – 21st of Nisan), the Jews were never to eat bread made with yeast nor were they even allowed to store yeast in their houses. However, it seems clear that the bread broken and passed out to the disciples by Jesus was a loaf made with yeast from dough that had been allowed to rise. The Greek word for unleavened bread is *azumos*.³⁸ The Greek word for a loaf of bread that had been raised by adding yeast to the dough is *artos*.³⁹ Their definitions are as follows:

azumos, ad'-zoo-mos; from Greek 1 (a) (as a negative particle) and Greek 2219 (zume); *unleavened*, i.e. (figurative) *uncorrupted*; (in the neuter plural) specially (by implication) the *Passover week* :- unleavened (bread).

artos, ar'-tos; from Greek 142 (airo); *bread* (as *raised*) or a *loaf* :- (shew-) bread, loaf.

When describing the bread broken by Jesus and given to the disciples as a representation of his body, the Greek word *artos* is used in all four Gospel accounts (**Matthew 26:26**, **Mark 14:22**, **Luke 22:19**, and **John 13:18**). It would be unreasonable to assume that Jesus was ignoring the Passover regulations here, for he flawlessly upheld the Laws of Moses during his ministry. Instead, it seems likely that this meal was eaten the day before Passover, which was the last day for more than a week in which bread made with yeast could be eaten.

What about the assertion that the crucifixion had to occur on Friday, the 15th of Nisan, because the next day was to be a Sabbath day, which occurs every Saturday in the Jewish week? **John 19:31** tells us that in fact the next day was to be a “special” Sabbath. Thus, it does not necessarily mean that this had to be a Saturday, for if God proclaimed a specific date out of the month as holy, the Jews would observe the normal Sabbath regulations on that day no matter where it fell in the week. So was the day after Passover declared as a special Sabbath day by God? In **Exodus 12:16**, God specifically designated the 15th and the 21st of Nisan

³⁸ Greek 106; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

³⁹ Greek 410; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

to be honored as Sabbath days, for they were the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Whether or not these days fell on a Saturday was beside the point. Because the 15th of Nisan on that year fell on a Friday, it would still have been observed by the Jews as a Sabbath day and all of the pertinent regulations and the denial of work would still apply.

The fact that both Friday and Saturday of this particular year were declared Sabbath days is perhaps the most convincing attestation of a Thursday crucifixion. We are all but required to assume Jesus was crucified on Thursday the 14th of Nisan, for this is the only explanation that affords the Jewish elders, high priests, and members of the ruling council the activity attributed to them on the day of Christ's death without breaking the Sabbath regulations. Early in the morning, these men would escort Jesus from to the Palace where Pilate quartered during the feast. They would then accompany the Roman soldiers to another Palace where Herod was staying. They would subsequently return to Pilate and possibly even journey to another location where Pilate assumed his judge's seat. Eventually, they would follow the execution detail outside the city walls to the place of the Skull and afterwards return to the city. The point is this: a Sabbath day's journey consisted of but 2,000 cubits, around a half-mile. Yet the amount of travel needed to complete the conviction and death of Jesus greatly exceeded this distance. One might argue that such a violation was trivial to these already duplicitous Jews. However, this is not the case, for even amid their worst act of rebellion against God, they made sure to remain ceremonially clean and would not enter Pilate's quarters (**John 18:28**). Other meticulous observances were sure to be kept.

Furthermore, the actual observance of the Sabbath would normally begin at 6 PM on the previous day, for the Jewish day began and ended at this time. Thus, to assume a Friday crucifixion, we must place these highly legalistic Jews completely desecrating the Sabbath (the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread no less) upon their detainment Jesus by trying him before the high priest and the Sanhedrin on the same night, escorting the accused man back and forth throughout Jerusalem, and finally trekking some distance outside the city walls to observe his execution. And yet no mention of a binding Sabbath is mentioned on the day Christ died, only that it was soon to begin that same evening. After Jesus' execution, the Jews would request the crucified bodies removed from their crosses, for late afternoon had arrived and the Sabbath was soon to begin (**John 19:31, Luke 23:54**). Pilate would comply and remove them, giving Joseph of Arimathea custody of Jesus' dead body.

All this leads us to conclude that the day of Jesus' crucifixion was Thursday, the 14th of Nisan – one day before the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a special Sabbath day. This allows for the Jews who handed Jesus over to the Romans to remain within the regulations of the law, for their numerous dealings preceded the advent of the Sabbath. So upon Jesus' arrest, they were provided smaller than a one-day window of opportunity to try him, convict him, and convince the Roman government that he was a threat to their nation. Having achieved their goal with surprising speed, their hypocrisy reached

new heights as they demanded Pilate to remove Jesus' lifeless body from the cross that their precious Sabbath traditions would be honored.

Perhaps a more trivial argument (yet still pertinent) for the Last Supper occurring on the 13th of Nisan and the crucifixion on the 14th is the time in which Jesus himself prophesied to lay dead prior to his resurrection. In **Matthew 12:40**, Jesus clearly stated that he would remain for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (a possible reference to Hades – see notes on **Luke 12:49-53**). Some have tried to harmonize this prediction with the crucifixion on a Friday afternoon and the resurrection on a Sunday morning. This can be done by assuming that part of a day is the same as a day and that a night might be associated to either the previous day or the following. Still, this timeline presents a practical problem, as only two nights and even less than two days would have passed from the time of death to the time of revival. If Jesus was crucified on a Thursday and rose from the dead on a Sunday morning, no further explanation of the said passage is needed. Three nights would have transpired and the third day would have arrived.

So why then do the Synoptic Gospels call this last meal the Passover? They even associate this day with the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Again, the possibility of two existing Jewish calendars might explain the discrepancy, for clearly John's account was based on a different holiday sequence. It seems apparent based on the Gospel of John that the meal took place on the 13th of Nisan. Perhaps many other Jews in the city also were observing the Passover rituals on that same evening, if more than one date was being recognized. The high priests, elders, teachers of the law, and Pharisees were certainly not engaging in the Passover meal on the night of the Last Supper, for they had assembled at the house of Caiaphas the High Priest where Jesus would soon be escorted after his arrest and brief appearance before Annas. For them, the Passover meal would be observed the next day in accordance with the book of Exodus – on the 14th of Nisan.

Another suggestion is that years after the famous Last Supper, the event became known in a symbolic sense as Jesus and the disciples' final Passover meal together. The entire week was often referred to as the Passover and Jesus in fact called this meal a Passover (**Luke 22:15**). The disciples would have spent the actual Day of Preparation (for the Passover meal) grief-stricken and in confusion as they watched the mob persuade the Romans to murder their teacher. By evening, they would have been in a state of total despair and intense mourning. So perhaps at some point, the disciples began to remember that final night with Jesus as their token observance of the Passover meal.

The following paragraph is my personal conclusion based on the scriptures and the harmony of the Gospels. Evidence to the contrary also exists. In any event, the possible differences in the timeline of events do not take away from the indisputable facts: that Jesus was betrayed, he was crucified, and on the third day he rose from the dead proving that he is the Messiah, the Savior of the World.

Conclusion:

It looks like Jesus and his disciples ate a meal together on the 13th of Nisan. This would become known as the Lord's Supper (**1 Cor. 11:20**). Though it appears that the meal differed from the customary Passover meal – both the day it was eaten and the bread used on that night being the main differences – the apostles would at some point begin to generally refer to that fateful meal as their last Passover with Jesus, for the Lord himself declared this meal as their Passover together. Later that night, Jesus would be arrested and the next morning taken to Pilate after being found worthy of death by the Sanhedrin. That same day, on the 14th of Nisan, while many Jews in the city began preparations for the slaughter of the Passover lamb, Jesus was taken out of the city and crucified. As the late afternoon closed in, Jesus died and was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. That evening was the beginning of what we would call Friday, the 15th of Nisan. The Law of Moses declared it a Sabbath – the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The following day was a Saturday, which the Jews observed as their weekly Sabbath. On the first day of the week, Sunday morning, some of Jesus' faithful women followers went to the tomb and found it empty, for the Christ had risen from the dead. Jesus had been dead for three nights and the better part of three days, yet he had risen as prophesied.

Jesus crucified on Preparation day, dying at twilight of Passover evening, the 14th of Nisan

Exodus 12:5-6

Exodus 12:17-18

John 18:28

John 19:14-15a

Jesus' crucifixion coincided with the slaughter of the Passover lamb

1 Cor. 5:7

Hebrews 10:5-10

Matthew 5:17

The day after the crucifixion, a Friday, was a special Sabbath

John 19:31

Exodus 12:16 (15th and 21st of Nisan declared Sabbaths)

Jesus referred to 'three days and three nights'

Matthew 12:40

The meal became known as the 'Lord's Supper' rather than Passover

1 Cor. 11:20



The Lord's Supper

Luke 22:14-20

Jesus and his disciples reclined at the table in the upper room and dined together. There is mention in [John 13:2](#) that they were served this meal, although no indication as to the person or persons that actually waited on them is given. One suggestion commonly offered is that the owner of the house was the father of John-Mark. This supposition is strengthened if indeed John-Mark was the young man referred to in [Mark 14:51-52](#). He seems to have followed the Lord and the apostles from their meal to Gethsemane. It would be quite interesting indeed if Mark and his parents were the ones who waited on Jesus and the apostles on this night. For sure this house would become a place of meeting for the disciples in Jerusalem as the church began. Several years after the church's inception, the book of Acts records Peter's miraculous escape from prison, whereupon he returned to the house of Mary, mother of John-Mark. The disciples were gathered in here in prayer ([Acts 12:12](#)). Certainly the sentimental importance of this house would be immense to the church if indeed the Last Supper took place here.

Before the meal began, Jesus explained that he had been anticipating this moment for quite some time. This night was pre-planned by the Lord; he had made all the necessary arrangements prior to the evening meal. From the selection of the house, the preparation of the meal, the bread and the wine, and perhaps the order of seating around the table, nothing was done at the last minute or left to chance. Jesus was about to institute a ceremony by which the disciples throughout the Church Age would remember him and proclaim his death.

The fact that Jesus would not eat again of the bread and drink the fruit of the vine until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God is certainly an indication of his impending death. But when does Jesus again share in the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine? Perhaps we are to take this to mean that we shall share in this feast again at the time of Jesus' second coming, where all those who have participated in the death of Christ will be united with him in his heavenly kingdom ([Romans 6:5](#)). However, we might also conclude that Jesus is present as disciples come together to participate in the communion service throughout the Church Age. Perhaps either view is valid.

As previously discussed, the kingdom of God would soon be restored to earth as the church was revealed at Jerusalem, around fifty days after the crucifixion of Jesus. Almost immediately thereafter the disciples began to come together for the purpose of breaking bread in observance of the Lord's Supper ([Acts 2:42-46](#), [Acts 20:7](#), [1 Cor. 11:23-26](#)). In a very real sense, Jesus is present when disciples come together to remember his death and the blood that was shed for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus promised in [Matthew 18:20](#), "*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*" Thus, Jesus does participate in the Lord's Supper as disciples come together in his name.

To begin their meal, Jesus gave thanks to God and then passed around the wine to the Twelve and they each filled their cups. As they began to eat, Jesus took a loaf of bread and announced that this was symbolic of his body that would be given for them. He then broke off pieces of the loaf and handed bread to each of the disciples. It is obvious that the disciples were not really aware of the magnitude of these words in light of the events that would transpire within the

next 24 hours. They took the bread and continued to eat and drink and talk amongst themselves.

At some point during the meal, **John 13:4-5** tells us that Jesus removed himself from the table and washed the feet of his disciples as they reclined (the traditional position for eating such a meal). As the supper ended, Jesus spoke up again. It is likely that those serving the meal would have cleared the table of its contents and left only the wine on the table, per Jesus' instructions. It seems as if a lone cup was left in front of the Lord (**Matt. 26:27, Mark 14:23**). He took the cup, gave thanks to God, and made a similar announcement as he had done earlier with the bread. He declared the wine symbolic of his blood that would be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Again, this was an obvious reference to Christ as the Lamb of God that had come to take away the sins of the world (**John 1:29**).

Jesus had come not to simply restore the kingdom of Israel or to call God's people back to repentance and adherence to the Law of Moses. He stated in **Luke 22:20** that in fact he was bringing an entirely new covenant that would follow the shedding of his blood. God revealed to his people through the prophet Jeremiah that this day was coming (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). And soon these very men would bear witness to its fulfillment. However, Jesus had to first undergo a rather gruesome torture and execution in which that blood would be spilled. Only after the pouring out of his blood and his subsequent death would God be able to institute this new covenant (**Hebrews 9:16-28**). The fulfillment of the ages had come and the blueprint foretold in the Old Testament scriptures was soon to be actualized. The Lord's Supper is a constant reminder of this new covenant between God and man made possible through the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

In the ensuing first years after Jesus resurrection, the disciples came together on the first day of the week to share this communion service and remember the Lord. Even today, we as disciples are called to remember Christ as we break bread together. Although the specific day of the week is not bound or formally commanded in the New Testament, the church of Christ today tends to follow the first century tradition of gathering on Sundays to worship God and partake in the Lord's Supper. However, that does not mean that this is the only time in which Christ is present as we observe this ceremony. Even two or three disciples gathered together can share a meaningful time together in communion as they take the bread that represents Jesus' body and share the fruit of the vine that represents his blood. Paul gives us further instructions on the personal reflection and self-examination that should accompany our regular observance (**1 Cor. 11:27-29**). We must not only remember the Lord but also strive to do our best to live up to the calling for which he has chosen us. Nevertheless, we are reminded every time we take communion that we have all fallen short and we all desperately need the cleansing blood of Christ in our daily lives.



Woe to That Man
Luke 22:21-23

At some point during their evening meal, Jesus revealed to his disciples that a betrayer was in their midst. It appears that Judas was present as Jesus gave thanks and broke bread and passed it to his disciples. Almost certainly Judas was in attendance when Jesus got up from the table and washed his disciples' feet. After returning to the table and instructing his disciples about the meaning of this washing, Jesus became understandably grieved. At this point he disclosed to his followers that one of those sitting at the table sharing in the meal was going to betray him. **John 13:26-30** records Jesus handing a piece of bread to Judas after he had dipped it in a sauce served with the supper. Presumably, the Twelve were still eating the meal for the bread and other dishes were still on the table.

To the disciples, Jesus appeared to have given Judas some specific instructions as he gave him the bread. Thereafter Judas got up and left the house. Even though Jesus quietly revealed to John that Judas was the betrayer (**John 13:23-26**), his actions seemed quite normal considering his role as the administrator of the group's finances. Consequently, the disciples did not realize that Judas was the betrayer, even after he left the house. It is likely that the meal continued after his exit. **Luke 22:20** specifies that it was not until the supper was finished (and likely the table cleared) that Jesus took the cup and as previously discussed gave it to his disciples as a representation of his blood that would be shed for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, it appears that Judas may have been absent for this portion of the communion ceremony. In fact, Jesus continued to teach his disciples and revealed many things to them after Judas' departure, as recorded in **John 13:31-17:26**.

The order suggested here is merely a best guess considering the harmony of the Gospels. However, it seems appropriate for Judas to partake in the breaking of bread and even the washing of his feet, for Jesus had loved and served Judas as he had the rest of the Twelve. And it also makes sense for Judas to have left the room before the passing of the cup, for although Jesus shed his blood for all of mankind, those who reject him also reject the offer of forgiveness of their sins.

The progression of Judas' downfall is well documented. Again, the opinion stated in this commentary is that a lack of faith and hidden doubts began to surface in the heart and mind of Judas. For Satan, this type of weakness in a person's spiritual armor leaves more than enough room for one of his deadly arrows to penetrate the soul and destroy their faith completely. **John 13:2** tells us that by the time of the Last Supper, Satan had already been prompting Judas to betray Jesus. The NIV fails somewhat in their translation here, using the rather benign word "prompted" as a rendering of the Greek phrase meaning *to thrust into the heart*. Satan had not merely prompted and suggested betrayal to Judas. More accurately, he had detected his lack of faith and thrust a flood of wicked thoughts into his heart. However, Judas' fate was not sealed at this point. Although he had been bombarded by evil thoughts, it was not until he took the bread offered him by Jesus that he fully gave way to Satan and allowed his own wickedness to destroy him (**John 13:27**).

So did Judas choose his own destiny or was he simply created to fulfill the prophecy regarding the Son of Man's betrayal (**Psalms 41:9**)? Again we are

confronting the question of predestination vs. freewill (see notes on [Luke 7:29-35](#)). Jesus makes it obvious that the betrayer will be held accountable for his actions, which leads us to conclude that Judas made a conscious choice to be unfaithful to the Lord. God's foreknowledge does not absolve men from being held accountable for the decisions they made during their lifetime. For those who betray Jesus – either through falling away from the faith or rejecting the Lord altogether – it would have been better for them to have never existed. Yet in all of mankind's arrogance and self-deceit, many choose to ignore this explicit warning from God in the flesh.

The Greatest in the Kingdom

Luke 22:24-27

As the apostles discussed who the betrayer might be, it appears that the conversation took a rather unspiritual turn. In all likelihood, each of the disciples began to justify themselves in an effort to prove that he could not possibly be the betrayer. In doing so they began to credit themselves with great deeds of faith. They went on to recount the noble contribution they had made to this ministry and demonstrated how their role was vital to its future. Jesus' disclosure that a betrayer was in their midst revealed just how insecure the apostles were and how much each of them worried about how they were viewed by the others.

Jesus' reference to himself in [vs. 27](#) as the one at the table who serves is perhaps a connection to the events in [John 13:3-17](#). What a stirring image is painted if in fact Jesus simply got up from the table while the disciples were defending their own merit, disrobed, and began to wash their feet – a job normally done by a hired servant, the least in the house. How humbling it must have felt to be silenced by such an act of humility. Without saying a word Jesus would have already made his point quite loudly. If the timing suggested here is accurate, Jesus' teaching to his disciples here in [vs. 25-30](#) especially abounds with meaning. However, the washing of the feet may just as well have occurred a bit earlier in the meal and Jesus was simply recalling his example to illustrate his current point.

Jesus compared leadership in the kingdom versus the leadership of the Gentiles – or we might say leadership in the secular world. In the Greek and Roman method of rule, the Emperor was usually considered one of the gods and was often rash and quite heavy handed with the authority he possessed. Below him existed a near caste system where everybody recognized his place. From the nobles, politicians, and aristocrats all the way down to the servants and slaves, superiority was ordered and authority was exercised and passed down. A common practice among the Gentiles from those in positions of authority was to grant favors, payoffs, and perks to those under them or around them to secure their own position; these were called Benefactors.

The apostles would have had no trouble recognizing the corruption and abuse of power that Jesus was referencing. As Jews themselves, they were already quite familiar with the adverse affects of the Gentile authority, for their people had suffered greatly throughout history by such empires – most recently at the hands of the Greeks and the Romans. They would have despised the comparison of their behavior to men who lorded their authority over others and practiced bribery to warp the system.

As he continued on, the kingdom version of leadership and authority was an attractive and refreshing contrast. They were to be like the servants and the young who as yet held little rank in the overall system, as Jesus had thoroughly demonstrated. They were now called to imitate him and humbly serve and consider the needs of others more important than their own. Jesus had lived out the example that they were to follow. He had given to them, he had befriended them, he had taught them, and he had encouraged them. Jesus granted them positions of honor in his ministry, yet he had not acted like a Benefactor

distributing favors to be paid back with loyal service. Instead, he had given to them without commanding their reverence, nor had he treated them as indentured servants. And to further solidify his point, Jesus had even washed their feet on this night as they reclined at the dinner table.

This is how the apostles were to live after he was to be taken from them. They would be called to be servants of the church. Jesus did not want the apostles to simply relegate their responsibilities to those under them in the secular sense. Instead, Jesus desired for them to thoroughly train and raise up more qualified leaders by investing their lives and their hearts in the next generation of disciples, much the same way Jesus had invested himself so profoundly in them. They were not to lead by title or authority but by love and humility. They were to set a personal example for others to imitate. They would often be the first ones called to suffer for the faith, to testify before the authorities, and to stand up in defense of the church. To God, the greatest is he who serves.



Leadership in the Kingdom

Luke 22:28-30

After essentially calling the apostles to repent, Jesus went on to encourage those very same men he had chosen to be close to him. Although the apostles' insecurities had been exposed, Jesus wanted them each to be secure that in fact they were very important to him, to God, and to the kingdom. They had remained faithful to Jesus during the times when many rejected his message and walked away. Because of this, God was pleased with them. Therefore there was no need for them to justify their role in Jesus' ministry or to be insecure and worried about other people's opinion of them. Jesus was pleased with their loyalty and their commitment to change and knew that they were almost ready to be entrusted with the kingdom of God.

Even as he commended the apostles for their loyalty, Jesus knew that only later that same night all of them would desert him and flee during his arrest. Yet Jesus still credited them with standing by him during his trials. Isn't this a contradiction? No, instead it is simply an amazing picture of God's grace and Jesus' desire to forgive and love his followers. Jesus was able to foresee these same men as they would faithfully and unceasingly build up his church, the living body of Christ. So to those who would soon prove disloyal, Jesus commends them for their loyalty. We see that God is not as interested in our failures as he is our ability to get back up, dust ourselves off, and continue to serve him. So to those whose faith shall fail, Jesus will someday say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Jesus' remark about the apostles sitting on thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel may not be a reference to the final judgment day. In the Old Testament book of Judges, Israel had no king. Instead, a judge was the ruler or leader over God's people, for Jehovah God was their king – their protector and provider. In fact, the people's request to have a king placed over them was to God a rejection of him and his leadership of Israel (**1 Samuel 8:6-7**). This pattern

of leadership – a godly man who governed as judge over the people – was about to be restored in the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus would soon be crucified, and after his resurrection he ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God. There he shall forever bear the title KING OF KINGS. So with the entrance of the Church Age, the time had again come where godly men would serve to lead God’s people as the judges had done. Together, the apostles and the people were serving one king, Jehovah God in Christ who sits enthroned in heaven. Jesus may have been making reference here to the pattern of leadership that the apostles would hold in the church – a methodology last seen in Israel before the years of King Saul.

As I have just proposed, this reference to the apostles as being judges of the twelve tribes of Israel may simply be a confirmation that they would in fact be the first generation of spiritual leaders as the kingdom of God was restored to earth through the church of Christ. God’s people would no longer be the physical nation of Israel. Rather, the growing remnant of faithful disciples of Jesus would comprise the new spiritual kingdom – known to God as the true Israel. This explanation of [Luke 22:28-30](#) remains consistent with the preceding sentences from Jesus, where he warned them against ungodly use of authority, instructed them as to the requirements of spiritual leadership, and encouraged them that he would soon confer upon them the kingdom of God. In fact, if you look at the instructions that the scriptures give to the judges and the importance of their spirituality as the leaders of God’s people, you can identify a consistency in the way Jesus charged the apostles to lead. Jesus charged them to lead justly, to serve as godly examples, to influence the people towards righteousness, and to avoid conforming to worldly patterns of leadership such as the acceptance of bribes, acting like the Benefactors, and lording their authority over others. These instructions are remarkably similar to the way God had prescribed the judges to lead.

[Deut. 1:15-17](#)

[Deut. 16:18-20](#)

[Deut. 17:8-13](#)

[1 Samuel 8:6-7](#)



The Sifting of the Twelve

[Luke 22:31-34](#)

Jesus unveiled to the apostles a sobering reality from the spiritual realms. Satan had already asked permission to sift not just Simon, but the entire group of apostles. The English rendering of ‘you’ in [vs. 31](#) is plural in the original Greek text. Thus, Jesus’ warning might better read, “*Simon, Simon, Satan has demanded to sift you all like wheat.*” The devil did not simply want to destroy the faith of him who was given the keys to the kingdom; he wanted to sift through each one of the men that Jesus had personally trained. Satan wanted to see what they were made of. He longed to attack their convictions and expose their

frailties. He longed to prove Jesus a failure in his earthly mission to prepare the Twelve to take the reigns of the coming kingdom.

Satan is an accuser (**Job 1:6, Rev. 12:10**) and his desire to harass God's devoted followers is likewise depicted in the Old Testament. It is revealed in the book of Job that the devil is unmistakably confined in submission to God. He must first ask permission to pursue the Lord's faithful. God was pleased with Job and believed him to be an example of righteousness. Thus, Satan asked permission to sift him, for he eagerly desired to prove God wrong. In much the same way, Jesus had just told the disciples that he too was pleased and encouraged by their faithfulness to God and their loyalty to him. Because of this, they became prime targets for Satan. The accuser's logic must have sounded something like this: *If Jesus feels like these men are ready to sit in the seats of authority in the new kingdom, why not let me test them out just to make sure?* And Satan had approached Jesus with just such a request. (A side note here: Satan's request of Jesus is worded in the almost identical manner as his request of God regarding Job. Thus, we observe that Jesus' authority over Satan is identical to God's as seen in **Job 1:8-12**. We are again given further evidence that Jesus was Jehovah God in the flesh.)

Jesus was already able to foresee the events of this fateful night. Matthew and Mark both quoted Jesus as he recalled the soon to be fulfilled prophesy in **Zech. 13:7**, "*Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*" He knew that his disciples would all fall away and fail to stand by him at his arrest. Simon Peter's denial was already ringing in his ears, even as Peter emphatically swore that he of all the followers would persevere with him even through prison or death. As has been mentioned, it was a sure sign of God's grace that Jesus had just given these men a commendation for standing by him during his trials even though he knew that this night's test would prove to be a complete disaster. Surely Satan would be trumpeting accusations before God on this night. He could easily ridicule the lack of faith displayed by the apostles as each one ran away in fear while the mob took hold Jesus.

Yet Jesus prayed for Peter, for he knew that his leadership and his faith were crucial to the strength, unity, and spirituality of the others. He knew that this night would be the all-time low point in Peter's life. The three days that Jesus lay dead would seem like an eternity for him as he mentally replayed his denial over and over again, burning in his soul a bitter pain that could not be described in words. Yet when Jesus rose from the dead, Mary and the other women were given specific instructions to relay the good news of his resurrection to the disciples and particularly to Peter (**Mark 16:7**). The importance of Peter's faith is seen again in **John 21:15-19**, as Jesus reinstated Simon son of John as the group's recognized leader. And Satan was not finished with Simon Peter, lest he think his test had already come. After his restoration, Jesus forewarned Simon that another rendezvous with the adversary was inescapable.

Satan's desire to sift these men would not be quenched on this night by any means. It is reasonable to assume that Jesus disclosed his encounter with Satan and his request to sift them all to prepare the apostles for the times of testing that lay ahead. We have already looked at the martyrdom of the apostles

and some of Jesus' faithful disciples (see notes on [Luke 12:1-12](#)). Certainly the devil continued to demand from God the right to sift these men and challenge their faith up until the moment that each one gasped his dying breath. Yet only the one doomed for destruction would ultimately fail the test. For the rest of them, God's grace would cover over this night's failure. And once Peter and the others turned back and regained their strength, they would mount an unstoppable offensive against Satan's army of evildoers. Satan would never be able to overpower the church of Christ, nor would he be able to persuade the other apostles to deny the faith.

[Rev. 12:10b](#)

[Job 1:8-11](#)

[Mark 16:7](#)

[John 21:18-19](#)

Let us make one last observation from this passage of scripture. This is the only time in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus directly refers to Peter as Simon. He first calls him three times by his given name, Simon, and then refers to him by his usual nickname, Peter. Jesus had dubbed him Peter (or Cephas in Aramaic – name meaning *rock*) when he first called him to leave his fishing nets and come after him. Most of us assume that this became the name in which Jesus almost exclusively referred to him, for the Gospels use the name given him by Jesus much more than Simon. Still, we can't really be sure as to the actual frequency that Jesus used either name. In fact, Jesus rarely refers to him directly using the name Peter – only three times in all as recorded in the Gospels compared to ten uses of the name Simon (grouped together in six passages of scripture). Should we assume that Jesus usually referred to his right-hand disciple as Peter yet at certain points reverted back to the name Simon? This was the name that most people knew him as, the name he went by before he and Jesus ever met. Perhaps Jesus was making a point by its use, but this assumption is at best inconclusive. A look at the six moments in the four Gospels where Jesus used the name Simon may suggest that these times were intentional and the use significant. The six times Jesus calls him Simon are as follows:

1. [Matt. 16:7](#) – After Peter declared that Jesus was the Christ and Jesus informed him that God in heaven had revealed this fact to him.
2. [Matt 17:25](#) – When Jesus speaks up first regard Peter's apparent question as to whether Jesus paid the temple tax or not.
3. [Mark 14:37](#) – When Jesus returns from his Gethsemane prayer and finds Peter unable to stay awake and keep watch with him.
4. [Luke 22:31-32](#) – When Jesus reveals to Peter that Satan wished to sift them, but that he had prayed for him to turn back, hinting at his eventual denial of the faith.
5. [John 1:42](#) – When Jesus first declares that he shall be called Cephas, or Peter.
6. [John 21:15-17](#) – When Jesus asks Peter three times whether he truly loved him.

It is Written

Luke 22:35-38

When the disciples had been sent out on their first assignment, Jesus had given specific instructions about what to bring and how to act. Their mission then was to be a peaceful one, as they announced that the kingdom was close at hand. Jesus made sure that they only cooperated with gracious recipients to their message and gave them clear directions on how to treat those who would reject them. Let us recall Jesus' words at the time of that first commission.

Luke 10:3-6

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. ⁵"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you.

As they prepared to head out to the Mount of Olives, Jesus knew that a confrontation was imminent. This night would not bring forth peace, but would instead trigger a cycle of darkness that would cause his disciples to scatter in disarray and end with his own torture and death. Thus, Jesus prepared his men with instructions quite different than the one's first given them. It would appear that the current order given by Jesus – to sell their cloaks to buy a sword – was somewhat symbolic in nature, perhaps for no other reason than that the scriptures might be fulfilled. Jesus quoted from **Isaiah 53:12**, which predicted that the suffering servant would be associated with transgressors or those involved in a rebellion. If this is the intended meaning of this somewhat peculiar instruction, then in fact two swords were quite enough for the disciples to be portrayed as law-breakers. And we shall see that in fact Jesus' arrest was tainted with a flagrant violation of law, as Peter misinterpreted his master's instructions and would unleash his sword. Even after rebuking Peter for his act of defiance against the mob, Jesus recognized that this was all transpiring as predicted in the scriptures. Jesus would be numbered with the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12b

*because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

Throughout his arrest, his trial, and on until his dying hour we will see in Jesus a commitment to fulfill all that was written concerning what would be the culmination of his mission. A great deal of prophecy was yet to be fulfilled and God in the flesh was quite familiar with every aspect of the process that now lay before him. He would make one final appeal to God before ultimately submitting himself and partaking in the cup of suffering that was his to drink. He would then comply with this predestined storyline almost like an actor who has rehearsed his

lines a thousand times and knows exactly how all the other players on stage will respond. Although the events would unfold with predictability, the range of emotions and intense sorrow that Jesus felt would be genuine. The humiliation would be obvious and the physical pain unfeigned. Yet Jesus was not willing to swerve even the slightest bit from what was written, but instead he continued on with the plan and called Satan's bluff.



Not My Will, but Yours be Done

Luke 22:39-44

As was their custom during the Passover week, the disciples went with their Lord to the Mount of Olives until they reached the place called Gethsemane. Jesus asked his disciples to sit down upon their arrival at the olive grove while he continued on a short distance to pray. According to the books of Matthew and Mark, he then asked for his three closest disciples and friends to come a little farther with him. He gave them specific instructions to keep watch while he spent time with God, for he knew that a detachment of soldiers would arrive at any moment. Jesus was about to face the darkest and most painful hour of his earthly existence and the need for time to pour out his soul to God was essential. Thus, he simply needed his companions to stay attentive and warn him if they heard any type of disturbance or sensed an approaching crowd.

Jesus' prayer in the olive grove is generally adopted by Christians as the ultimate example of self-denial and surrender. We see in Christ the very extent of his humanity as he appeals to God the Father with anguish and perhaps fear as the cup was now set before him to drink. The cup of torture and suffering. The cup of humiliation and contempt. The cup of mockery from his adversaries and denial by his friends. The cup of public execution, a shameful criminal's death for an innocent man. His intense passion even manifested itself in physical form as his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.

The appearance of the angel in **Luke 22:43** (most likely in the form of a man, not robed in light array) is somewhat exceptional. This angel had been sent to Jesus to comfort him and offer him strength at this, his most trying hour. The one who brought consolation to the world now needed consoling. We have given evidence several times in this commentary as to the divinity of Jesus – that he was fully God in the flesh. We may understand the behavior of the angel here as confirmation that Jesus was also fully man, for surely an angel comforting its Creator is a reversal of roles. Luke seems to be showing us that God had in fact lowered himself to be found in the appearance of a son of man. The writer of Hebrews also tackles this implausible dynamic, proving that during the time that Christ spent on earth, God the Father had placed the Son even lower than the angels. He did this in order that he might exalt him after he was made perfect through suffering (**Heb. 2:5-10**). And now that suffering was at hand. For the first time since his forty days of fasting and temptation, an angel of God was sent to soothe Jesus of Nazareth.

One is compelled to ask, how would Luke of all the Gospel writers have known about the appearance of an angel whilst Jesus was alone praying? And how did the Gospel writers discover the text of a prayer held in total seclusion? It seems apparent that John-Mark, a traveling companion of Paul on several missionary efforts, was the likely giver of this information. Again, it has been offered that Mark's house hosted the Last Supper and that Mark then secretly followed the disciples that fateful night as they went to Gethsemane to pray (**Mark 14:51-52**). We're guessing that Mark placed himself in the vicinity of Jesus as he withdrew by himself to spend this monumental time with God in prayer. Perhaps he then witnessed a comforter come to Jesus' side. Long after the event, Mark could have questioned the apostles as to which of them had come to encourage Jesus, and after ruling them all out they must have concluded that God himself had sent this attendant. If this presumption is true, then Mark was surely the source that supplied both Matthew and Luke with these exclusive events at Gethsemane. Mark also worked with Peter while in Rome to compile the Gospel that bears his name, though his work and Matthew's account chose not to include mention as to the angel's appearance. (It is also conceivable that Paul was Luke's source here. That is possible if we conclude that during Paul's time in Arabia (**Gal. 1:17**), Christ taught Paul through revelation (**2 Cor. 12:1-4**), during which time he showed him the events surrounding his death and resurrection that he might bear witness to Luke and thousands more during his impressive missionary career.)

Back to Gethsemane. Despite his extreme distress, Jesus was able to keep his emotions in check as he placed the spiritual importance of this hour above all else. He desired first and foremost that the will of God would prevail, no matter what personal cost was required of him. And that cost was enormous, as much as any man or woman has ever faced until then and since. Death on a cross was the designed will of God and the fulfillment of the purpose set before Christ before time began. Because of his unity and love for God and his unparalleled love for humanity, Jesus was willing to deny himself and take up that cross. Motivated by the joy set before him (**Heb. 12:2**) and the salvation of those who would come after him (**Isaiah 53:11**), Jesus left Gethsemane resolved to endure the pain and the shame that awaited him.

If we were to define self-denial based on Jesus' actions in Gethsemane, we could conclude that it is the willingness to place the will of God above all else. Denying yourself is the willingness to make decisions and take action based not necessarily on what you want or what promotes your own self-interest, but based on what God would have you do and what promotes the kingdom of God. Denying yourself often means choosing the option that makes little sense at the time but reaps an eternal reward. It requires patience, self-control, and a deep-rooted faith that God will bless the decisions we've made even if the road ahead of us is paved with hardship, rejection, and grief. In order to deny yourself, you must be totally convinced that the eternal far outweighs the present; that your life on earth pales in comparison to your life eternal.

Read Luke 9:22-23

Temptation

Luke 22:44-46

After an hour in prayer Jesus returned to find his disciples asleep, unable to carry out his request to maintain a lookout for the betrayer. **Luke 22:45** shows us that sorrow was the reason for their fatigue. A glimpse at the extended version of the Last Supper dialogue recorded in John's Gospel reveals the reason for their grief. Jesus explained to his disciples that he would no longer be with them and that he was going to a place that they could not follow at this time (**John 13:33, 16:5-6**). Jesus even repeated these words so that they distinctly understood that he, their leader and their friend, was soon to be taken away from them. Because of these words, the disciples began to feel downcast in soul and the intense sorrow even brought about physical symptoms. They became exhausted due to grief and stress and they just shut down after their jaunt up the foot of Mount Olives.

Even before he withdrew by himself to pray, Jesus appealed to his disciples to pray as well in order that they might not fall into temptation. He repeated this admonition when he discovered that his followers had been overcome by their exhaustion. When you look at the natural progression of sin listed in **James 1:13-15**, we are shown exactly why fighting sin in prayer at the point of temptation is both necessary and wise. Sin is not just something we fall into unintentionally; it is the result of a process stemming from our inherent evil nature.

The process begins with temptation, a device common to every man and woman (**1 Cor. 10:13**) and experienced fully by Jesus whilst in the flesh (**Heb. 4:15**). At the point of temptation, the one being tempted is under no obligation to stumble into sin nor has any sin been committed simply because he or she is provoked to transgress. Instead, this is the very moment when the spiritual person takes their stand and looks for the way out promised by God. The one who has already spent time praying for strength in anticipation of this moment is more prepared to resist the temptation and more watchful for the godly course that leads to righteousness. However, if you are caught unsuspecting by such temptations or you are simply unwilling to fully engage in self-control at this critical point, you will most likely progress one step closer towards sin.

The sin process rapidly evolves when we yield to our temptations ever so slightly. Allowing the deceitfulness sin to further entice us arouses our hidden evil desires. Our struggle against sin is much fiercer now and there's a greater possibility that we will lose the battle. Because we did not demonstrate enough self-control to resist at the point of temptation, we will in all probability fail to possess the greater amount of resistance necessary now that the desire to sin has been unleashed. The next step is sin, a willing embrace of evil. And the final stage of the progression is death, the result of a lifetime of sin.

Jesus had earlier taught his disciples to pray that they might not even be led into temptation (**Luke 11:4**). He now instructed them in Gethsemane to pray that they might not fall into temptation. Again, the Bible teaches us that Jesus constantly fought temptation just as we did. We must assume that he prepared himself for this battle in regular prayer. We might even conclude then that Jesus was without sin not because of supernatural powers that rendered him impervious

to evil, but because of his daily commitment to fight sin at the point of attack – temptation. With Jesus the battle never moved beyond this level; the fight never entered into the arena of desire. Satan was never able to drag him away and entice him to the point of sin. Not once. Jesus fought and won the battle of sin at the point of temptation. This we must imitate in Jesus.



Betrayal in the Garden

Luke 22:47-53

During Jesus' admonishment to his weary followers, Judas arrived in the olive grove and with him were men sent to detain this controversial teacher. Judas' greeting of Jesus – a kiss and perhaps an embrace – was quite normal under the very abnormal circumstances. We might conclude that the detachment of guards sent by the elders and chief priests followed Judas at a distance to perhaps protect the betrayer from the hands of the other disciples. In other words, it is likely that Judas' betrayal of Jesus could have remained a mystery to the rest of the apostles. Judas could have simply returned to Gethsemane, greeted Jesus with a kiss, and then intermingled with the rest of the men – a very normal occurrence. Keeping with this theory, the mob would arrive within a minute or so after having seen the one Judas kissed. This explains the need for a signal to be arranged – a signal that would conceal Judas as the betrayer while alerting those who had arranged for Jesus' detainment. The disciples could have easily assumed that the mob followed Judas to this sight without his knowledge, and Judas could have played it off as such. Soon enough however they would receive confirmation about Judas' betrayal, the price for which he handed Jesus over to the Sanhedrin, and the depressing death of this once faithful preacher of the kingdom message.

Who was this crowd that had come with lanterns, torches, and weapons to detain Jesus (**John 18:3**)? The Synoptic Gospels do not mention any sign of Roman soldiers at the time of Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane. These Gospel writers seem to portray the crowd simply as representatives from the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. But **John 18:3** also tells us that a band of soldiers were with these religious officials. Although the Greek word for this type of soldier (**speira**⁴⁰) usually refers to Roman soldiers, it can also be used as a reference simply for a mass of men or for a group of Levitical janitors – a type of diplomatic Jewish sentry (i.e. officers of the temple guard as per **Luke 22:52**). Per normal Roman law, these men would almost certainly not be allowed to bear weapons in their line of duty. They simply served at the Temple to ensure proper obedience to the Jewish customs and regulations.

The fact that John's account describes this group carrying weapons indicates that it was out of the ordinary and thus worthy of mention. A collection of "pious" men, delegates from the chief priests and elders, and a group temple attendants armed with weapons would be extraordinary indeed, while a group of

⁴⁰ Greek 4686; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Romans soldiers bearing arms is redundant. We can be quite sure that the Romans had no reason to become involved in Jesus' arrest or his subsequent trial before the Sanhedrin, nor were they present here at Gethsemane. Matters of Jewish law were of little interest to Pilate and would certainly not warrant a detachment of Roman soldiers, as is often portrayed in the arrest of Jesus. The Jews had not yet brought charges against Jesus either by the Mosaic Law or the Roman law; this would be their first order of business. Only then would Pilate reluctantly become involved in this matter.

As was mentioned earlier, Jesus' arrest would not be without incident. Peter rushed to his Lord's defense. Surely he was attempting to kill the servant of the high priest with his sword, landing a blow to the head. It is likely that the servant attempted to dodge the lethal blow and ended up losing only his right ear, as recorded in both Luke and John. Jesus took control of the scene, healed the ear of Malchus the servant of the high priest ([John 18:10](#)), and cautioned his own followers for their misplaced zeal.

Jesus exposed the absurdity of this mob commissioned in the dark of night armed with swords and clubs. He was a man of peace and was not hiding his ministry or teachings; rather he spent each of the previous few days in the midst of all the people at the temple courts. But Jesus again confirmed that the arrest was such in fulfillment to the scriptures ([Matt. 26:54](#)). Jesus was arrested and detained like a common lawbreaker per Isaiah's prophecy ([Isaiah 53:12](#); which may just as well refer to the criminals crucified with Christ, but also has bearing here).

At this point, the disciples deserted Jesus. Do we have any reason to think that they were followed or that the mob made any attempt to detain them along with Christ? It is believed that Mark himself is the one described in [Mark 14:51-52](#), the young man who escaped seizure and fled naked in the night. Thus, we might assume that there was an attempt to capture some of Jesus' disciples, although the man they wanted was secured easily enough. To make doubly sure however, they bound Jesus (tied him tightly wrist to wrist and fastened him to a guard; his legs were perhaps left free to descend the hill). The officials and guards then made their way from the Mount of Olives while the disciples headed further into the woods. Some would later follow Jesus at a distance, as he was now in the company of an easily recognizable group carrying torches and lanterns. They were taking him to a hearing before the high priest.



Jesus Before the High Priest

[Luke 22:54-65](#)

Jesus' captors led him first to the house of Annas, the father-in-law to Caiaphas. He would separately appear before Annas, Caiaphas, and then the entire Sanhedrin before the events of that night and the early morning had been completed. Annas had been appointed high priest in 6 AD by Quirinius, governor of Syria, but was later ousted in 15 AD by Valerius Gratus, procurator of Judea. The office of high priest was normally a lifetime position, but the Romans

frequently changed high priests (perhaps as an attempt to enfeeble Jewish authority). Thus, Annas would be succeeded by five of his sons and by his son-in-law Caiaphas (18-36 AD), who was a Sadducee. It was Caiaphas who served as the active high priest during Jesus' adult life and throughout his ministry (**John 18:12-13**). Yet it would still appear that Annas wielded some degree of power behind the scenes for he was able to take the first crack at the sequestered teacher.

After an appearance before Annas, during which he was questioned and even slapped in the face, Jesus was taken still bound to Caiaphas (**John 18:19-24**). Peter and another disciple – most certainly John, son of Zebedee – were able to make their way into the courtyard of the high priest. John was known by the high priest. (Because of this we also see that John knew the name of the high priest's servant whose ear was hacked off, Malchus. John was even able to identify a relative of Malchus who later questioned Peter; ref. **John 18:26**). As a result, John was able to get himself and Peter as close to their Lord as possible. **John 18:17** records perhaps the first time that Peter disowns Jesus. Peter muttered a shrewd denial that he was a disciple of Jesus to the girl that allowed Peter into the courtyard per John's arrangements. John most likely overheard this denial. These words are conceivably harmonious with **Luke 22:55-56**, but not necessarily so. Peter surely disowned Jesus three times that night as prophesied by Christ – literally proclaiming, "I don't know the man". But when all was said and done, he may have also slipped out a few more very subtle dismissals of his association with Jesus of Nazareth prior to the rooster's crow.

It seems as if John was able to go beyond the courtyard and was possibly even allowed into the room where Jesus was questioned. We find Peter apparently left to himself in the courtyard for a while, though John may have later rejoined him (perhaps just in time to witness Peter's final denial). It was a cold spring night and Peter found a place by the fire that had been started. He sought to warm himself and hopefully remain unnoticed by an assembly who had undoubtedly been briefed on Jesus' arrest and were certainly in support of the high priests actions. Some amid this crowd had even participated in Jesus' capture at Gethsemane (**John 18:26**). It was here that Peter continued to deny his Lord, claiming not to know of whom they were talking about. His words did not dismiss the people's inquiries but seemed to further arouse their suspicion regarding his very presence in the courtyard on that night. Undoubtedly everyone present was aware of Jesus, his ministry, his disciples, the many testimonies of his miracles, and the controversy surrounding his messianic claims. Peter's plea of total ignorance was certainly peculiar and led them to further question this Galilean.

More than an hour passed as the bustling in the courtyard continued well into the predawn morning. This provided plenty of time for the high priest to question Jesus prior to his official appearance before the entire Sanhedrin at daybreak. We find Peter's final and most decisive disowning of Christ occurring at a time when Jesus was in full view of those mingling in the courtyard. This was most certainly during a gap of time after Jesus' questioning at the house of Caiaphas and prior to his official trial before the Sanhedrin. We might assume that Caiaphas and the others had completed their shady interrogation and Jesus

was led out of the house still bound. The Jewish council consisting of the high priest, elders, teachers of the law, and other chief priests may have continued to meet in the house of Caiaphas or they could have assembled at the Chamber of Hewn Stone, the meeting hall in the temple. They would continue to debate the issue and eventually come to a majority decision to put Jesus to death.

Wherever they met, they would have to stall until daybreak for it was improper to try Jesus at night. During this idle time, those guarding Jesus found a way to entertain themselves. They began to beat Jesus and spit on him. They blindfolded him and mocked him based on the notion that Jesus was a prophet or a seer of some type. They had most likely watched and heard all the accusations leveled against him by their superiors and had plenty of material from which to select their sarcastic insults.

It was either during this physical mistreatment of Jesus or just prior to it that Peter's last denial occurred. To further credit his lie, Peter swore by God himself that he was telling the truth. As seen in **Job 31**, calling down a curse or misfortune upon yourself was one way of emphatically proving to others that you were not lying. Only then did Peter notice that Jesus had been escorted away from Caiaphas and was now in sight. As those cowardly words still hung in the air, the rooster crowed and jarred Peter's memory. Then Jesus turned and locked eyes with the man who had but hours earlier unleashed a sword in his defense. And perhaps it was then that Jesus began to be mocked and blindfolded by those guarding him. All of this was too much for Peter and he no doubt struggled to keep his composure, still attempting to play off his allegiance to Christ long enough to usher himself away from those in the courtyard. It seems likely that interest in Peter's association with Jesus was now overshadowed, as the courtyard assembly began to move towards Jesus and the guards. This would further provoke their mocking, for they were now entertaining not only themselves but an audience as well.

Once Peter was away from danger, his emotions burst forth as the reality of his actions set in with crashing waves of guilt, humiliation, and grief. If what has been suggested regarding the concealment of Judas' betrayal of Jesus is accurate, we must amplify the pain felt by Peter on that night. I have suggested that Judas was able to conceal his betrayal of Christ at least to the other disciples, for only John was given the inside information regarding the betrayer's identity. Thus, as the disciples dispersed at Gethsemane, Judas too could have scattered only to later return to find out the outcome of the trial before the Sanhedrin. So there is a slight possibility that Peter's ignorance of Judas' deal with the chief priests may have led him to conclude that he, Peter, was in fact the betrayer that Jesus spoke about during their last meal together. This would only deepen his grief to the point of self-loathing. Either way, he had disowned his Lord, his teacher, and his friend. Peter's soul was overwhelmed with sadness and he wept violently.

Luke 22:33-34

But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

³⁴Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."



Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

Luke 22:66-71

Although Jesus had already been questioned before Annas and had appeared before Caiaphas and others at the high priest's house (**Matthew 26:57-68**), he was officially brought before the Sanhedrin at the first glimpse of daylight. This would serve as the only legal trial of Jesus of Nazareth before the Jewish Council. Those who had earlier grilled Jesus with questions and accusations now assembled as mentioned at the Chamber of Hewn Stone in the temple. This venue placed the council members, chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law in a semi-circle with the high priest in the center. Jesus was brought before these men for the second time in the span of a few hours. He was likely untied as he had not been formally sentenced or declared guilty of an infraction of the law. This was perhaps the first time that some of the members of the council noticed that Jesus had been beaten since they had seen him last. Staunch Jews would have disapproved of this type of treatment since his official hearing was yet to begin. Still, the Sanhedrin offered no visible sign of sympathy or normal fairness on this day.

The council had narrowed down their argument against Jesus during the previous meeting at the house of the high priest. They had but two questions to ask Jesus, either one would carry the charge of blasphemy and thus render a death sentence under Jewish law. The first question was regarding Jesus' claim that he was the Messiah. In truth, a claim such as this was not necessarily a violation of the Law of Moses for both Moses and the prophets declared that the Prophet-Christ would arise from among their own brothers and it was foretold that the Son of Man would rise to the throne of Israel. Jesus' reply to this first question was not the self-condemning admission that they were looking for. Jesus simply implied that upholding this claim would be pointless under the present circumstances, for the council was in no way prepared to accept Jesus as the Christ nor would they listen or respond to a sound scriptural defense from Jesus were he to pose one.

The second question posed to Jesus stemmed from the well-known report that Jesus' followers and many of those healed by him believed him to be the Son of God. Jesus is never recorded in the four Gospels declaring the words, "I am the Son of God", but he did not deny the tributes given him by those who declared him to be the Son of God, the Holy One of Israel, the Son of David, and the Christ. In effect, Jesus did reveal to his closest followers that he was in fact the Son of the Living God, yet he did not want this claim to reach the Sanhedrin until the appointed time for his suffering. That time had finally come and the question was now offered him. Jesus once and for all confirmed that he was in fact the Son of God, as had been asserted by many.

The high priest and the council had heard exactly what they wanted to hear. At the house of the high priest they had been largely embarrassed as they brought out many who testified against Jesus with allegations and fabrications. They had trouble harmonizing these stories and at the end of it all, none of the charges brought against Jesus were substantial violations of the law. After their inquest was stumped, they resorted to questioning Jesus in hopes that he might condemn himself with a messianic or a blasphemous claim, though Jesus did not legally have to testify against himself. And because Jesus had in fact provided the confession needed to charge him with blasphemy, the same questions were posed to him now at this official hearing. This was their only hope to level a serious charge against Jesus. The question was posed and once he complied, they quickly pointed out that no further testimony was needed nor did any witnesses have to be called (to their relief). Jesus' testimony against himself was sufficient to warrant his execution under Jewish law.

Although the official verdict of the Sanhedrin was to put Jesus to death, the decision may not have been unanimous. [Mark 14:64](#) specifically states that all in attendance deemed Jesus worthy of death, a unanimous verdict. However, it is not clear whether the gathering referred to here was his informal questioning at the house of the high priest or the official meeting before the Sanhedrin. The former seems most appropriate. [Luke 23:50-51](#) tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was on the council that rendered the final sentence on Jesus' head, yet he had not consented with their "*decision and action*". It seems likely that the "action" Luke was referring to was the seizure of Jesus and the improper meetings that took place prior to his official trial before the council. Even so, Joseph's absence during this period was a private declaration of non-consent to these actions, for he still kept his allegiance to Jesus undisclosed ([John 19:38](#)). We might assume that he was present during Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin, for an absence during this official meeting would have been irregular. Perhaps his refusal to consent with their "decision" took place at that meeting.

Joseph of Arimathea was almost certainly a significant source of information as Luke penned his Gospel. He would have been able to take Luke behind the scenes of the Jewish rulers as they schemed against Jesus, for the Gospel writers seem to know what Jesus' opposition discussed throughout his ministry up until the time of his death and burial. Because of his wealth, Joseph or Arimathea was also able to secure Jesus' dead body from Pilate, perhaps indicating that he was even known by Pilate. Again, we see that God had a plan for his chosen people, the Jews. Because Joseph risked it all to become a disciple of Jesus, God was able to fulfill the plans he had for him. A man who was once influential among the Jewish council-members would become an influential member in the body of Christ.

Perhaps there were others who did not consent with the decision to put Jesus to death, but we have no indication that anyone spoke up in Jesus' defense – neither Joseph of Arimathea nor any other potential dissenter. Perhaps they were not allowed to argue. We can be sure that no one would have been able to turn the tide of this scandalous horde. Jesus himself did not speak in his own defense, nor did he call upon the scriptures or the evidence of his divine power as proof of

his claims. Knowing God's will, Jesus resolutely accepted the Sanhedrin's decision. Their next order of business was to convince the Roman government to act in accordance with Jewish regulations, for their power trumped the Jews in matters of execution ([John 18:31](#)).



Jesus Before Pilate

[Luke 23:1-7](#)

Still early in the morning, Jesus was again bound and let from the temple to Pilate's quarters. Pontius Pilate lived most of the year in Caesarea but ventured south to Jerusalem to ensure stability during the Jewish holidays. He would have either stayed at one of the palaces of Herod the Great or perhaps at the castle or fortress of Antonia. Jesus and his accusers reached the Roman palace unusually early and because it was the day of Preparation, the Jewish leaders refused to enter the Gentile occupancy for they would be rendered unclean ([John 18:28](#)). As was mentioned previously, these men still desired to share in that evening's meal and partake of the Passover lamb – all this while the Lamb of God was in their midst. The entire series of events is loaded with brutal irony.

Indeed Pilate was aware of the Jewish traditions of ceremonial cleanliness, but they certainly annoyed him nonetheless. Right away we see Pilate's reluctance to get involved with what seemed to him as matters of Jewish law. His stubborn refusal to cooperate with the determined chief priests forced them to exaggerate the charges brought against Jesus. They listed subversion and tax evasion as two of Jesus' crimes. Certainly these infractions would carry more weight in Roman courts than would messianic claims based on the fulfillment of prophecies found in Hebrew scriptures.

Pilate intentionally removed himself from the bothersome Jewish rulers and summoned Jesus to stand before him in private. During this conversation recorded in [John 18:33-38a](#), Jesus seemed to have convinced Pilate that his movement was in fact a spiritual reform and posed no significant threat to the Roman government. To Pilate, Jesus was at best a teacher or perhaps a philosopher, and a controversial one at that. Again, we might just as well assume that Pilate was looking for a reason to acquit Jesus in purposeful defiance of the Jews whom he so despised. Oddly enough, Pilate seemed rather uninterested in the criminal accusations that were brought against Jesus but had focused his questions on his claim to be a type of king, though his kingdom was not of this earth. Perhaps the subversion charge and accusations of tax evasion were easily perceived by Pilate as desperate attempts by the Jews to rid their nation of a man they had deemed a heretic and a threat to their influence among the common Jews. We do know that Pilate detected envy from within these Jewish leaders regarding Jesus ([Matt. 27:18](#)). Banking on this, Pilate would later assume that the multitude of Jewish commoners would rise to defend Jesus and override the will of the chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law.

Pilate returned to the Jewish rulers after his informal investigation of Jesus and notified them that he had found no reason to charge Jesus with a crime. This

again sparked a wave of exaggerations regarding Jesus' ministry and the consequences of his popularity. The chief priests made it look as if Jesus was another Galilean revolutionary whose movement intended to recapture the city of David and place a Jewish king on the throne. This was in fact what the Jews ultimately desired; yet they contested this now with feigned allegiance to Rome and to Caesar. Pilate saw through their duplicity and their mention of a Galilean home base for Jesus' movement backfired on them. Pilate now had another avenue to frustrate the will of the chief priests. He knew that Herod Antipas was in Jerusalem for the Jewish holiday and he attempted to pass on the ultimate responsibility of this matter to him. This was certainly a disappointment to Jesus' enemies who had fervently come from that morning's council eager to carry out his death. Moreover, dealing with the hated Herod was perhaps worse than working with Pontius Pilate.



Jesus Before Herod

Luke 23:8-16

The chief priests and teachers of the law now escorted Jesus to Herod's Royal Palace along the western-most wall of the upper city of Jerusalem. It is possible now that Pilate would have delegated a small handful of Roman soldiers to escort the group. Upon reaching his palace, Herod was delighted to know that Jesus had been brought to him. Since the imprisonment of John the Baptist, Herod wanted to see Jesus of Nazareth but as yet had not. Herod was the tetrarch over Galilee and had no doubt been barraged with reports of Jesus and his miracles. Certainly John the Baptist had himself testified as to the divinity and power of his Lord during his many in depth discussions with Herod whilst in captivity (**Mark 6:20**). Herod wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle, some demonstration of the type of power and authority that sparked the waves of reports about this celebrated teacher.

Jesus however did not grant Herod the amusement he craved. In fact, Jesus made not a single reply to any of Herod's inquiries nor did he defend himself against any accusation hurled against him by the chief priests and teachers of the law. Not only did his silence serve to fulfill the writings of the prophets (**Isaiah 53:7**), it also disappointed and frustrated the vile Herod. To save face, Herod commanded his soldiers to belittle Jesus, perhaps as bait for Jesus to stand up in his own defense or show them a sign as proof of his authority. Herod took part in the mockery as well, even donating an attractive robe from his closet to aid in their spiteful role-playing. Again, it was the many accusations leveled against Jesus by the Jewish rulers that supplied Herod and his soldiers the substance of their contemptuous dialogue. Like Pilate, Herod seemed quite intrigued by the insurrection charges directed at Christ. How absurd it must have been for these Roman governors to see these Jews so determined to rid their nation of one of its most popular and effective leaders. How would Jesus ever become king of the Jews when the highest-ranking political and religious leaders from among his own people hated and disrespected him so?

Herod returned Jesus to Pilate and would not accept the responsibility of his punishment. It is not known exactly why Pilate and Herod come together in friendship because of this incident, but it is easy to surmise. They both had a mutual abhorrence for these Jewish provinces in which they lived and governed. Certainly both men wished to be elsewhere in the vast Roman Empire. The Jewish customs and even the Jews' mutual loathing for Greco-Roman society made it one of the least appealing places for the pagan rulers to indulge in their relentless debauchery. Both Herod and Pilate were certainly vying for power and promotions within the Empire and perhaps this produced a competitive dislike for each other in the past. Now however they had worked together in agreement regarding this man Jesus and perhaps their reciprocated acknowledgment of power and responsibility stroked their egos in a way that left both quite satisfied.

Upon Jesus' return from Herod's Royal Palace, Pilate again refused to comply with the death sentence so desired by the chief priests and scribes. Instead he promised to punish Jesus and thus officially took Jesus into Roman custody at this point. It is not clear why Pilate even agreed to punish Jesus, for neither he nor Herod found any basis for charges against him. Nevertheless, Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence and thus assumed control of the situation and detained him.

Isaiah 53:7

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*



Jesus Before the People

Luke 23:17-25

To further thwart the will of the irritating chief priests and teachers of the law, Pilate remained determined to release Jesus. He had devised a way to cover his own back by employing a customary Roman tradition that acknowledged the Jewish Passover. Again, the Synoptic Gospels associate the release of a Jewish prisoner at the time of *festival* (Greek - **heorte**; of uncertain affinity; a festival: - feast, holy day⁴¹) which is often assumed to be the Feast of Unleavened Bread occurring that year on Friday, the 15th of Nisan. John's Gospel once again specifies the exact time of this tradition fell on Passover, lending support to the notion that Jesus was crucified on the actual day of Passover, the 14th of Nisan (**John 18:39**), and a Thursday in that year. This day is likewise consistent with the Greek word **heorte**, as the Passover meal was a feast and the entire week leading up to the Passover was a festival.

⁴¹ Greek 1859; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

As mentioned, Pilate assumed that Jesus' popularity among the Jewish commoners would absolve him of the responsibility to carry out any further chastisement against the Galilean teacher. However, within the span of time that Jesus left the hands of the Jewish rulers and his appearance before the mass of Jewish pilgrims, the chief priests and teachers of the law were able to completely saturate the crowd with lies, exaggerations, and felonious claims about Jesus' ministry. Using their own positions of influence as members of the council, they began to spin the events of that morning and the previous evening. They no doubt mentioned the arrest in Gethsemane and exaggerated the tale of the swordfight that took place as one of Jesus' followers attempted to defend him. They no doubt barked about his blasphemous claims of equality with God and warned the crowd of worshippers as to his threats to destroy the Jewish temple. They reported that the Jewish Council had found Jesus worthy of death and criticized both Pilate and Herod for their refusal to carry out the death sentence. They thus prodded the people's ever-present Jewish nationalism, painting themselves as the familiar victims to the Roman's indifference to the laws of Moses. These once loyal listeners and even witnesses to Jesus' miracles had been successfully deceived. The yeast of Christ's enemies had managed to work its way through the whole batch of dough.

1 Cor. 5:6b-8

Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Pilate brought Jesus before the Jewish people and offered them two choices: Barabbas or Jesus. It seems the chief priests and members of the Jewish Council rather than Pilate were the ones who originally suggested Barabbas as the second contestant. The release of Barabbas would have been a morale booster for the Jews and a slap in the face to the Romans. Were they to let Barabbas go, they would be freeing a man whose rebellion against Rome was well known and had even involved murder. This whole charade was astoundingly hypocritical, for the very reason stated by the Jews for handing Jesus over to be put to death was insurrection, subversion, and stirring up the people in a rebellion (**Luke 23:2-4**). Everyone involved knew that these claims against Jesus were false. Nevertheless, the man they asked for, Barabbas, was proven guilty of all these same crimes and his actions were well known! What a vivid display of duplicity and spite. It is no wonder why Pilate was able to quickly see through the envy of these embittered charlatans.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming cries of the mob prevailed and Pilate released Barabbas to them. Still, we see that the governor was unwilling to order Jesus' execution. John tells us that Pilate instructed his soldiers to have Jesus

flogged and then brought him out again for one final appearance. He had already been slapped, struck in the face, and spit on by the Jewish guards, but his mistreatment at the hands of the Romans was far worse. Flogging was so severe that it was often fatal in this era. Those who survived the initial beating could eventually die from infection, as the healing process from such a marring would take months and certainly left its victims permanently disfigured. Jesus would have been mutilated by one or two Roman legionnaires who were no doubt experienced in inflicting torturous punishment. With his hands tied to a post above his head, Jesus' back, buttocks, arms, and legs would be left exposed to absorb the many violent blows of the flagrum. Even his chest and genitals would have felt the sting of the leather strips as they wrapped around his body during the beating.

After flogging Jesus, the merciless soldiers took a purple robe (perhaps still Herod's) and dressed him up as the unimpressive king of the Jews. Going to great lengths to entertain their mockery, the soldiers prepared a crown from a thorny plant and beat it into his scalp. Recall that God had first created thorns to infest the ground as a result of sin (**Gen. 3:17-18**). These thorns now gouged into Jesus' head as a reminder of the sin of the world that was being carried by the Son of God. They also struck him on the face. The degree of this beating is alluded to in the prophetic words of **Isaiah 52:14b**, *"his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness"*. Prior to his crucifixion, Jesus' face and body was destroyed to the point that he was virtually unrecognizable to even his closest friends and family.

Bloodied, beaten, and dressed in a royal purple robe, Jesus was led out one last time and he gazed over the crowd of frenzied Jews. Pilate again explained that Jesus had received his full punishment and he intended to release him. At this time, the multitude insisted that he be crucified (**John 19:1-16**). They even disclosed the real reason why they had found Jesus worthy of death by their standards – Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (**John 19:7**). Pilate was taken aback by this revelation and he pulled Jesus aside one last time, perhaps in hopes that Jesus might appeal these charges and post-pone the immediate decision facing the governor.

Surely Jesus recognized the very voice of Satan who had years prior baited him with the words, *"If you are the Son of God..."* (**Luke 4:3, 9**). The Tempter was at it again, using his age-old techniques of putting God to the test. Any assertion of innocence would have empowered Pilate to detain Jesus and conduct a formal investigation and trial. The wave of momentum swelling towards his crucifixion would have been dispersed. Pilate all but begged Jesus to defend himself against these charges (**John 19:10**), while at the same time he reasoned with the Jews as to Jesus' innocence (**John 19:12**). On both fronts, Pilate was fighting a losing battle. On one side, the Jews were determined to bring Jesus down as a blasphemer. On the other side, Jesus had already resolved to drink the cup of suffering that was now placed before him and he remained determined to fulfill the will of God. In truth, Pilate was backed into a corner. That does not mean that Pilate was not guilty of sin, for he had already ordered Jesus to be severely beaten despite his innocence. Yet as Jesus confirmed, it was the Jewish

nation rather than the Romans who would be held responsible for the greater sin, for they were rejecting their Messiah (**John 19:11**).

Pilate moved to his official seat of judgment, a place called Gabbatha or Stone Pavement. The probable location for this formality was an area near Herod's palace, where the governor now resided. Governors were known to have addressed audiences from this raised, outdoor pavement. A less likely location for the "Stone Pavement" is the pavement in the fortress Antonia on the temple mount, seeing as this pavement may date from a later period. From his judge's seat, Pilate remarkably made one last attempt to rationalize with the Jews (**John 19:15**). And at the last minute, Pilate was further shaken by a messenger relaying the disturbing news that his own wife had been tormented in a dream about Jesus and professed him to be a "just" man (**Matt. 27:19** KJV). In fact, the Greek word **dikaïos** used by Pilate's wife can be taken to mean many things, including holy, righteous, and innocent.

dikaïos, *dik'-ah-yos*; from Greek 1349 (dike); *equitable* (in character or act); by implication *innocent, holy* (absolute or relative) :- just, meet, right (-eous).⁴²

Nevertheless, Pilate folded to the will of the crowd and submitted to their incessant cries. Finally, they were granted the death sentence they so coveted. Pilate made it official. He took water and publicly washed his hands before the crowd, clearly maintaining his own objection to their envious intent. It was certainly uncustomary for a Roman governor to assert his own innocence in such a circumstance as this – a routine execution order of a disruptive Jew. It is especially odd considering Pilate's reputation as a "*typical Roman, not of the antique, simple stamp, but of the imperial period, a man not without some remains of the ancient Roman justice in his soul, yet pleasure-loving, imperious, and corrupt. He hated the Jews whom he ruled, and in times of irritation freely shed their blood.*"⁴³ Even this immoral, harsh pagan was disturbed by the wicked spiritual hour that now befell the earth. Darkness reigned. Jesus was to be martyred.



Simon of Cyrene

Luke 23:26

The Synoptic Gospels all mention the selection of Simon of Cyrene, a Jewish pilgrim (or possibly an immigrant if he resided then in Palestine) from North Africa (now Tripoli, the capital of Libya). He was forced into the procession of condemned men to carry the cross for Jesus. John's Gospel credits Jesus with carrying his own cross. We are left to assume then that Jesus made a valiant effort to bear the weight of the wooden crossbeam (weighing perhaps 70-

⁴² Greek 1342; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

⁴³ Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary, portion of "Pilate, Pontius", WORDSearch5 Disc. Library

100 lbs.) as long as possible. John makes sure to acknowledge Jesus on this effort as the other Gospel writers only implied it. Nevertheless, Jesus' strength must have given out prior to the execution site, forcing Jesus to fall either backwards or forwards. A fall forwards would have landed Jesus' face and chest into the path's hard surface with the patibulum pinning his torso to the ground. A backwards fall forces Jesus' torn back against the lumber, causing a whiplash motion in his neck until the back of his head met solid ground. Perhaps a collapse in both directions occurred before the Roman Centurions indiscriminately selected Simon from the crowd to get on with their mission.

What is interesting about this event is that Simon is mentioned by name in the Synoptic Gospels and Mark's account even lists the names of his children, Alexander and Rufus. Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome at the likely dictation of the apostle Peter. In Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he greets a disciple named Rufus and his mother, who held a special place in Paul's heart and ministry (**Romans 16:13**). It is quite possible that this is the same Rufus, the son of Simon the Cyrenian, whose mother would then be Simon's wife.

Simon's mention by name in the Synoptic Gospels and the reference to his sons seems to give proof that he and his wife and eventually his children became disciples of Jesus. Thus, we see quite clearly that God leaves nothing to chance. Even at Jesus' dying hour, God is using the events of this dreadful day to bring about salvation for a family. What seems random to us – the hurried selection of an onlooker to enable the execution procession to continue – was not random at all. Simon was just on his way into the city as the procession was making their way outside the city gates. That is the moment in time when their paths crossed, as orchestrated by the author of salvation himself. And because of this encounter with a dying savior, Simon's life would never be the same.



Weep for Yourselves

Luke 23:27-31

Now unbound from the heavy wooden patibulum, Jesus was finally able to discern the wailing of several women who were following the procession. He was being escorted out of the city that rejected both the Son of God and the prophets, yet he was still moved by the dreadful fate that would soon come upon it. Surprisingly, he was able to look beyond his own physical pain to feel pity for the women and children who would be caught up in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (66-70 AD). Jesus revealed to these mourners the depths of anguish they would face at this time, causing them to cry out "*to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'*" This was first uttered by the Israelites facing destruction at the hand of the Assyrians as prophesied by Hosea (**Hosea 10:8**). It will also be on the lips of those facing the full measure of the wrath of the Lamb of God (**Rev. 6:15-17**).

So was the destruction of Jerusalem a sure sign of God's judgment against the Jews for the crucifixion of Christ? Was God avenging the death of his son as he watched the city burn some forty years later? Based on Jesus' words to

these women, it's hard to give a resounding "yes". For in the midst of his passion and suffering, Jesus displayed no sense of spite, no desire for revenge, no anger or hate for those responsible for his rejection and his death. Before ever coming to earth, God in Christ fully recognized that mankind's ability to perform evil was unlimited. So instead, he offered only sorrow for those who would likewise suffer. This level of selflessness is almost absurd, and it is certainly an indication of the unfathomable love that God has for his people.

Jesus posed a rhetorical question to these women that represents several possible meanings: "*For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*" Again, Jesus was not surprised by this exhibition of wickedness, only grieved. For if the messiah, who had come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, received in his flesh to the full extent of men's sin and hatred of God, what would happen when the time of the Lord's favor had passed? If God in the flesh – full of grace and truth, perfect in word and deed – was despised so intensely, what would become of those who came after him and took up his cross? And if such evil exists when God's grace covers over the earth, what will happen when the storehouses of his wrath are released?



This is Jesus

Luke 23:32-38

Jesus and the two criminals were taken outside the city walls and led to the place of the Skull (in Latin: Calvaria or Calvary), also called Golgotha. Without delay, the three men were systematically stripped of their clothes and then crucified. They would be placed on their backs and nailed to the patibulum just below base of the hand, at the first depression of the wrist. The wooden crossbeam was then lifted and set in place, fastened to the upright portion of the cross, which was already affixed at the site. Their feet were then nailed to the vertical post allowing the victim limited mobility, just enough to pull himself upward, enabling diaphragm movement and inhalation. Each short breath would serve only to cheat death for another minute.

The scene now staring Jesus in the face was quite ugly – the epitome of all that is evil in the world. Before him stood his accusers more or less basking in the startling success of their campaign to eliminate him. The Jews and their rulers began to mock and fire insults at him, precisely spoken as prophesied in **Psalm 22:7-8**. They mocked him for claiming to be the Son of God and they sarcastically pondered as to why God was now unwilling to rescue him. "He saved others", they scoffed, for they had been appalled as Jesus unabashedly granted the forgiveness of sins to many and claimed to have the God-given authority to do so. They wondered why that authority to save could not be used to save himself. On and on they ridiculed, once more bringing up his supposed power to rebuild the Temple in a matter of three days. To these scoffers this seemed an outlandish claim indeed. Could not a man who wields such power free himself from the nails that now fastened him to the cross? Even the Roman

soldiers threw in their best jabs, still relishing the irony of this self-proclaimed king of the Jews being hated so deeply by his own people.

Not since the early days of fasting in the wilderness had Jesus faced such an overwhelming temptation to verify his divinity. **Proverbs 27:3** states, “*Stone is heavy and sand a burden, but provocation by a fool is heavier than both.*” Satan had found his opportune time and he zealously provoked Jesus through the cruel mouths of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. “Prove yourself, if you are indeed the Christ, the Son of God, the Chosen One!” Satan failed in the wilderness to lure Jesus into a compromise, and he was unsuccessful again at Calvary. As Jesus remained affixed to the cross, Satan’s defeat became all the more certain. The eyes of the mockers would not see the proof they now defiantly beckoned; that would be reserved for the chosen ones. The Christ would not prove his immortality by discharging the nails in his wrists and feet and descending off the cross in a spectacle of power for all to see. Instead, he would commit himself to God and descend into the realms of death so that immortality could be offered to the remnant of believers. Only in his death would mankind be offered true life.

At Jesus’ feet the Roman legionnaires divided their outfits among them and cast lots for the odd numbered undergarment (**John 19:23-24**). Both of these actions were prophesied in **Psalm 22:18**, “*They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*” The mention of Jesus’ undergarment in John gives us rather conclusive proof that Jesus was stripped completely naked and crucified with his entire body exposed before his tormentors, his mother, his disciples, and his women followers. Crucifixion was not simply a painful way to die, it was excessively humiliating.

Despite all this, the first words uttered from Jesus’ mouth as the hideous passion story played out before him were these: “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*” Were these words directed at the Romans who acted in virtual ignorance as they disposed of another Jewish radical? Or was this supplication unthinkably offered on behalf of the prominent Jews who leveled the death sentence against him and spurred on his execution when Pilate stalled? The scriptures are not clear, and in fact some early manuscripts of Luke do not contain this quote. And perhaps we are not meant to know for sure, for who is not in need of forgiveness from on high? Who does not require the intercession of Christ on their behalf?

Recall that Jesus was the Son of Man appearing in flesh and had the authority on earth to totally forgive sins (**Luke 5:24**). Was this request of the Father just such a granting? Note that Jesus did not say, “Your sins are forgiven”, as he had said to those who received complete atonement (**Luke 5:20, 7:48**). Instead, Jesus called on the Father to forgive them for their present ignorance. It is possible that Jesus was in effect absolving both the Jews and the Romans solely for their participation in the crucifixion. In other words, this may not have been sweeping pardon of all sin, but a recognition that God’s foreknowledge and will had allowed this present course of events to occur (**Acts 2:23**).

Jesus was offered a wine-vinegar mixture to scarcely dull the pain. Even this slight bid of comfort he refused. Jesus would have already been suffering

extreme mental and physical trauma, yet it appears that he still wished to remain as coherent as possible. Because of his dehydration, his body would have absorbed the liquid rapidly, including the alcohol present in this fermented drink. Jesus was not about to relieve his pain at the cost of his mind being dulled. This was the most critical spiritual hour the world would ever face. Although Jesus' body was weak and powerless to ward off the shock, his spirit remained willing to complete the very mission for which he was born into the world.

To annoy the Jewish rulers one last time, Pilate prepared a sign and had it affixed to the cross above Jesus' head. The four Gospels are in general agreement as to the charge leveled against him, "THE KING OF THE JEWS". The writers have some trivial differences as to exact words that came prior to this charge. The scriptures read as follows:

THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. [Matthew 27:37](#)

THE KING OF THE JEWS. [Mark 15:26](#)

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. [Luke 23:38](#)

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. [John 19:19](#)

Why the apparent differences? John gives us the most detailed account of the sign's origin, telling us that Pilate had the charge transcribed in three languages: Greek, Latin, and Aramaic. Certainly this fact alone could account for the three linguistic dissimilarities (Luke and Mark are essentially identical, only including the charge against him). Perhaps the Aramaic listed Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, the Greek included his name with the charge, and the Latin was solely the indictment – or some other arrangement using this line of reasoning. Whatever the case may be, the overwhelming similarities that exist in the crucifixion accounts validate its historical certainty and substantiate the existence of the many eyewitnesses that provided testimony to its occurrence. The alleged differences – such as this one with the sign – can easily be attributed to differences in the author's perspective. In some cases, a more logical explanation may exist outside the realms of our knowledge that would harmonize the accounts with airtight reckoning.



The Thief on the Cross

[Luke 23:39-43](#)

Unique to the Gospel of Luke is the story of the penitent thief on the cross. It is one of the most widely known and retold stories within Christendom. The depths of God's mercy, patience, and love are seen as Jesus extends his saving grace to a most unworthy subject. It is interesting to see the apparent contrast between Matthew and Mark's Gospels, as they clearly depict both of the criminals hurling insults at Jesus. At least two explanations for the dissimilarity in the accounts exist. It is possible that the two condemned men crucified to the right and left of Jesus each had a small number of friends and/or family members present at the time of their deaths. Perhaps this motley crew and at least one of

the robbers were joining in on the verbal assault against Jesus, making it seem as if they and the convicted criminals themselves were hurling insults at him. A more likely scenario would be taking both accounts (Matthew/Mark and Luke) at face value, insisting both to be true. This idea places the condemned criminals hurling insults at Jesus, perhaps during the first hour of their affixation to their respective crosses. It then allows for one of the criminals to make a somewhat rapid transformation as he witnessed the events of Jesus' suffering and drew nearer to his own imminent death. This second theory seems to fit best with the concept of scriptural inerrancy.

We are shown in the Gospels ample reasons as to what could have changed this man's heart in mere moments. Perhaps he overheard Jesus forgiving the men who nailed his hands and feet and overlooking those who mocked him with hateful derision. Maybe his heart began to melt as he witnessed the immeasurable grief in the soul of Jesus' mother and he was moved as Jesus called his friend John to take this woman in as his own family. The crowd of Jesus' disciples and loyal women followers could have also humbled him. Perhaps this small group made an impression upon him as to the profound impact that this teacher from Nazareth had made in the world. It would have been obvious just by seeing Jesus' friends and family – who they were, their behavior, their disposition, and their meekness – that this Jesus was no rebel; he was not a threat to Rome or a deceiver of men. Perhaps this recognition served also to highlight the criminal's own fruitless existence, as regret runs high when people face death and reflect on the contribution they made during their lifetime.

Whatever the precise reason, the convicted man began to realize that this Jesus was not merely a controversial teacher, he was an innocent man dying unjustly. He recognized that while he died a delinquent's death, the one who hung next to him was receiving a martyr's death. And though both men piled on during the initial onslaught of mockery, this realization and perhaps the shame of his own hasty ridicule broke him. He then rebuked the other criminal for his obstinacy and in doing so became the third person in this passion story to assert Jesus' innocence (the first being Pilate and the second, Pilate's wife).

It was this simple recognition of Christ's purity and his astonishing change of heart that led him to utter a most unreasonable request. He asked simply to be remembered as Jesus received his due authority when he established his kingdom. It is not clear how this man knew of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom. Perhaps he was either as a first-hand witness of Christ's ministry or heard from others about Jesus while he himself sat in Roman captivity. Or perhaps he simply overheard the sarcastic shouts of his adversaries as they heralded Jesus, the king of the Jews, and asked him to prove his authority by coming down from the cross. We are not told whether he was crucified in such a way that the other criminals could read the sign placed above Jesus' head, charging Jesus to be the king of the Jews. Either way, God opened the heart and mind of the dispirited criminal so he could recognize that these allegations against Jesus were true. Jesus was a king, and he needed no further proof of that fact. He now believed and understood that Jesus would someday receive a crown of glory far removed from their present torture. He knew that this was not the end, neither for Jesus nor him. He believed in the

resurrection. And God had undeservedly extended his mercy upon him at his dying hours. Simply miraculous.

Unfortunately, this moving story has been somewhat polluted by many within conventional Christianity. They use this passage of scripture correctly to emphasize God's immeasurable patience, mercy, and love to those whose hearts are broken and call out to him. However, they dangerously misuse these same verses to explain the plan of salvation under the new covenant and they promote the widespread notion that today's believers receive forgiveness of sins in much the same way as this penitent thief. A lack of understanding of the scriptures and the significance of the Messianic period is to blame.

While on earth, Jesus had the authority to forgive sins. He demonstrated this (as mentioned in the previous segment of this commentary) to a paralytic in [Luke 5:20](#) and to a sinful woman in [Luke 7:48](#). And finally, he confirmed his ability to grant salvation to the thief on the cross. All of these occurred while God walked on earth in the appearance of a man in Jesus.

What many within modern Christianity overlook is that salvation under the new covenant was yet to be offered, for the new covenant had not been put into effect! [Hebrews 9:16-28](#) describes the means necessary for the old covenant to expire and the new covenant in Christ to commence. The shedding of Jesus' blood was the pivotal requirement in terms of the forgiveness of sins. But the Hebrew writer also reveals that death was also necessary for the will of God to be enforced. We are also shown that the new covenant would find Jesus entering into heaven to intercede for us before God, corresponding the same way the priests did under the old covenant. Upon Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven, the faithful remnant of disciples were told to wait in the city of Jerusalem as the promises of God were about to be fulfilled. On the day of Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was given the apostles so that they might usher in this new covenant to God's people. The second chapter of Acts clearly lays out the notion that God's previous covenant with Israel given through Moses was seeing its last days. Peter and the others preached a new covenant by the authority given them by Christ.

The plan of salvation under this new covenant could not have been proclaimed more clearly and simply than it was on a day where more than 3,000 souls were added to the number of redeemed disciples. Peter ordered every believer to repent of his or her sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ([Acts 2:38-41](#)). The twofold promise of God to those who obeyed this very simple requirement was exceptional. Forgiveness of sins was given to all who accepted the message and were baptized – an offer just as gracious and undeserved as the pardon given to the thief on the cross. Secondly, the baptized believers were given the gift of the Holy Spirit, a seal of the new covenant ([Eph. 1:13](#)) and an eternal bond guaranteeing our inheritance in the divine realms ([1 Cor. 1:22](#)).

To those of us living under the new covenant in Christ, we must look at the story of the thief on the cross in its proper context. It shall always serve as a reminder of God's unlimited mercy on even the worst of sinners. But our passage into this covenant of mercy lies elsewhere in scripture, so be warned and be wise.

2 Tim. 3:14-15

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Why do the other three Gospels not include this most significant event in their account of Jesus' passion? Matthew, John, and Mark (likely Peter's account) were all written from first-hand eyewitness testimony. In spite of that, Luke is the only one to record this miraculous conversion. We can be almost sure that Luke gathered some of the details of Jesus' crucifixion (including the thief on the cross account) from someone other than the apostles. Perhaps the apostles did not even hear these words, for each seems to have been within earshot of Jesus at various times hearing different portions of the seven short sentences uttered by Jesus prior to his final breath. Let us remember that Jesus and the two criminals survived for more than three hours on their crosses. We know that at one point during this duration, the women who followed Jesus along with one if not more of the apostles stood near to the cross (**John 19:25**). We see also that at some point, they stood at a distance (**Mark 15:40, Luke 23:49**). It is reasonable to assume that the apostles periodically left their close proximity to the cross to the console these women mourners.

Could Luke's source then have been the centurion who stood guard before Jesus throughout the whole ordeal? He certainly had the privilege of hearing all the words spoken by the Lord as recorded in each of the four Gospels. The Synoptic Gospels all mention the centurion's response to the death of Christ, that he proclaimed Jesus to be both a righteous man and a son of God (**Matt. 27:54, Mark 15:39, Luke 23:47**). Again, his mention by these Gospel writers – like the mention of Simon of Cyrene and his sons by name – gives rise to the notion that this centurion became a disciple of Jesus. A conversion such as this would have been widely known among the believers and its appearance in the Gospels would be quickly recognized and celebrated. It is possible that some years later, Luke's travels would have put him in contact with this centurion and his testimony recorded in his account.

This is not the only possibility as to Luke's source. Perhaps the story of the thief on the cross and Jesus' remarkable appeal for the forgiveness of his adversaries were overheard by Mary the mother of Jesus and stored away in her heart. We are quite sure that Luke spent considerable time with Mary when compiling his research. We might just as well assume that she was the one who remembered and passed down the three precious sentences spoken by Christ and recorded only in Luke's account. As was just said, she was allowed to go near the cross as her son writhed in agony before her. It was here at the cross that the mysterious prophesy spoken by Simeon more than thirty years prior reached its fullness (**Luke 2:35**) – for a sword now penetrated her very soul to the core.

Whatever the source, Luke was able to present us with three unique expressions of Christ during the most crucial hours of his life on earth. The first two represent the boundless mercy and patience of God as displayed in Jesus the Son. During his dying hours, Jesus still reserved in his heart a depth of love and hope for mankind that was completely unmerited. The last expression signified Jesus' complete trust and faith in God the Father, who purposely and with all foreknowledge sanctioned the death of his one and only Son. Jesus had embraced his calling and fulfilled his destiny. Now he submitted himself to him who judges justly, for the will of God had prevailed in his life. Placing his hope in the resurrection, he forfeited the gift of life.

Luke 23:34a

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Luke 23:43

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Luke 23:46a

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."



The Sun Darkened and the Curtain Torn

Luke 23:44-45

In but two short verses, Luke records two spectacular phenomenon rich with spiritual importance. We shall mention them and sum up their significance, though books could be written about the timeless consequence of these themes in and of themselves. During Jesus' final dying moments on earth, the Synoptic Gospels all record a period of three hours where darkness came over the land. *"The sun stopped shining"*, explained Luke regarding this darkness. Apparently this was not just an overcast day due to a collection of cumulous storm clouds. This was a darkening of the sun itself, much like a solar eclipse. Secondly, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. We are not told who spread the report about this peculiar occurrence, but it obviously became widespread knowledge among the Jews and even the disciples of Jesus. Let us look into these two incidents.

Surely the significance of the earth's darkness is obvious and intended to be recognized. In Gethsemane Jesus declared, *"But this is your hour -- when darkness reigns."* As Jesus' body began to absorb the sum of all the sin of the world, God's creation responded with utter disgust and the earth grew dark. In the history of mankind there shall exist no other moment that more accurately portrays the evil within man's fallen condition. **2 Cor. 5:21** affirms that this blameless Son of God had now become a sin offering for us; he became the embodiment of our sin. And this passage and the events that transpired under this canopy of blackness correspond to the fulfillment of **Isaiah 53:5-6** in every detail.

Our transgressions drove the nails through his hands and feet. Our iniquities caused his heart to be crushed within his chest, compounded by the utter grief and more literally compressed by a build up of pus and fluid in his pericardium. Though healing and peace would be given to us, punishment and wounds were dished out upon him. Because all men would be led astray, Jehovah God would bear in his flesh the marks of our wickedness. As stated previously, the hour of wickedness had come. Darkness reigned.

Let us recall the prophecy given us in **Joel 2:31**, “*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.*” Was this a prophesy about the cross? We know that the sun refused to shine during these three hours of Jesus’ suffering, but what about the moon turning to blood? Read the following passage in the Psalms regarding God’s promise to David:

Psalm 89:35-37

*“Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness--
and I will not lie to David--*

*³⁶that his line will continue forever
and his throne endure before me like the sun;*

*³⁷it will be established forever like the moon,
the faithful witness in the sky.”*

Selah

We see that the moon itself it a reminder, a faithful witness of God’s promise to forever establish the royal lineage David. Jesus, a descendant of David, was the fulfillment of this promise. God determined that his followers would be able to look into the night sky and see the moon and be reminded of our eternal king, Jesus Christ. And on this dreadful day during a three-hour period of darkness, people looked up to see this faithful witness now beaten, pierced, and covered with blood from head to toe. Perhaps that is what we are meant to realize when we observe the beaten body of Jesus as it relates to the fulfillment of **Joel 2:31**.

In the scriptures, the Day of the Lord referred either to God’s deliverance of his people or his wrath upon the wicked. Taking this Day to be an outpouring of God’s wrath, it is often assumed that the Day of the Lord spoken about by Joel refers to the final judgment day. A more likely location of this day exists if we assume the prophecies were referring to Israel’s deliverance, as **Joel 2:32** seems to point. Surely Christ’s suffering would enable God to reveal his salvation to Israel through faith in his blood (**Romans 3:25**). We might recognize the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy to be referring either to Jesus’ death on the cross and perhaps his resurrection on the third day. Because of his resurrection, he would forever hold the keys to death (**Rev. 1:18**) and be able to usher in a new covenant of salvation to Israel and to all who shall call on the name of the Lord. Surely, the Day of the Lord was upon the earth or was rapidly approaching.

Assuming the Passover was being prepared even as our Lord hung on the cross, we are reminded of Israel’s deliverance from their bondage and God’s

judgment upon the Egyptians. After sending many plagues – including darkness – the Israelites living in Goshen were given specific instructions as to the slaughter and preparation of their Passover lamb. They were to mark the sides and tops of their doorposts with the blood of the lamb. When God sent the angel of death throughout the country to bring judgment on all the families in Egypt, those houses covered with the blood of the lamb were passed over. Certainly we are to recall this most significant and memorable deliverance of God’s people as we recognize the Lamb of God fulfilling his mission to take away the sins of the world (**John 1:29**). The blood of Christ, our Passover lamb (**1 Cor. 5:7**), now and forever offers deliverance for God’s people by washing away their sins.

Read Matthew 26:28
Romans 3:25
Ephes. 1:7
Rev. 1:5b

Luke mentions another highly significant event as Jesus approached his final breath. The curtain of the temple was completely torn in two. We must recognize the importance of the curtain to understand this crucial aspect of the Messiah’s death on the cross. After God described to Moses the intricate design of this blue, purple, and scarlet curtain, he explained its function in **Exodus 26:33**; “*Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.*” As the tabernacle was constructed and erected, God commanded Moses to warn Aaron and those who served as high priests as to the gravity of approaching what rested behind the curtain – the Most Holy Place. The high priest was instructed to enter the Most Holy Place but once a year; the rest of the year the curtain served as a necessary separation.

The entire 16th chapter of Leviticus details the priest’s annual visit to this Most Holy Place, the place where God appeared above the atonement cover that protected the Ark of the Testimony. A single inappropriate advance would render a most severe outcome, as cautioned in **Leviticus 16:2**, “*The LORD said to Moses: “Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.”*”

The spiritual significance of the tearing of the curtain is clear, for the physical happenings of the Old Testament were simply a foreshadowing of the spiritual reality that is Christ and his church. The Hebrew writer expounds on this topic in brilliant detail in the 10th chapter, and concludes his line of reasoning as follows:

Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full

assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Because of Christ's sacrifice, there shall no longer exist a separation between God and man. At one time, sin separated fallen man from our Holy God, much like the curtain of the temple. However, as Jesus took our sin in his body, he literally became the curtain in this spiritual scenario. During the high priest's annual approach behind the curtain, he would first bathe in water and clothe himself with the sacred linen tunic as prescribed by God. In the same way, we are called to have faith in the cleansing blood of Jesus and be baptized; as a result, our sins are washed away and we are clothed with Christ (**Acts 22:16, Galatians 3:26-27**). We can then enter into a relationship with God, for Jesus now stands in our defense and lives to intercede for mankind (**Hebrews 7:25**). Unblemished and free from a guilty conscience, we can approach the Most Holy Place with confidence.

Entering into the Most Holy Place with confidence? This statement must have baffled the Jews to whom the book of Hebrews was written. The high priest entered only once a year and had to present sacrifices of blood to atone for his and his people's sins. This yearly presentation would have been quite fearful and intimidating. Never would the high priest enter the Most Holy place boldly. Instead, he would surely be filled with intense apprehension. One wrong move might arouse God's anger and render the same sentence as the one carried out on Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu (**Leviticus 10:1-3**). But thanks to the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to enter into a relationship with God through faith and with full assurance by a new and living way!

Another point of significance in terms of Christ's death on the cross and his body being a representation of the curtain is found in **Leviticus 16**. During his annual visit to the Most Holy Place, the priest was to take two goats before Jehovah and cast lots to see which was to be slaughtered for a sin offering and which was to be let go alive into the desert as a scapegoat. The scriptures read as follows:

Leviticus 16:7-10

Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸He is to cast lots for the two goats--one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

When the lot was cast, one goat would be sacrificed as a sin offering for the Israelites. The goat's blood would be taken behind the curtain and sprinkled on the atonement cover and in front of the ark to atone for the rebelliousness and uncleanness of God's people. Regarding the scapegoat, the scriptures read:

Leviticus 16:20-22

"When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites--all their sins-- and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²²The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

Again, the foreshadowing of Jesus' death on a cross and the purpose for which he gave himself up is evident. The scapegoat bore the sins of Israel on its head and yet was allowed to live, while the other goat was put to death. In the same way, we who are guilty of sin are allowed to live because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Under the old covenant, sin could not be taken away nor could those who worshipped God be made perfect (**Hebrews 10:4**). Thus, the lot fell on Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to appear before the altar and offer his own body as a sacrifice of atonement. In doing so, he enabled us – those who are loaded down with sin and defilement – to be set free, to be cleansed, to be made perfect, to escape death, and to live forever with him.

Read Hebrews 10:1-10
1 John 3:5.

We would not expect Luke to go into detail about such matters, for a Gentile would have trouble understanding the spiritual correlation of Christ's death and the directives given the priests concerning worship at the temple. Nevertheless, Paul would warn the Gentiles not to become arrogant regarding their invitation to God's salvation (**Romans 11:17-21**). Because they were not rooted in scripture and had not been familiar with God's special relationship with Israel, they might fail to appreciate the necessary sacrifice of atonement that was given them in Christ. As today's disciples, let us strive to understand the many profound implications of Jesus' death, so that we may never be found ungrateful for the wonderful act of grace and love that was poured out for us.



The Death of Christ
Luke 23:46-49

We can assume that Jesus' initial period of suffering on the cross transpired during the light of day. Early on, we witnessed the onslaught of mockery from the various passers-by – including the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law. At some point Jesus instructed the apostle John to care for his heartbroken mother, and his mother to behold her new son (**John 19:25-27**). But

now we are approaching the third hour since darkness covered the land, which must have left the many onlookers to this execution baffled and afraid. We do not hear the proud mocking of the Jewish leaders as was offered during his initial period of suffering; nor do we hear the proud taunting of the Romans.

The chill of death now crept into the mind and body of Jesus. The Son of God was now receiving the curse of God, as described in **Deut. 21:22-23a**; “*If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse.*” This realization was perhaps the motivation behind Jesus’ loud cry, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” or, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Some mistook this supplication as a cry to “Elias”, or Elijah. Instead, Jesus the Son of God was offering an expression resembling his humanity and his willingness to forsake his own just divinity. In truth, it was not the Father who had forsaken the Son, but Jesus himself who willingly and momentarily abandoned his equality with God to endure such a heinous death (**Phil. 2:5-8**). As he bore the emotional, spiritual, and physical pain of man’s sin, Jesus, who is the fullness of the Godhead, was overheard communicating from the depths of his emotions with the God the Father, from whom this curse was intentionally given.

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

Upon receiving a sponge soaked in wine vinegar, Jesus uttered the words “*It is finished*”, recorded only in **John 19:30**. The actual Greek word for this expression is **tetelestai**, coming from the root verb **teleo**. The Greek definition is as follows:

teleo, tel-eh'-o; from Greek 5056 (telos); to *end*, i.e. *complete, execute, conclude, discharge* (a debt) :- accomplish, make an end, expire, fill up, finish, go over, pay, perform.⁴⁴

This phrase is rich with meaning and might just as well be taken to read, “*It is accomplished*”. Jesus never wavered from his purpose to save souls, to train his followers, and to set for us an example that we should strive to imitate. He never compromised with sin though he battled through a wealth of temptations. He had now reached the completion of the crucial assignment for which he set out more than three years prior. From the time of his forty days of fasting at the onset of his ministry, Jesus had been preparing his mind and body for these agonizing hours on the cross. Even so, he fought through distress (**Luke 12:50**) and overwhelming sorrow (**Matthew 26:38**) before taking aim at the baptism of suffering that now engulfed him.

⁴⁴ Greek 5055; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Although it was necessary for Jesus to bear the curse of sin for the atonement of mankind, it was not an easy mission to complete. He thus cried out one last time in a loud voice, “*Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit*”. According to the scriptures, Jesus appears to have died in a “lost” state. Because he died willingly under a curse from God, it makes sense that he would have somehow been separated from God at the time of his death. It is for this reason that we might expect Jesus’ spirit to descend into Hades following his last breath (see notes on [Luke 12:49-53](#)). And perhaps it is this was the motivation behind Jesus’ final cry, committing his Spirit unto God.

Again, the mystery of the Trinity is revealed. We witnessed the Most High God, the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God unveiled to man at Jesus’ conception some thirty-three years prior. We beheld it once again at Jesus’ baptism – the voice of God overheard boasting about his Son while the Spirit descended on him in the form of a dove. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, the fullness of God was evident. And now at his dying breath, Jesus the Son commits his Spirit into the hands of God the Father. What occurred during the time Jesus’ body lay dead is not entirely clear. However, as Jesus willingly surrendered his body unto death, we see him fully trusting that the union of the Godhead would be revealed in all its fullness at the resurrection. There we shall find God the Father exerting his strength via the Spirit who once again breathed life back into Jesus the slain Son.

The magnitude of Jesus’ death literally rippled throughout Jerusalem. Along with a cover of darkness, the earth now began to shake, splitting rocks and breaking open the tombs of those long dead. Perhaps it was this violent earthquake that caused the curtain of the temple to tear in two from top to bottom, a likely failure from shear forces if the curtain was sufficiently fastened at the sides. If so, it was nonetheless God who controlled the entire event, using his sovereignty over the destructive forces of nature to accomplish his purposes.

The earthquake only increased the terror of those in attendance at Golgotha. Some began to beat their breasts, an act found scriptures accompanying great distress and mourning. In fear, many of these onlookers fled the scene and they most likely returned within Jerusalem’s city walls. Jesus’ friends and followers remained, though they stood at a distance. They surely heard his final words committing his spirit unto God, and then watched in utter anguish as his head and shoulders slowly slumped forward. In disbelief, they huddled together and mourned the death of their beloved teacher and leader. Certainly to them Jesus was a martyr. He had done no violence, nor was any deceit found in his mouth. Yet his revolutionary message and his vast display of miraculous power had roused the jealousy of the Jewish elite from the office of high priest on down through the ranks. But now this radical prophet had been silenced. This light that had come into the world had been snuffed out.

The Synoptic Gospels all mention the centurion’s reaction to the whole series of events at the time of Jesus’ death. He was probably unfamiliar with Jesus’ true importance as Israel’s long awaited Messiah, but he was still able to recognize that this dead man was of God ([Matthew 27:54](#)). He was overtaken with terror and anxiety, and these sensations were not just the result of the

darkness and the earthquake that overtook the land. He and the other guards become aware that they had taken part in the execution of an innocent and righteous man. Just a few hours earlier they cared very little about his innocence or guilt; they simply carried out their duties with systematic precision. This was to be a routine execution of another Jewish insurrectionist; they were just following orders. In fact, the Roman Empire was shaped and secured with heavy-handedness and public displays of dominance. These same men had egged on those who mocked Jesus, for humiliation was an integral part of capital punishment. They themselves joined in, dressing Christ in purple and bowing before him with unreserved contempt. And now they stood there horrified, appalled by their own contribution to this tragedy.

Luke mentions another peculiar reaction from the centurion. This Roman soldier apparently lifted his voice to God in praise despite his fear. There are more than a dozen Greek words that are generically translated as “praise” in English versions of the New Testament. The word used here in Luke is as follows:

doxazo, *dox-ad'-zo*; from Greek 1391 (doxa); to *render* (or *esteem*) *glorious* (in a wide application) :- (make) glorify (-ious), full of (have) glory, honour, magnify.⁴⁵

Understanding this form of praise gives us a better picture of what took place at the foot of the cross. The entire execution detail of soldiers and guards recognized Jesus’ innocence. But this realization seems to have struck a deeper chord in the soul the centurion. He was willing to audibly state before them all that Jesus was an upright man and even a son of God. Having overheard Jesus forgive his adversaries a couple hours earlier and having witnessed the pardon extended to the man crucified next to him, the centurion must have concluded that whoever this god was, he was exceedingly merciful. Being unfamiliar with Jehovah God, the centurion simply gave glory and esteem to Jesus’ superior. This adoration was witnessed and perhaps was so remarkable that it was widely reported and passed on to our author, Luke.



Removal and Burial

Luke 23:50-56

We may be quite sure that Joseph of Arimathea witnessed Jesus’ final cry and surrender to death, for he brought this testimony to Pilate (**Mark 15:44**). Joseph is described by Luke as a “*good and upright man*”, and this becomes obvious as we witness his desire to give Jesus a proper burial. Though Christ died a shameful, criminal’s death, Joseph wanted to make sure that Jesus’ body was not discarded in a similar manner. So while some disciples remained at Golgotha

⁴⁵ Greek 1392; Strong’s Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

and mourned, Joseph ventured back into the city and without delay went to Pilate's quarters.

At some point in time, Nicodemus the Pharisee joined Joseph of Arimathea ([John 19:39](#)). The two men actually shared similar beliefs and circumstances. Their hearts had been stirred as each man watched and listened to the radical teacher from Galilee. Yet both were forced to admire him from the sidelines, for one was a prominent member of the highest Jewish court and the other a part of arguably the most powerful Jewish faction in Israel. Both of these groups had deemed Jesus a false prophet at best, and at worst a man who wielded the very power of Beelzebub. Thus, the two men kept a low profile, fearful of the consequences of speaking up in support of Jesus. They may have divulged their common viewpoints to one another prior to this fateful day, but that is difficult to confirm. In any event, God had united these two men and they were determined to carry out an honorable burial for the teacher they had secretly acclaimed.

As he walked through the streets of Jerusalem en route to Pilate's quarters, Joseph had to summon his courage ([Mark 15:43](#)). The petition now resting on his heart would be a decisive admission of his esteem for Jesus. Though he feared the Jews, he overcame his apprehension and risked his good standing with them in order to carry out what God had put on his conscience. Joseph was able to gain audience with Pilate and informed him of Jesus' death. Some have suggested that the two had a relationship prior to this day's events, possibly because Joseph was a wealthy man. We know that neither man consented with the Jews' plot, and perhaps Joseph initiated some mutual acknowledgment of that fact earlier that morning as Pilate attempted to reason with Jesus' envy-filled adversaries.

Crucifixion was actually intended to be a slow and torturous death for its victims. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, the Jews had asked for the bodies to be removed from their crosses ([John 19:31](#)). It was the day of Preparation and the Sabbath would begin in a couple hours. (As I have argued, the Jews were preparing their Passover meals and getting ready to spend the next two days observing the Sabbath regulations). This request to speed up the execution required the application of crucifracture, an appalling practice of breaking the legs of the crucified victim ensuring a more abrupt death by suffocation. The hearts of the Jewish leaders were hardened indeed, as their request to amplify Jesus' suffering in this manner was utterly merciless.

Pilate had only moments earlier complied with the Jewish leaders' final request when Joseph arrived. He was surprised to hear of Jesus' untimely death. To make doubly sure, Pilate summoned the centurion in charge of the execution. One wonders whether Joseph and Pilate engaged in a discussion of the day's events at this point, as it could have been a half hour or so before the centurion returned to verify Jesus' death. Having observed Pilate's attempts to release Jesus earlier that day, perhaps Joseph now revealed his similar disdain for the council's actions. It seems obvious that Joseph needed to gain with Pilate's trust, demonstrating that he would act responsibly in regards to this controversial teacher's burial. Perhaps a brief discourse to this end occurred during these minutes.

Soon, the centurion returned and reported to his governor. What Joseph had most likely not seen but now heard from the centurion is the means by which Jesus' death had been confirmed. After the order was given, the soldiers broke the legs of the thieves to Jesus' left and right, causing their lives to end in excruciating trauma. Standing before Jesus' lifeless body, one of the Roman soldiers drove a lance through Jesus' ribcage and into his heart, producing an outpouring of blood and watery serum (**John 19:34**). This act fulfilled **Zechariah 12:10**, which states, "*They will look on me, the one they have pierced.*" Because the use of crucifraction was avoided, the prophecies that indicated that not a single bone would be broken were likewise fulfilled. See **Exodus 12:46**, **Numbers 9:12**, and **Psalm 34:20**.

Nevertheless, Jesus was confirmed as dead. He had been placed in Roman custody from the moment Pilate ordered him to stand before Herod and placed a detail of his own soldiers around him. Pilate now surrendered custody of Jesus' body to Joseph of Arimathea, apparently concluding what we already know about the man – that he was just and reliable.

As Joseph and Nicodemus made their way back to Golgotha, they obtained the necessary items to carry out a hasty but traditional Jewish burial of Jesus of Nazareth. Because it was the day of Preparation and the Sabbath had not yet begun, it would be easy to find a bustling marketplace throughout Jerusalem's narrow streets as the people – both retailers and consumers – made ready for a holiday eve and a day of rest. Joseph purchased a clean linen cloth to encase the body. The word used in the Synoptic Gospels for this singular piece of cloth is as follows:

sin-don, *sin-done'*; of uncertain (perhaps foreign) origin; *byssos*, i.e. bleached *linen* (the cloth or a garment of it) :- (fine) linen (cloth).⁴⁶

John is the only Gospel writer to use a plural form of a word describing a different type of linen, suggesting that more than one type of cloth was used. The Greek word used in **John 19:40** is as follows:

othonion, *oth-on'-ee-on*; neuter of a presumed derivative of Greek 3607 (*othone*); a linen *bandage* :- linen clothes.⁴⁷

The NIV renders "*strips of linen*" for this expression while the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible render the word "*linen clothes*". We would expect that several pieces of linen would be used in keeping with the Jewish burial customs. At the scene of the empty tomb, John's Gospel mentions a smaller cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head during his burial (**John 20:7**). In addition to this piece, we see another reference to the other linen cloths that surrounded Jesus' body. It would appear that the singular piece of bleached linen purchased by Joseph would serve as the outer cloth that would cover Jesus' body. In addition to this piece, he carried (or obtained) smaller

⁴⁶ Greek 4616; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

⁴⁷ Greek 3608; Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

pieces of cloth that would be used to wrap Jesus' body. The intention of these smaller pieces of linen was to absorb the blood and serum that covered the corpse. The strips of linen would be immersed in the embalming mixture, perfuming the dead body. Once Jesus' body was prepared and finally laid in the large piece of clean linen, the horrible trauma witnessed by many on this day would be for the most part concealed.

A sizeable mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing around a hundred litras (approximately 75 pounds), was supplied by Nicodemus. Myrrh is an aromatic resin included in the formula of the holy anointing oil and known for its aromatic properties. The aloes referenced here are most likely the gum extracted from pounding the Aloewood, a rare plant grown in China or India and brought to Palestine by merchants. Even the Egyptians used this fragrant oil during their highly perfected embalming practices. The mixture furnished by Nicodemus was certainly blended specifically for the purposes of embalming and perfuming a dead body for burial. We see that Nicodemus like Joseph of Arimathea was a rather wealthy Jew. Although Jesus publicly announced how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, these two men would overcome the odds and use their wealth to glorify God's servant in his death. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled as Jesus, who died naked and penniless in the midst of criminals, was about to receive a burial normally attributed to the most prosperous of men (**Isaiah 53:9**).

The two men now returned to Golgotha. They were most certainly accompanied by a delegate from Pilate, perhaps even the same centurion who continued to oversee this day's execution. Some official verification would be needed at the execution site to confirm that Joseph of Arimathea had been given permission to take custody of Jesus' dead body. The Gospels seem to support the notion that Joseph of Arimathea himself assisted in taking Jesus' body from the cross (**Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53**). Perhaps the Romans removed the actual nails while Joseph held the limp body and prevented it from falling to the ground.

Some of the women disciples still remained at Golgotha, most likely some distance from the crosses, though only two of these women would actually witness the scene of Jesus' burial. As Jesus' body was removed from his cross, these two women followers likely attached themselves to Joseph and Nicodemus in order to see what would be done to their Lord. Nothing is known about where the rest of the women disciples went, or the apostles for that matter. Perhaps John and the others accompanied the mother of Jesus and most of the other women mourners from Calvary after they saw Jesus give up his life. It is probable that the disciples congregated at some known location – perhaps the upper room where they partook in the Last Supper the previous night.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joseph followed Joseph and Nicodemus to a tomb in a garden near the site of the execution. Because the tomb was not a natural grotto but was instead hewn out of rock, this would have been a rather luxurious place to be buried. **Matthew 27:60** reveals that this was tomb was excavated and completed by Joseph of Arimathea. Wealthy Jews were sure to arrange an impressive place of burial that they might be remembered as one richly blessed by God. He had most certainly paid for this plot of land and hired skilled men to prepare the tomb in preparation for his own

eventual burial. A stone was already fashioned to cover the entrance of the tomb once the body was positioned.

The garden mentioned in **John 19:41** was surely part of the entire burial plot. We can safely conclude that a full-time gardener compensated at Joseph's expense was already attending it. Mary Magdalene would even mistake the resurrected Jesus as the gardener (**John 20:15**), which confirms that one would be expected at such a place. Upkeep on a tomb and garden such as this might precede the intended occupant's death for many years and extend for decades afterwards per the prior contract of its owner. The tomb would be honored and cared for by the occupant's ancestors, who would have been recipients of a most generous inheritance.

This tomb would now be Joseph's gift to his dead friend, a man he was too afraid to pledge total allegiance to during his lifetime or speak up in defense of during the final hours before his death. Surely this realization haunted both Joseph and Nicodemus. And like most men of wealth who felt indebted to Jesus, their former treasures become trivial (**Luke 19:8, Philippians 3:7-8**). Though he offered up one of his most valuable possessions to the Lord, the promise given in **Mark 10:29-30** would soon be demonstrated. Joseph had surrendered his own burial plot because of his admiration of Jesus, and he would receive back a hundred times what was given. Instead of a future home for his own dead body, he would possess the one of the greatest proofs of Christ's resurrection in existence in the early church – the empty tomb! Surely this site would hold unparalleled sentiment for the disciples in the first century and beyond. It was a reminder that their faith was not in vain. It would inspire those facing persecution to hold on the hope of their own resurrection and union with Christ in heaven.

Using approximately 3 PM as the time of Jesus' death, we are now only a few hours before the initiation of the Sabbath and one of the most revered holidays in the Jewish calendar. The two men hastily wrapped Jesus' body in strips of linen soaked in the aromatic embalming mixture. The body was then placed in the tomb in the larger clean linen piece. It is even possible that in lieu of the traditional burial spices, the two men trimmed several flowers and plants from the surrounding garden and placed them around Jesus' head and torso before finally draping the linen cloth over his body. Joseph and Nicodemus now left the body to rest and walked out of the tomb and together rolled the stone over the entrance. It seems reasonable to assume that the centurion or some other Roman delegate remained with the burial party. Perhaps he too assisted with the positioning of the stone. There may have even been a sloped track carved at the entrance of the tomb which would make the stone a bit easier to set in place and much more difficult to remove.

Seeing the manner of his burial, the two women decided to prepare some spices and perfumes to honor their Lord. Had they been thinking rationally, they should have discussed this intention with Joseph and Nicodemus, for surely they would not have been able to reopen the tomb to access the body. Perhaps a rendezvous was discussed, or permission to return with the other disciples was requested. But as evening set in, the Sabbath day had arrived and the women would spend the next two days abstaining from work and travel in observance of

the Sabbath regulations. **Luke 23:56** tells us that the women went home to make the necessary preparations. We are not told whose home this was or its precise location, but we must assume that they didn't have to travel too far – perhaps within the city walls of Jerusalem or neighboring Bethany a couple miles to the east.

Knowing exactly who these women are might help us uncover that location. The first was Mary Magdalene, loyal follower of Jesus from Magdala in Galilee. Jesus had driven seven demons from her earlier in his ministry (**Luke 8:2**). Any “home” she might have had was long since forsaken and was of course many, many miles north of Jerusalem.

The other was Mary the mother of James and Joses (and likely Mary the wife of Clopas) who seems to appear for the first time in any Gospel here at the crucifixion. Who was this Mary? Certainly the Gospel writers wanted to distinguish this woman from the other women named Mary that attended the crucifixion. One possibility is that she was the same Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, whose home was in Bethany. It seems appropriate and in character for Mary of Bethany to stay with the body of her most adored friend and teacher up until the last minute. She was indebted to him for the life of her brother and she had only days before anointed him in the presence of many witnesses (**John 12:1-7**). Perhaps this was the woman who Luke now referred to as Mary wife of Clopas. If so, the two women had at least an hour's walk ahead of them once they left the tomb. It's not unreasonable to assume that Bethany was their final destination. However, if she was the same Mary of Bethany, we might expect the use of her identity as the wife of Clopas or the mother of James and Joses in one or more of her additional appearances in the Gospels.

Another suggestion regarding this Mary is that she was the physical sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. We know for sure that one of the women in attendance at Jesus' crucifixion was Jesus' aunt, the sister of his mother Mary (**John 19:25**). However, we are not given indisputable evidence as to the identity of Mary's sister. Two possibilities are Mary the wife of Clopas and Salome the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John. If the wife of Zebedee was Mary's sister, that would make her sons James and John first cousins of Jesus. Again, a unanimous failure to mention this by the Gospel writers seems unlikely if it were true. So perhaps **John 19:25** should be read as an indication that Mary wife of Clopas was the sister of Mary mother of Jesus. It seems possible that while the disciples removed Jesus' mother from the horror of Golgotha, Mary agreed to follow Joseph and Nicodemus to the burial site as a consideration to her distraught sister.

In fact, this woman (the mother of James and Joses) could actually be both Mary of Bethany and the physical sister of Jesus' mother. This would explain the relationship between Jesus and the three siblings in Bethany; they would be his aunts and uncle. Assuming Mary was the eldest sibling, Jesus may have even been closer in age to his aunts and uncles and the familiarity and friendships with the three developed during their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem as he grew up.

Whether this Mary who attended Jesus' burial was the sister of Jesus' mother or his admirer from neighboring Bethany (or both) cannot be verified.

Both assumptions are purely speculation. In any event, the identity of Mary the mother of James and Josés would be quite known in the early church, as her husband and children would also have been known and easily identifiable. It is only we who must ponder these things. We only know that the Synoptic Gospels unanimously confirm that two women – Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary – attended the burial of their martyred Lord and friend. Their commitment to him was unquestioned, their love for him immeasurable. And though the scriptures mention nothing of their emotion, their heartache and sorrow must have been nothing less than overwhelming.



The Empty Tomb

Luke 24:1-12

We have already spent much debate as to whether Jesus was crucified on Thursday or Friday afternoon. The day of his resurrection however is clearly noted by all four Gospel writers as the first day of the week, a Sunday in the Jewish calendar. The previous two days (as I have suggested) were spent in observance of the Sabbaths, during which time the women mourned and prepared to anoint Jesus. They planned on waking up early that Sunday morning to honor the dead body of their Lord appropriately, for they had been unable to express their devotion prior to the advent of the Jewish holy day.

During the Sabbath, the Jews went again to Pilate as recorded in **Matthew 27:62-66**. This time they asked for the tomb that held the body of Jesus to be both sealed and guarded. They wanted to thwart any attempt by the disciples to fabricate a reappearance of Jesus. It is strange that the unbelievers within the Jewish leadership were more acute to Jesus' prediction to rise from the dead on the third day than were Jesus' own disciples. However, the chief priests and the Pharisees were not in a state of mourning and inconsolable grief. Because of their callused hearts, they had the luxury of thinking logically.

We are not sure whether the Jews knew exactly where the body was laid, or if they were even aware of Joseph of Arimathea's donation of his own burial plot. Either way, Pilate complied with their request, a guard was posted, and a seal was added to the cover stone. Questions as to whether this guard was a delegate of Roman soldiers or a temple guard have been offered. It seems likely that this was indeed a small number of Roman soldiers entrusted to the temporary charge of the chief priests, for these same soldiers would later accept a bribe in order to avoid a bad report about them reaching Pilate (**Matthew 28:11-14**). It seems unlikely that the Jewish temple guards would fear such a report, though it is still possible. What is perhaps more unlikely is that the chief priests would need to bribe their own temple guards with a large sum of money. In any event, guards were posted at the tomb that held Jesus' body to prevent any grave-robbing attempt.

The women now made their way to the tomb during the pre-dawn Sunday morning. The group consisted of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Josés, Salome (wife of Zebedee), Joanna (wife of Cuza, the manager of

Herod's household; [Luke 8:3](#)), and perhaps others. Finally, it occurred to these simple-minded disciples that they had not made arrangements to have the tomb reopened to gain access to Jesus' body. Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Joses surely told the others now about the size of the stone that was pushed over the mouth of the tomb. This seems like a major oversight, one that we shall momentarily discuss. But without allowing this mental lapse to discourage them, they continued on towards the garden that surrounded the tomb.

We shall make a small diversion here to discuss the aforementioned lapse of good sense. First of all, there is no doubt that this circle of women disciples loved Jesus with all of their hearts and they were almost certainly under deep emotional duress trying to cope with his death. Consequently, they seem to have been rendered somewhat irrational during the period of time that spans Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. This irrational condition would only be compounded by their joy and bewilderment once the angels proclaimed the resurrection. What we are left with is a collection of accounts of that morning's visit to the tomb and the events surrounding those early Sunday hours that are some of the most difficult testimonies within the four Gospels to harmonize.

Several minor difficulties in chronology and precise details exist. Exactly which women were present on this Sunday morning seems to differ from Gospel to Gospel. We are tempted to wonder why the women who prepared so diligently to honor Jesus would not think of the stone covering the tomb and realize their inability to access his body? Was there one angel or two? Was he (or were they) sitting inside the tomb or outside on the stone? Did only Mary Magdalene return to the disciples or did the other women return as well? Or did both occur? And in what order? Did Jesus appear first to Mary Magdalene or to a group of women?

The Gospels all seem to highlight distinctive portions of the resurrection story. Should these apparent incongruities cause concern for Christians, seeing as the resurrection of Jesus Christ is by far the most crucial event validating our faith? Again, we must remember that the Gospels were written and compiled from eyewitness testimony. We can be sure that each of the women present that Sunday morning was asked many times to recall their account of the events. Certainly each would describe unique aspects of the whole experience, depending on what made a lasting impression on them. This fact alone would account for the variety of perspectives offered by the Gospel writers.

In addition to this, I strongly believe that these women's testimonies differ greatly from accounts that would have been offered by a group of male eyewitnesses, had it occurred in such a fashion. Emotion and sentiment often play a much greater role in the sense memory of a female than they do in a male. Consequently, a man might have recalled that Sunday morning's events with a greater degree of chronological precision and matter-of-fact narration, while a woman may recall the very same events as a collage of experiences, feelings, and recollections with much less emphasis on the exact chronology. Even to Peter and the other disciples, the women's immediate account of the events seemed nonsensical ([Luke 24:10-11](#)). How much more did the passing of time allow these women to treasure their own distinct account of that fateful Sunday morning?

All things considered, the difficulty in correlating the four Gospel accounts does not in any way place the events of that morning in suspicion. Instead, it allows us to see the reports of Jesus' most devoted women followers in light of their assorted emotions – grief, despair, fear, astonishment, hope, and then inexpressible joy! Therefore, I shall do my best to suggest a best-fit account of these events, keeping in mind the collection of memoirs given us from these loyal women who were the first to witness the empty tomb and the first to see the glorious resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

Let us now return to the garden. The women were unaware of the Jews' actions during the previous holy days, so they certainly did not expect to find soldiers guarding the tomb. They had remained effectively housebound per the Sabbath regulations. When they arrived at the tomb however, the scene before them was quite astonishing. The stone had already been rolled back and they saw guards who appeared to be dead lying around the garden near the tomb's entrance (**Matt. 28:2-4**). It must have looked like some type of heist – a robbery that had turned violent and left these soldiers dead and Jesus' body stolen. In a panic, Mary Magdalene immediately left the scene to retrieve some assistance from the apostles (**John 20:1-2**) while the other women remained at the tomb.

Those who remained just stood there perplexed, not quite knowing what to think (**Luke 24:4a**). To make sure, at least a couple women entered the tomb and confirmed that Jesus' body was indeed missing (**Luke 24:3**). Those who entered were greeted by a single angel who reminded them of Jesus' resurrection (**Mark 16:6-7**). Without delay, angels appeared to those outside the tomb and likewise informed the women that Jesus had risen from the dead as he said he would (**Matt. 28:5-7, Luke 24:4-8**). The rest of the women were invited to enter the tomb and see for themselves that the body was gone. Of the group that journeyed to the tomb that morning, only Mary Magdalene left distraught, believing the grave had been robbed. The rest of the women now hurried off in cautioned excitement, not stopping to tell anyone what happened until they reached the disciples.

The eleven apostles and the other disciples seemed to have been barraged by the differing reports that led them to promptly investigate the situation for themselves. Mary Magdalene's report reached them first. Hers was a panicked story, for she believed the body had been stolen and taken to an undisclosed location. Right then, perhaps as Peter and John were making their way to the tomb, the rest of the women arrived and confronted the disciples with a completely different tale – one of hope. In their explanation, various angels had appeared to them, stating that Jesus had risen from the dead and had intended to meet up with the disciples in Galilee (**Matt. 28:10, Mark 16:7**). Perhaps they attempted to persuade the disciples to hurry north to Galilee per the angels' instructions. The differing accounts seemed all but preposterous to Peter and John, and they resumed their footrace to the tomb. It appears as if Mary Magdalene followed Peter and John to the tomb and that she somehow eluded the report that the rest of the women gave regarding the angels' remarkable announcement.

Upon Peter and John's arrival to the burial plot, they saw for themselves that the body was indeed missing. No angels appeared to these men, for they were expected to believe the testimony given them by the women disciples. Peter entered the tomb first and John soon followed him. They found the strips of linen lying on the tomb's floor. These cloths had once wrapped the body of their martyred teacher and friend. The larger linen cloth that covered his body was folded and present as well. The only thing missing was Jesus. If indeed robbers stole the body, we could easily assume that they would have simply taken it wrapped and transported it in the linen cloths. It would be preposterous to conclude that grave robbers would peel off the cloths and transport the lifeless body naked. Whatever raced through their minds, we do not know. We do know that John was eager to believe in the unthinkable, while Peter seemed reluctant to get his hopes up (**John 20:8, Luke 24:12**).

They left the tomb and decided to return to the rest of the disciples. By this time, Mary Magdalene had caught up with them and remained outside the tomb in the surrounding garden, weeping. We might assume that Peter and John pleaded with her to come back with them but eventually allowed her to stay behind.

Jesus' first appearance

John 20:10-18 records Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance. Mary Magdalene remained at the tomb. She was broken and deeply hurt, still believing someone had stolen or moved the body of her Lord. Peering into the tomb, she beheld two angels dressed in white, sitting where Jesus' body had once lain. They asked her why she was crying and she explained her dilemma. She then turned and while still bent over noticed a man standing near her in the garden. Believing Jesus to be the gardener, she begged to know what had been done with the body. In a voice so familiar and gentle, Jesus simply called to her by name, "Mary." Immediately an inner transformation took place within Mary's soul as three day's of torturous grief were swallowed up with an inexpressible joy. "Teacher!" she cried as she embraced her risen master and savior.

Jesus said something interesting here that may shed some light on his resurrected bodily state. He cautioned Mary saying, "*Don't hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father.*" Undoubtedly Jesus rose from the dead with the same body that only days before suffered a most brutal trauma, one in which "*his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness*" **Isaiah 52:14**. He did not rise from the dead in glory, clothed in radiant white with his flesh restored. Instead, his appearance seemed to startle the disciples and more than once they were kept from recognizing him (**Luke 24:16, John 21:12**). His wounds had been somewhat cleansed by the burial process and the aloe-soaked linens that surrounded him. Nevertheless, he certainly bore an assortment of cuts and bruises surrounding his head and face, along with a number of lacerations from his flogging and the five puncture marks that had all together combined to end his life.

It is possible that Jesus covered himself head to toe as he traveled around Judea and Galilee, revealing himself only to those he wanted (**Acts 10:40-41**).

This could explain why those on the road to Emmaus did not realize the man in their midst was Jesus and why the disciples eating breakfast with Jesus on the Galilean shore were forced to assume his identity. And perhaps he still lived with the soreness and pain of these injuries, which is why Mary's tight clutching of him now at the gravesite was discouraged.

Nevertheless, he was alive! He had risen just as he predicted, a self-made prophecy recorded several times in all four Gospels (**Matt. 12:40, 16:4, 16:21, 17:9, 17:23, 20:19, 26:61; Mark 8:31, 9:9, 9:31, 10:34, 14:58; Luke 9:22, 11:29, 16:31, 18:33, 24:7, 24:46; John 2:19, 11:25**). The Spirit of God had breathed life back into this lifeless body (**Rom. 8:11**). Soon he would return to his heavenly Father to be transformed in glory – the glory that had been his before time began. The Son of God had momentarily forfeited his place in heaven to become a man and once and for all swallow up the curse of death placed on all mankind.

The significance of Jesus our Lord rising from the dead cannot be understated, nor can it be properly expressed in mere writing here. The resurrection separates Christianity from all other religions, faiths, teachings, disciplines, and schools of thought. Only through Jesus Christ can we as mortal humans conquer death and lay hold of the promise of everlasting life with God. Only because of Christ is our hope of a resurrection made secure. Because of their faith in Jesus and the hope of a glorious afterlife, countless Christians throughout the centuries have forsaken everything, risked it all, laughed at death, and have been willingly and shamefully martyred as they boldly preached the good news. Even now Satan continues to make war on God's servants using death as his weapon. But since the resurrection of Christ, the fear of death no longer holds mastery over those whose hope is in him. And only by placing our complete trust, faith, and will in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus are we offered this hope.

Let us assert again in all frankness and seriousness: Christ rose from the dead proving he was and is the Savior of the world. Because of this fact there exists no other faith, no other doctrine, no other Gospel, no other path, and no other name in heaven or on earth or under the earth by which men and women will be saved from spiritual death. The name of Jesus Christ is above all else; salvation is found nowhere else (**Acts 4:12**).

Please read the following scriptures that highlight the importance of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, the Gospel message, and the hope given us through Christ. It is a long list, but not at all complete. For in truth, all the scriptures from the creation of the world in Genesis to the revelations given to John speak of this hope, this Gospel, and this glorious resurrection.

John 20:31

Acts 2:24-36, 3:15, 4:10a-12, 5:30-32, 13:32-37, 17:2-3,31, 23:6, 24:14-15, 26:6-8,22-23

Romans 4:23-5:5, 5:17, 6:3-5, 6:9-11, 6:21-23, 7:24-25a, 8:10-11, 8:22-25, 10:8-13, 15:12-13

1 Cor. 6:14, 15:19-21, 15:25-28, 15:54-55

2 Cor. 3:12, 4:13-14, 4:17-5:1

Ephes. 1:18-21
Philip. 2:9-11, 3:10-11
Col. 1:21-23,27, 2:11-12
1 Thes. 1:3, 4:16-17, 5:8
1 Tim. 1:15-17
2 Tim. 2:8-10
Titus 1:2
Hebrews 2:14-15, 3:6, 5:7-9, 10:23, 13:20-21
1 Peter 1:3-4, 1:18-21, 3:14-18
1 John 5:11-13
Jude 1:21
Rev. 1:18, 2:11, 12:11, 14:6,13

Jesus' second appearance

Matthew 28:8-10 records Jesus' second post-resurrection appearance. After Jesus appeared to Mary, he would catch up with the other women who had earlier ventured to the empty tomb. They had already believed the testimony given them by the angels and had delivered the message to the apostles and the other disciples. Soon thereafter, Jesus himself appeared to these women and they were overwhelmed with joy. They fell to his feet in worship, signifying that indeed they believed Jesus to be more than a man, a prophet, or a messenger of God; they knew him to be the one true Lord of All appearing in the flesh.

Jesus instructed these women to pass on a message to the apostles. It appears as if Jesus' original plan was to first meet these men at Galilee, a deliberate reunion where the movement first grew its roots but a few years prior. But later that same evening we will see Jesus appear to the apostles in Jerusalem. Straight away he rebuked them for refusing to fully believe and trust in those he showed himself to earlier that day (**Mark 16:14**). It seems likely that the apostles were reluctant to leave the city and journey northward to Galilee based on the testimony of the women believers.

Jesus' third appearance

By harmonizing **1 Cor. 15:5** and **Luke 24:34**, we are led to conclude that Jesus appeared to Simon Peter before his Sunday evening appearance to the rest of the apostles. Presumably this meeting with Peter took place before Jesus' excursion with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (**Luke 24:13-32**). We are not given the specific circumstances surrounding this personal appearance to Peter. In one sense, we do not really need to know, for this may very well have been a discussion that Jesus intended to be private. Jesus often commanded his disciples to withhold information, revelations, or experiences they had with him until a certain time. Perhaps he commanded Peter to keep the details of this rendezvous confidential for all time. Or perhaps the simple fact that Jesus appeared to Simon Peter was itself the most consequential piece of news from Jesus' third appearance after the resurrection. It may have been a short-lived sighting, much like Jesus' appearance to Mary and then the other women. Either way, the Lord had appeared to Peter.

The Road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-32

Luke tells us that Emmaus was a village about 60 stadia (7 miles) west of Jerusalem, though its precise location is not verifiable today. A disciple named Cleopas and his companion had been with the group of disciples earlier on that Sunday morning and they had been given the testimony of the women who had returned from the tomb. They had only been told of the message uttered by the angels at the tomb and had left the city or at least the company of disciples before they heard the testimony of those who actually witnessed Jesus' resurrection.

We are not given any biographical information about these men nor do we know exactly why they were traveling to Emmaus, though we can assume it was the home of at least one of them. It is not prudent to assume that Cleopas was the same Clopas of [John 19:25](#) or by supposition that he was Alphaeus the father of James the younger, though scholars have argued for and against such claims. What makes these men worthy of mention is simply the fact that God chose them to see the risen Jesus.

The scriptures are very clear that Christ had no intention of appearing to the masses, to the rulers and governors, or to the Sanhedrin who assailed him for his claim to rebuild the temple of God in three days. Instead, a few select men and women were given this most precious reward. A remnant of believers was able to see and touch the risen Lord. [Acts 10:41](#) tells us, "*He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*" The true identities of Cleopas and his companion were undoubtedly known in the early church. Their significance in the body of Christ was not their heritage or their relatives, but the simple fact that these two men were handpicked by God to witness the resurrection.

As they traveled along the road, Jesus caught up with them and pursued a conversation about the recent events of the previous Passover weekend. They were kept from recognizing him (and I have suggested the possibility that Jesus was purposely covering himself as he traveled in and around the city of Jerusalem to keep from being seen by those whom God had not chosen to witness the miracle of his resurrection). Their spirit was downcast and their faith depleted. In their own words, they declared Jesus a prophet. Though he was "*powerful in word and deed before God and all the people*", Jesus was nonetheless reduced to the status of prophet in their minds. At one time they had hoped their teacher was more than just a prophet – perhaps the Redeemer of Israel, the Messiah, or even the Son of God. But now, they didn't know what to think, nor did they know the whereabouts of the body of their recently martyred Lord.

Jesus had heard enough. With indignation at their foolish unbelief mixed with unbridled eagerness to proclaim the truth, Jesus burst forth. He confronted their lack of faith and then revealed to them the long awaited mystery of the Gospel. The crucial element missing in their understanding of Israel's redeemer was the necessity of his suffering. Indeed this detail was missed by the entire Jewish nation. It has already been pointed out in this commentary that the expectant Jews hadn't associated the all-powerful Son of Man – the successor to the throne of David – with the Lord's servant in [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#), upon whose head was laid the sin of all Israel. They did not see their savior as the man in [Psalm 22](#) who was so severely despised, mocked, and physically chastised by a band of wicked men. The Jews pictured the rise of their king as described in [Psalm](#)

68:17-18, “*The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord has come from Sinai into his sanctuary. When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious--that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.*” But instead of leading the Jews in triumph and releasing them from their relative captivity, Jesus “*was led like a lamb to the slaughter*”, as foretold by Isaiah.

As Jesus explained this oversight to Cleopas and the other disciple, their hearts burned within their chests. They were being ushered into a completely new understanding of the scriptures. Suddenly, all the prophets and the Psalms were aligning with masterful wisdom as the words of the stranger unveiled the mystery of the ages. And certainly a veil was lifted from their eyes and their hearts.

Even now when the mystery of the kingdom and the power of the Gospel are preached, a veil is lifted from the eyes of lost men and women. People who have diligently read the scriptures or have sat in churches their whole life may still be blinded to the good news. But when the truth of God’s word is finally preached and God’s spirit is working, a veil is lifted from their eyes and the knowledge that has eluded them for so long is now displayed before them in remarkable clarity.

2 Cor. 3:14-18

But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Their journey to Emmaus – about a two-hour walk – was nearing its end and Jesus appeared to be headed onward. It was still daytime but dusk was approaching. The two disciples urged their new friend to stay with them in the village. This gesture was a normal measure of hospitality offered by Jewish countrymen, as travel alone at night could be unsafe. Jesus consented and joined them at what we presumed was the home of one of the disciples. Bread and surely drink was set before Jesus. Though he was the guest, he acted as the head of the household by taking the bread, giving thanks to God, and tearing off pieces and giving it to the two men. At this, their eyes were opened. They now recognized the man who had been schooling them in the scriptures the past couple hours was indeed the risen Jesus! And as soon as they recognized him, he was removed from their sight.

How should we assume that Jesus “*disappeared from their sight*”? Did he just walk away in haste or is a supernatural explanation more fitting? Although the scriptures are clear that Jesus rose again not as a ghost or apparition but as “*flesh and bones*” (**Luke 24:39**), we cannot state with accuracy the physical and spiritual properties of his resurrected state. Though I have attempted an explanation of Jesus’ post-resurrection behavior, my assumptions may be entirely flawed. We know that during Jesus’ lifetime

he was filled with the full measure of God's spirit and he held the keys to time, space, and matter in his hands. He walked on water. He was transformed before the Three. He stilled the wind and the waves. He healed the incurable and he even raised the dead. So we might just as well assume that the entire forty days that Jesus walked on earth following his resurrection were a series of supernatural and inexplicable occurrences and bag the physical speculations altogether!

In other words, Jesus could have very well walked around in full view of everyone disguising his appearance and his wounds in a supernatural way. He still would allow only the eyes of a select group of men and women the privilege of perceiving his true identity. Perhaps he also reserved the power to appear and disappear as he chose and could travel in the Spirit from place to place. We will see Jesus appear to the disciples in a room whose doors were locked and all entrances blocked for fear of the Jews (**John 20:19**). We have just seen him vanish from sight from these two disciples after "*their eyes were opened*"; both of these events imply the miraculous.

Neither the physical nor the spiritual explanations deny the fundamental and important facts: that Jesus of Nazareth was martyred and his death confirmed; after three days he rose from the dead and was seen; his flesh was touched and his wounds were verified. During the weeks prior to his return to heaven, Jesus demonstrated his human properties to his followers to reinforce the miracle of his bodily resurrection. He ate with them, he walked with them, he talked with them, and he was touched by them. In **Luke 24:38-39**, he asserts the purely physical nature of his resurrection by asking the apostles, "*Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*" On the other hand, Jesus also demonstrated his deity during this period to reinforce his unity with God the Father. He opened their eyes (**Luke 24:31**), he opened the understanding of their minds (**Luke 24:45**), he once again demonstrated his authority over nature with a miraculous catch of fish (**John 21:6**), and he breathed on the apostles and the Holy Spirit came upon them (**John 20:22**).



The Evening Appearance and the Days that Followed **Luke 24:33-43**

Cleopas and his companion returned to the apostles and would have arrived back in Jerusalem well after dark. Traveling seven miles at night was not favorable, but this was probably the easiest journey of their lives. They no doubt jogged and walked briskly the entire way – their adrenaline pumping and their hearts pounding with joy. They couldn't wait to deliver this unbelievable news to the now small remnant of disciples who were all but hiding out in the Holy City.

By now the report of the empty tomb had spread throughout the city. The guards had already been bribed and now mixed stories were being distributed among the Jewish populace. Certainly Pilate had been made aware of the empty tomb, though the story told to him by the guards was fallacious and misleading. In all likelihood, the Roman soldiers were alerted to the situation and commanded to seize any followers of Jesus. The Jewish rulers were determined to level the disciples with the charge of unlawfully stealing the body of Jesus for the purposes of blasphemy by proclaiming the resurrection. They

almost certainly intend bring Jesus' followers before the Sanhedrin to explain the body's disappearance. Thus, the Jews and the temple guards were also on full alert to arrest any of the disciples that they recognized.

Fortunately, the two men did not appear to be well-known disciples of Jesus and they were arriving in the city after dark. They knew the exact place where the Eleven and the other disciples had taken refuge. They made their way through the city and arrived at the house (likely the same residence with the upper room that had only days before hosted Jesus' final meal with his apostles). Once identified, they were brought into the room and they recounted their story with overwhelming joy. They told of their journey to Emmaus and the fire in their hearts as Jesus proclaimed the mystery of his suffering to them. They told of their brief meal where Jesus finally revealed himself to them. To their surprise, they were not the only ones to see and talk with Jesus that day. Simon Peter had also encountered the Lord, as did a number of the women disciples. It must have been so reassuring to hear that some of the others had witnessed the crux of their implausible story that perhaps even they struggled to accept as true.

In fact, there were still some in that room – including some of the apostles – who had not truly accepted the notion that Jesus had risen from the dead. **Mark 16:11-14** confirms that some persisted in their stubborn unbelief despite the testimonies of their best friends and trusted spiritual partners. They may have feigned excitement at the testimony of the others, but somewhere deep down in their hearts they didn't buy it. They hadn't seen it, and they weren't about to get their hopes up based on the vague accounts by a few within their number. At some point, one of the doubters, Thomas called Didymus, slipped out of their company altogether. Perhaps he was sent out into the night for food and/or supplies, or to accompany the women disciples back to Bethany. For some reason he would not be present during that evening's encounter with the risen Christ.

While the two from Emmaus still exchanged stories, tears, and embraces with the others, they all heard a familiar voice say, "Peace be with you". Suddenly they realized that Jesus was in their midst! How he had entered the house and slipped in without anyone noticing must have crossed their minds. Some may have concluded that they were seeing a vision or a spirit. To make sure, Jesus showed them the nail scars in his hands (or wrists) and the wound from the spear that was thrust into his ribs (**John 20:20**). He assured them that he was the same man who had only days before shared the bread and wine with them. He ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence to further verify that he was still a living, breathing person.

Mark 16:14 tells us that Jesus then challenged his disciples because they had not been willing to receive the testimony of Mary, the other women, Peter, and Cleopas and his companion. The disciples would soon be called to preach the good news of Christ's resurrection to people everywhere who would be called to believe solely based on their eyewitness testimony. Yet not even this devoted remnant would believe the testimony given them by their trusted friends and fellow disciples. Jesus once again showed his followers that he had little tolerance for their lack of faith. So much was riding on their faith now, for Jesus was soon to be taken from their sight forever. Then they would be called to live not by what is seen, but by faith.

Read 2 Cor. 4:18

2 Cor. 5:7
Hebrews 11:6

John 20:21-23 also gives us another episode that occurred during Jesus' evening appearance to the disciples and the Eleven (minus Thomas). Jesus breathed on his followers and they were given the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. This manifestation of the Holy Spirit is not the same as the "power from on high" that would come on them as promised by Jesus (**Luke 24:49**). That outward manifestation of the Spirit would descend on them in the form of tongues many weeks later at the Pentecost celebration (**Acts 2:1-4**). Instead, this measure of the Spirit is the same portion promised to all true believers and is the seal of God guaranteeing their salvation (**2 Cor. 1:21-22**). It is like a seed planted within each disciple of Jesus that transforms the inner being by bearing the fruits of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22-23**). On the coming day of Pentecost (just days after Jesus ascended into heaven), Peter will explain to his listeners that they too can receive this promised Holy Spirit if they accept the message, repent of their sins, and be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. This promise is what separates forever the baptism preached by John – which offered for its partakers the forgiveness of their sins – and baptism into the name of Jesus Christ (or in long form, into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). The Great Commission baptism – or baptism in the name of Jesus Christ – for all time promises both the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling gift of God's Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:38-39**).

As we read **Luke 24:36-49**, it appears that our author has combined this first evening encounter with the apostles and the others in Jerusalem with his final appearance to them on the day of his ascension into heaven. To be sure, the two events were separated by a period of forty days (**Acts 1:3**). As has been stated before, it seems as if Luke was compelled to finish his Gospel in haste – likely due to Paul's unexpected change of confinement locations. We might assume that Luke had intended to give us a more detailed account of this forty day period, for he begins his second work (the Acts of the Apostles) with some additional information of the events that transpired therein. In **Acts 1:1-11**, Luke seems to be expounding on the conclusion of his first work, assuring his readers that Jesus had not ascended into heaven immediately following the resurrection. Instead, Jesus' followers had several encounters with their risen Lord, some of which we may not be recorded in the Gospels. He used these opportunities to firmly authenticate his victory over death and further explain the coming of his kingdom. As **Acts 1:3** explains, "*After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.*"

One week later

John 20:24-29 gives us an account of Jesus' next appearance to the apostles. A week had transpired since the resurrection and the group had remained in Jerusalem. We can assume that they were still fearful of being seen and remained somewhat isolated in the same house that had become their place of congregation. Again the doors of the house were locked when Jesus appeared to them. Jesus went immediately to Thomas who had not been present when Jesus had first been seen by the others a week prior. How completely ashamed Thomas must have felt to hear the words he had spoken in doubt and

disappointment now repeated back to him by his risen Lord. I do not get the impression that Jesus was indignant with Thomas, but simply resolute in his command to put his doubts aside and believe. All of the apostles now believed because they had seen their teacher killed and now witnessed his resurrection. Others would be called to have greater faith than these men, for they would be called to believe not by sight but by trusting in the scriptures and confiding in the eyewitness testimony of others. To those people Jesus declared, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*”

The Great Commission in Galilee

Jesus had intended all along to rally together his followers in Galilee. After this second meeting with the disciples in Jerusalem (a week after Jesus’ resurrection), the Eleven and the others with them now made this journey up north. Jesus did not travel with them, however he instructed them where to meet. They arrived at the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee where many of these faithful disciples and their families lived. As they waited for Jesus to arrive, we might assume that they began to tell some of their closest friends and family members about the resurrection and Jesus’ intention to meet them at the small mountain where he had preached to the masses, healed the sick, and fed the hungry. Paul tells us in **1 Cor. 15:6** that Jesus made a single appearance before more than five hundred of the brethren. It would be safe to assume that Galilee still held the largest concentration of believers of any city throughout Israel and Judea.

Before they met at the mountain however, **John 21:1-23** gives us the account of Jesus’ first appearance in Galilee. It looks as if Jesus’ tarried at least a few days, leaving the brothers to simply wait upon his arrival. The anticipation of Jesus’ return to the same region that witnessed the majority of his preaching and his miracles must have been almost unbearable to the disciples. Peter and some of the others decided to head out on the lake to fish – if for no other reason than to pass the time. It had certainly been a while since many of these former business partners had worked their nets and they probably welcomed the chance to get back out on the water together. They must have felt out of practice, for they were unable to locate a catch throughout the night.

Early in the morning, Jesus came and stood on the shore and called out to his friends. He commanded them to try the right side of the boat. As he had done a few years prior (recorded in **Luke 5:4-7**), Jesus stirred the sea and produced a miraculous catch of large fish. Peter must have smiled as he looked up at the “stranger” on the shore. He knew it was Jesus. So much had happened since Jesus first called Simon. As they saw their nets fill with fish, Peter certainly recalled that first miraculous catch a couple years prior. And here they were again; things had come full circle. Peter grabbed his cloak and dove in to swim to shore. He left the others to haul the fish ashore. They did not even attempt to pull the nets loaded with fish into the boat. They had tried that before and they almost sank their boats and ruined their nets. Instead, they just paddled the boats to the shore and pulled the nets onto the beach.

Jesus had a fire started and the brothers ate breakfast with their risen Lord. During this meal, Peter was singled out and challenged on his love for Jesus. Just a couple weeks ago Peter had thrice denied that he even knew his teacher. Now, Jesus asked him three times whether he truly loved him. Peter was exposed and admonished before the others. Nevertheless, he was restored as the necessary right hand to what was

soon to become a movement of God in which Jesus was no longer physically present with them.

As **Matthew 28:16-20** records, the brothers were now going to head up to the hill where Jesus had told them to go. We might assume that Jesus gave these men the time to round up the other believers while he himself ascended the mount. Though **Matthew 28:16** seems to read as if only the Eleven were present at this commission, the text does leave room for a much larger gathering. Surely the Eleven traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee of this occasion and were present on the mountain. But there seems to be no more likely occasion for Jesus to appear exclusively to a larger gathering of disciples.

What a powerful setting is created when we imagine this crowd of more than five hundred believers coming together to worship the Lord on the mountain that had so much significance during Jesus' earthly ministry. Though some still wrestled with their doubts, the fellowship was surely rich with tears of joy, shouts praise to God, and enormous hope that the consolation of Israel had arrived. God had visited his people and was now being worshipped by his faithful flock. The man they knew to be a great teacher and prophet of God now stood before them confirming his true identity as the risen Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus welcomed their praise and worship; he did not deter them. Jesus understood clearly from the onset of his ministry that only the one true God was to be worshipped and served. During his initial temptation in the wilderness with Satan, Jesus quoted **Deut. 6:13** as he refused to worship or serve anything else but God the Father. So as the believers fell before Jesus in worship, we see yet again that Jesus was not simply a messenger of God, a servant of God, or even just the Son of God. Jesus was the Lord God; he was all the fullness of the Father.

Jesus concluded their worship and explained to them that in his right hand was placed all the authority on earth and in heaven. Those who shall embrace that authority during their lifetime on earth will also be welcomed into the heavenly realms after their physical lives expire. Those who refuse the authority of Christ and will not submit to his lordship during their lifetime on earth are declaring quite clearly that they have no desire to be under Christ's authority in heaven either. In other words, people are not simply "sent" to hell by the will of God. Rather, it is the choice of each individual person to submit himself or herself to an authority and then reap the consequences of that decision. To be sure, **Ephesians 2:1-3** confirms that all of us have at one time made the decision to submit to the sinful nature and bow to the kingdom of Satan. But because of God's great mercy for us, an opportunity to break that yoke of sin and submit ourselves to the gracious lordship of Christ has been offered. Let us not be found living in defiance to the authority of Christ. Instead, we should welcome the chance to submit ourselves to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (**1 Peter 2:25**).

Finally, before these worshipers was placed the Great Commission. Jesus commanded these men and women to go throughout the world and multiply the number of faithful disciples to his teachings. They were to proclaim the new covenant of God through faith in Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth. Jesus promised that he would continue to walk with them and abide with them in Spirit. He would be there to open many hearts to respond to their message.

In this great commission, Jesus clearly commanded his followers to baptize all who would become disciples into the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Just as circumcision was a seal under the old covenant, baptism would signify the point in

time where God welcomed each new penitent disciple into the covenant of grace through faith in Christ and his resurrection (**Col. 2:11-12**). And just as a marriage ceremony before God makes a covenant binding between a husband and wife, so baptism shall be the official reception for each believer into an eternal relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son. Peter would soon offer this promise to all who responded to the Gospel at the forthcoming day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, explaining the promise of God to forgive the sins and grant the Holy Spirit to all who wished to repent, surrender to Jesus the Lord, and be baptized.

Years later, the Apostle Paul would explain to Titus the significance of this baptism, in which Paul himself received the washing away of his numerous and notorious sins (**Acts. 22:16**). To Titus he revealed that this baptism into the new and wondrous covenant in Christ is clearly an act of God's kindness, love, and grace – an obvious demonstration of the Savior's mercy. It signifies the time of our salvation – our rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. And with this washing, our sins are forgotten and we stand before God fully justified and fully qualified to inherit the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:4-7

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Jesus appears to his brother, James

There is no telling how long these believers remained on the mountain with Jesus or how this crowd was ever dismissed. Jesus had empowered them to be the carriers of the message of salvation to a world that was ripe for a spiritual harvest. We can be sure that Jesus gave them some final instructions to once again return to the city of Jerusalem, the city that was prophesied to see the restoration of God's kingdom (**Isaiah 2:1-4**). Of the five hundred present at the gathering in Galilee, about a hundred believers traveled back to Jerusalem with the apostles. With a renewed hope and vision, they assembled in the city and once again waited for Jesus to join them.

Apparently, Jesus had not yet fully explained that he was soon to return to the Father and sit on the right hand of the throne of God in heaven. In fact, the apostles still assumed that their risen Lord might reveal himself to the world and then God would fully restore his kingdom to Israel (**Acts 1:6**). Jesus had some additional explaining to do with regards to the spiritual nature of the kingdom that was soon to be revealed through the establishment of his church. Thus, he would rendezvous with them one last time in the Holy City before he ascended into heaven.

While the believers and the apostles made their way to Jerusalem, **1 Cor. 15:7** tells us that Jesus paid a visit to his physical family and revealed himself to his half-brother, James. **John 7:5** states clearly that during Jesus' ministry, his own brothers failed to put their faith in him. Perhaps in fairness to his brothers, Jesus may have recognized the difficulty they faced as they attempted to accept the deity of their own sibling. Could their own brother with whom they were raised was actually be the Son of God? Even his mother Mary wrestled with her doubts (**Mark 3:21, 31**) and the message

given her by the angel Gabriel some thirty years prior was at times clouded with uncertainty (**Luke 1:31-33**).

In any event, Jesus had a plan for his family and he made sure to reveal himself to them after he rose from the dead. We are not sure where this meeting took place, but we might assume that Jesus traveled southwest from Galilee and met his brothers in their hometown of Nazareth. This would be a fruitful visit, as Jesus' brothers became faithful believers and joined their mother and the other believers in Jerusalem (**Acts 1:14**). God had opened their hearts and their eyes and they devoted the remainder of their lives to the cause of the Gospel. James would receive the designation as an apostle (**Gal. 1:19**), becoming one of the most respected leaders in the early church. He would preside over the Jerusalem Council of **Acts 15** and would eventually lead the church in Jerusalem, a congregation that grew to more than twenty thousand believers most scholars estimate.

This James is the author of the epistle that bears his name. The final epistle in the New Testament is ascribed to Jude the brother of James', who was also a physical brother to Jesus. Both James and Jude would be martyred for their faith in the Lord, though the exact details of their deaths are difficult to confirm. Some have James being killed by the Jews as early as 62 or 63 AD, though some have him living to the age of 94. Different ancient writings have him being thrown to his death from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem (prior to its destruction in 70 AD), while others describe James being stoned to death, and still others suggest his head was bashed in with a club. Tradition might place Jude's martyrdom in the city of Edessa around 72 AD by means of crucifixion. Surely these men saw their brother rise from the dead, for what else could turn their faithless scorn into unflinching certainty?



The Final Appearance

Luke 24:44-49

Once again we find the apostles within the city walls of Jerusalem, gathered in the house that had become their sanctuary. We do not know how much time passed before Jesus arrived, but it could not be more than a day or a few days, for all the post-resurrection events occurred within forty days. We might even suppose that Jesus' family now accompanied him as he entered Jerusalem for this last meeting with his disciples.

It is here that Jesus finally opened up the minds of his followers to understand the scriptures. He explained to them the certainty of all that had happened as foretold by the prophets, by Moses, and by the Psalms. Just as he had explained the necessity of his suffering to the disciples en route to Emmaus, he now confirmed this point to them all. And just as the hearts of Cleopas and his companion were set on fire as Jesus unveiled all the mysteries of God, so too were the hearts of these men and women ignited with an eternal flame. The veil of partial understanding was lifted from the eyes of their minds and they were able to fully comprehend the glory of God's eternal scheme.

Jesus' mission of atonement had been completed and he again commissioned them to fill the entire world with that testimony. His secondary mission was culminating as well, for Jesus looked into the eyes of this assortment of ordinary men and women and he knew that they were ready to carry the torch, calling all men and women to repent and

embrace God's offer of forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ. Jesus expected them simply to bear witness to the many glorious things they had seen and heard over the past few years. And beginning in Jerusalem, God would use these servants and many soon-to-be converts to boldly preach the truth as he continued to lift the veil from the hearts of people everywhere.

The ministry of the church guided by the Holy Spirit would soon begin. The manifold wisdom of God – his appearing in flesh and the laying down of his life for the reconciliation of mankind – was finally going to be revealed to all the world as the church grew and reached every corner of civilization (**Ephes. 3:10-11**). The church would become the living body of Christ on earth. No longer would God's name dwell in the temple of Jerusalem. Instead, each and every faithful disciple of Jesus baptized into body of Christ shall be given the Spirit of God to dwell within them (**1 Cor. 12:12-13**) and together they become the Holy Temple – a house for God's name to reside forever (**Eph. 2:19-22**). Thus, the final instruction of Jesus to his followers was simply to remain in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit, for it was in Jerusalem that the fire of Christ's church would begin and from this city spread throughout the world.



The Ascension

Luke 24:50-53

As he had done many times before, Jesus led his followers in the vicinity of Bethany to the Mount of Olives (**Acts 1:12**). Like the mount in Galilee, this was another place rich with sentimental meaning to Jesus and the apostles. The olive garden that overlooked the city and its walls had many times hosted the fellowship of believers as they came together to sing, pray, and talk. As was previously pointed out, this location was so frequented by the Lord and his disciples that Judas knew exactly where to lead those who wished to arrest Jesus. So in the garden where he was betrayed some six weeks prior, the risen Lord now met one last time with his faithful disciples. And what a fellowship this must have been. Joy and songs of praise now replaced the tears of pain and the grief that so dominated this group a few weeks ago.

This unassuming band of unschooled and ordinary men and women now listened on as Jesus extended blessings upon them. Indeed they were already blessed, for Jesus knew long before the disciples did that this was a unique time in the history of all world events. He had often tried to convince his followers of this, explaining to them, "*Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.*" (**Matthew 13:16-17**).

By now the disciples must have understood the magnitude of this great hour. For of all the generations to have ever lived, only one was blessed to witness the coming of the Messiah. All events in history prior to Jesus pointed to the time of God's advent in the flesh. All the former prophets and righteous men and women who had ever lived were serving but one purpose – to prepare the way of the Lord and to make ready a people for the time of his appearing (**1 Peter 1:10-12**). All events that have transpired since this time have pointed back to the time when the Savior of the world became a man and walked the earth among his people. The Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in

the earth visited the very works of his hands and laid down his life for it. And a handful of men and women were chosen and blessed to witness it and testify to the world.

After Jesus blessed his followers, he began to be lifted up before their very eyes. Their hearts must have pounded as they watched the Son of God en route to his proper position at the right hand of God (**Mark 16:19**). At some point, a cloud enveloped Jesus and they were no longer able to make out his form. They continued to stare into the sky in bewilderment and admiration, but their concentration was broken as two men dressed in white now stood among them. They spoke up as recorded in **Acts 1:11**, “*Men of Galilee,*” they said, “*why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*” These two men dressed here in white were possibly the same two messengers who informed the women of Christ’s resurrection in **Luke 24:4** and the same two seen by Mary Magdalene in **John 20:12**. Now they appeared at the Mount of Olives to reassure the disciples that indeed Jesus would one day return to the earth.

So the method of Jesus’ return to earth “*coming on the clouds of the sky*” that had been prophesied by Jesus (**Matthew 24:30, Matthew 26:64, Mark 13:26, Mark 14:62**) was now restated by the angels (**Acts 1:11**). The apostle Paul would recall Jesus’ prophecy and describe the nature of his return to the Gentiles in his letter to the church in Thessalonica (**1 Thess. 4:16-17**). Lastly, God illustrated Christ’s return in the clouds to the apostle John by revelation (**Rev. 1:7**). The Bible tells us that every eye will be able to see Lord when he makes his return to the earth in all his glory. He will gather up all the dead in Christ and then reclaim those on earth who are still alive and are awaiting his return.

For now, Jesus had returned to his rightful place in heaven. Furthermore, the disciples were exactly where God wanted them – on earth. So instead of looking up into the heavens for a sign from God, it was time to look around them at the harvest fields. Likewise, every Christian today ought to heed the question asked by the angels to the disciples at the time of Jesus’ ascension. Is it prudent for our eyes to be “*focused intently into the sky*” while a harvest of souls that God has prepared lies before us? Many within Christendom have become so consumed with their anticipation of the Lord’s return that they have lost sight of the lost. They are caught up in diligent study of biblical prophecies and scrutinize the book of Revelation to the blatant neglect of the message of salvation. Jesus couldn’t have spoken more clearly to this subject when he spoke to his disciples in **Mark 13:32** saying, “*No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” So with regards to the day of the Lord’s return, we are on a need to know basis. And according to Jesus, we don’t need to know!

In reality, Jesus had not left his disciples; he was now living inside them. Nevertheless, a new era had begun. The master was no longer physically present with his servants. But instead of giving in to their former doubts, the disciples made their way from the Mount of Olives back into Jerusalem full of great faith, hope, and vision. Just a few weeks ago, they were held up in a house with the doors locked day in and day out for fear of the Jews. They were timid. They moved about in secret and avoided being seen together in public. Now however, this group numbering around hundred and twenty believers descended together and went directly to the temple – the customary place of Jewish worship for more than ten centuries. They were no longer worried about the

Jewish leaders, elders or high priests – or even the Romans for that matter. Their worship of God was in full view of everyone, and their joy and confidence were surely noticed.

Epilogue

In little more than a week, Jerusalem would once again fill up with Jewish pilgrims coming to enjoy the Pentecost celebration. The promised Holy Spirit would come on the apostles and the kingdom of God would be revealed first to the Jews. The suffering and resurrection of Christ would be preached and the blame for his death would lie equally on all who heard their message. Although the Romans inflicted the fatal blows, Peter made it clear that all of us shared in the guilt. As **Isaiah 59:2-3** explains, “...*your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt.*” One cannot look upward to a crucified Jesus without looking downward at the blood on their own hands.

The Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of many on that day as they became aware that their long-awaited Messiah had come and had been brutally discarded. In a state of despair, many in the crowd at Pentecost asked Peter and the other brothers what could they do. Could the history books be rewritten? Could God ever forgive his people? Was the Lord Almighty soon to let loose his wrath on Israel and drive them further into repression? Would the Christ seek to avenge his death on those who carried it out and on those who handed him over?

To their surprise, mercy was extended instead of retribution. Peter offered a promise of God that has stood firm from that moment until now. Instead of punishment, God promised forgiveness. Instead of separation from God, they would be filled with the Spirit of God. This measure of God’s grace was almost too good to be true, and certainly too good to pass up. Upon their baptism into Jesus Christ, three thousand souls were born again, inherited the promised Holy Spirit, and received also the promise of forgiveness from all of their sins (**Acts 2:37-41**).

These first three thousand converts added to the number of faithful disciples that now comprised the kingdom of God on earth. Their story would likewise inspire our author, Luke, to pick up his pen again and embark on a second work. To Theophilus was addressed another well-researched and orderly account. This work would chronicle the early church and the generation that followed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beginning with the ascension, Luke recorded the divinely inspired exploits of the apostles and other disciples as they set out to fulfill the Great Commission. Jerusalem became the central hub of the movement, which became known simply as “The Way”. There does not appear to have been an official church planting until the unofficial sending out of disciples everywhere as a result of the martyrdom of Stephen (**Acts 8:1-4**).

Saul, a Pharisee who would become known as the apostle Paul, entered the scene less than a decade into the movement after several years of persecuting the Way (**Acts 9:1-2**). As he saw it, this was an offshoot Jewish sect racked with heresy. Yet Saul was God’s chosen instrument to deliver the good news of Jesus to the non-Jewish world. Luke and Paul would become close friends and partners in the Gospel. Again, it is supposed that Luke wrote the Gospel that bears his name while keeping company with Paul during his first imprisonment in Caesarea.

Paul also took the opportunity to write during this period, confirming Luke's presence with him. Paul wrote in **Col. 4:14**, "*Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings.*" In **Philemon :23-24** he again writes, "*Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.*" Paul was eventually transferred to Rome and in his final letter written before his own martyrdom, Paul tells Timothy, "Only Luke is with me." – **2 Tim. 4:11a**. Some of Paul's companions had been sent to the Gentile churches at Paul's request, while others had simply deserted him, and still others had shipwrecked their faith altogether.

The passages noted above are the only three references to Luke in the entire New Testament. He does not attach his name anywhere in his Gospel or in the book of Acts. Nevertheless, his authorship of those two works is rarely questioned. Luke was a loyal friend, the only one to stick with Paul throughout his series of imprisonments. For Paul, it must have been reassuring to have both a close friend and a doctor at his side during his times of mistreatment.

Though his precise homeland is still a guess, Luke is known to have spent considerable time in Antioch and met and joined Paul first in Troas. Many however believe his home to be Philippi, a city where he remained and ministered to while Paul continued on with his second missionary journey. They are finally joined together almost inseparably from the end of Paul's third missionary journey (**Acts 20:6**). They then spent a period of perhaps seven to eight years in alliance, as understood by the "we" reference through the end of the book of Acts. The two are together as they traveled to Jerusalem (**Acts 20:6-21:18**) and remain a team in en route to Rome (**Acts 27:1**). Luke was with Paul during the shipwreck of **Acts 27:42-28:2** as they continued to the city that would see Paul's end.

What a great partnership was formed between these two men. All the while the Holy Spirit was making good use of their confinement, inspiring them to draft more than half of the entire New Testament. Clement of Alexandria (195 AD) even attributes the book of Hebrews as a joint effort between Luke and Paul, showing a consistency in style to both writers.⁴⁸ Without a doubt, the works they left behind are invaluable to a world that must now rely solely on the Bible for the perfect message of salvation and true understanding of the promises of God.

Outside the realms of the scriptures, we have few if any verifiable facts with regards to Luke – his true homeland, his other ministry endeavors, and his death. Some have even suggested that Luke and Titus were physical brothers. They read "the brother" in **2 Cor. 8:18** and **2 Cor. 12:18** to correspond to the brother of Titus.⁴⁹ Luke never mentions Titus by name throughout the book of Acts as we might expect. But if they were brothers, this omission might be understood as the New Testament authors often humbly omitted reference to themselves. Perhaps Luke omitted both himself and Titus by name as a demonstration of such modesty, if indeed they were brothers.

With regards to his death, John Foxe⁵⁰ believed that ancient traditions depict Luke as having been "hanged on an olive tree, by the idolatrous priests of Greece." However,

⁴⁸ *Clement of Alexandria* (c. 195, E) 2.573; taken from *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, David Bercot, p. 410

⁴⁹ Refer to Souter's article in Hastings, *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*

⁵⁰ Excerpt taken from Chapter 1 of *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*; John Foxe

accounts of Luke dying of natural causes also exist. One epitaph holds, “He served the Lord without distraction, having neither wife nor children, and at the age of 84 he fell asleep in Boeotia, full of the Holy Spirit.” Still, early tradition lists Luke as one of the martyrs.

By the 2nd century AD, the apostle’s letters and the various Gospels were widely read in the public meetings of the Christians. Though more than four accounts of the life of Christ emerged, the four canonical Gospels soon became widely accepted and distributed over and above the rest. Within the 2nd century there emerged lists of the New Testament books that had received acceptance as Holy Scripture. Among these were the four Gospels. The writings of the Apocryphal Fathers (2nd and 3rd century AD) confirm the widespread use and acceptance of most of the New Testament books still used today. In 367 AD, Athanasius of Alexandria published a list of 27 New Testament books that match those recognized today as inspired scripture. The third Council of Carthage ratified these same 27 books in 397 AD.

No significant reservations have ever really been offered towards Luke’s Gospel or his record of the early church recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke remains the only non-Jew to have authored works that were accepted as scripture inspired by Holy Spirit. His gospel was widely circulated in the early church and has been preserved and protected by God throughout the ages, even unto this present day. Because of these words, we understand that Jesus was the image of the invisible God – that the Creator of heaven and earth became flesh and lived with his creation for a short time. And we are furthermore called to have faith in God and his appearing in Jesus our Lord so that we might have the hope of salvation and life everlasting. Amen.



The Messiah

A world unexpected, the word of the Lord rare
 A people straying and groping in darkness
 God once again drew near to show us he cares
 A town unexpected, a city quite small and obscure
 Beheld a child born in poverty
 To the harassed and helpless, God offered a cure
 A seat was left empty in heaven’s emerald sea
 The Almighty God had stooped down
 Becoming nothing, a human like you and me
 Whatever we as a world thought we needed
 A light had dawned, a Savior offered
 And for our souls he then pleaded

The Teacher

He started on a new canvas, a clean slate
 Ordinary men and women were soon to receive
 The way to life eternal, a narrow road, a small gate

He uttered the mysteries of the ages with every parable and story
 Truths so deep they baffled the learned
 While children reveled in their simplistic glory
 He welcomed the students whom the others neglected
 Into their hearts a new wine was poured
 So intense and straightforward, only a few would accept it
 And finally he commanded all men to weigh out the cost
 Hold on to this life and yield not your will
 Or forsake all things, loose your life, and carry the cross

The Revolutionary

A revolution began, its numbers quite small
 It emerged on great promises
 And a vision of heaven for all those God would call
 He united men and women behind his dream
 Though he shouted no rally cry
 Nor did he clench his fists or gnash his teeth
 He became a conqueror, the world was his field
 Though he had started no empire
 Nor had he taken up a spear or shield
 He was armed with but one weapon, one rod
 A double-edged sword from his mouth
 For he spoke the very words of God

The Martyr

But in time he seemed to make more enemies than friends
 His followers hoped their Lord would prevail
 Until the movement came to a most unexpected end
 Before the elders and priests he stood determined and strong
 While they accused and abused him
 And cried for his death, though he'd done nothing wrong
 To the Romans he was handed and thereafter dismissed
 A whipping was given, and a crown made of thorns
 Nails driven through his feet and wrists
 Three nights he lay dead, then came the third morn
 His disciples beheld their martyred Savior arisen
 And the movement lived on in the church of the Firstborn