



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

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INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR

The author of the book is John, whose surname was Mark, Acts 12:12 / Acts 12:25. Mark or Marcus was his Roman name, which gradually came to supersede his Jewish name, John. He is called John in Acts 13:5 / Acts 13:13, but he is called Mark in Acts 15:39 / 2 Timothy 4:11.

Dave Stotts says the following.

‘Papias, in the early 2nd century AD, wrote about a tradition from the late 1st century AD that Mark was the agent and scribe for Peter. Thus, one could say that the “author” of the Gospel was Peter, while the writer and publisher was Mark. The title ‘according to Mark’ is found on all of the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel. Thus, most scholars give Mark the ‘writer’s credit,’ with the understanding that Peter may have collected and composed the initial accounts. The period covered in Mark’s Gospel matches the period of Peter’s personal travels with Jesus, so this tradition clearly agrees with the textual evidence.’

He was the son of Mary, a woman apparently of some means and influence, and was probably born in Jerusalem, where his mother resided, Acts 12:12. Of his father, we know nothing, but we know he was a cousin of Barnabas, Colossians 4:10.

It was in his mother’s house that Peter found ‘many gathered together praying’ when he was released from prison, Acts 12:12, and it is probable that it was here that he was converted by Peter, who calls him his ‘son’, 1 Peter 5:13.

It is probable that the ‘young man’ spoken of in Mark 14:51-52 was Mark himself. He is first mentioned in Acts 12:25. He went with Paul and Barnabas on their first journey, about A.D. 47, as their ‘minister’, but because of some cause, turned back when they reached Perga in Pamphylia, Acts 12:25 / Acts 13:13.

Three years afterwards, a ‘sharp dispute’ arose between Paul and Barnabas because Paul would not take Mark with him, Acts 15:36-40. He, however, was evidently at length reconciled to the apostle, for he was with him in his first imprisonment at Rome, Colossians 4:10 / Philemon 23-24.

At a later period, he was with Peter in Babylon, 1 Peter 5:13. Then, and for some centuries afterwards, he occupied one of the chief seats of Jewish learning. He was with Timothy in Ephesus when Paul wrote to him during his second imprisonment, 2 Timothy 4:11. He then disappears from view.

HISTORY

History says Mark went to Egypt and was the ‘Founder of the Coptic Church’, for which Rome made him a ‘saint’. The name ‘Copts’ denotes the native Egyptians. Just as ‘Christians’ were as distinct from Muslims and other invaders and settlers, who entered the land.

There are many stories and traditions concerning Mark. One example is that he was martyred in 68 A.D., having been dragged through the streets of Alexandria, where his body was preserved until 828 A.D. In that year, it was smuggled out of the city by merchants from Venice to protect it from the Muslims who had captured Alexandria.

The merchants successfully hid the body under a layer of pork, which, of course, no Muslim would touch. It is still kept in a Venetian Cathedral, which is said to have been built on the site of the house in which the bones were originally kept. Mark's head is still revered in Alexandria.

THE BOOK

Some suggest that the four faces mentioned in **Ezekiel 1:10** and **Revelation 4:7** represent Jesus in the four Gospels.

Matthew represents the face of the lion, which implies Jesus' kingship. Jesus is from the line of Judah.

Mark represents the face of the ox, which implies the servant, service. The serving Jesus.

Luke represents the face of the man, which implies humanity. Jesus is the Son of Man.

John represents the face of the eagle, which implies Jesus' deity. Jesus is the Son of God.

Matthew was written for Jews, and he uses the words 'as it is written' throughout his Gospel. Note the genealogy goes back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, **Matthew 1:1-17**. His point is to remind the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah in fulfilment of the Jewish Law.

Luke was written for the Greeks, and he uses the term, 'Son of Man' throughout his Gospel. Notice his genealogy goes back to Adam; his point is that Jesus is for the whole world, **Luke 3:23-38**.

John is writing to those in Asia, and he uses the term 'Son of God' throughout his Gospel. His point is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ through signs, eight miracles and eight 'I AM' statements.

Mark is writing to the Romans, and he simply talks about what Jesus is doing and how busy He is, which is exactly what the Romans were doing, building roads, etc., they were busy people. It was intended primarily for Romans.

This appears probable when it is considered that it makes no reference to the Jewish law and that the writer takes care to interpret words that a Gentile would be likely to misunderstand, **Mark 3:17 / Mark 5:41 / Mark 7:11 / Mark 10:46 / Mark 14:36 / Mark 15:34**.

Mark also uses certain Latin words not found in any of the other Gospels, **Mark 6:27 / Mark 7:4 / Mark 7:8 / Mark 12:42 / Mark 15:39 / Mark 15:44-45**. He only quotes from the Old Testament twice, **Mark 1:2 / Mark 15:28**. Jewish usages are also explained, **Mark 7:3 / Mark 14:3 / Mark 14:12 / Mark 15:42**.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARK'S GOSPEL

1. The absence of the genealogy of our Lord.
2. Whom he represents as clothed with power, the 'lion of the tribe of Judah.'
3. Mark also records with wonderful precision.

1. The explanation of words, **Mark 3:17 / Mark 5:41 / Mark 7:11 / Mark 7:34 / Mark 14:36**
2. The position, **Mark 9:35**.
3. The gestures of our Lord, **Mark 3:5 / Mark 3:34 / Mark 5:32 / Mark 9:36 / Mark 10:16**.

HE IS ALSO CAREFUL TO RECORD THE FOLLOWING

1. Facts of people, Mark 1:29 / Mark 1:36 / Mark 3:6 / Mark 3:22.
2. Numbers, Mark 5:13 / Mark 6:7.
3. Places, Mark 2:13 / Mark 4:1/ Mark 7:31.
4. Times which the other evangelists omit, Mark 1:35 / Mark 2:1 / Mark 4:35.

The phrase ‘at once’ or ‘straightway’, as the KJV translates it, occurs nearly forty times in Mark’s Gospel, while in Luke’s Gospel, which is much longer, it is used only seven times, and in John’s Gospel, only four times. The word ‘immediately’ is used twelve times.

The leading principle running through this Gospel may be expressed in the motto, ‘Jesus came, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom,’ Mark 1:14. Out of a total of six-hundred and sixty-two verses, Mark has four-hundred and six in common with Matthew and Luke, one hundred and forty-five with Matthew, sixty with Luke, and at most fifty-one peculiarities to itself.

DATE

As to the time when it was written, the Gospel furnishes us with no definite information. Some suggest that it was written about A.D. 63. The place where it was written was probably Rome.

OUTLINE

Jesus Is The Son Of Man. Mark 1:1-13
 Jesus’ Ministry In Galilee Demonstrating His Authority. Mark 1:14-8:30
 Jesus’ Journey To Jerusalem Revealing His Mission. Mark 8:31-10:52
 Jesus’ Ministry In Jerusalem And His Suffering. Mark 11:1-15:47
 Jesus’ Resurrection. Mark 16:1-18
 Jesus’ Ascension. Mark 16:19
 The Disciples Continue With Jesus’ Ministry. Mark 16:20

THE TEXT

‘The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’— ‘a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ Mark 1:1-3

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

In the very first verse, Mark announced that he would write about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Mark 1:1. It’s surprising, therefore, that he did not start by telling about Jesus Himself; instead, he described the work of John the Baptist, Matthew 3:1-11 / Luke 3:2-16.

This was because John was to prepare the way for Jesus, **Malachi 3:1 / Isaiah 40:3 / Mark 1:2-3**. John fulfilled this mission by preaching to get people ready for the coming of the Lord.

Referring to the coming of the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah had also said, ‘The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His Temple’. **Isaiah 40:3**. And look who it is who’s coming and is to be announced! **Mark 1:2 / Malachi 3:1**. Four hundred years had passed since Malachi made that prediction. Four hundred years during which the Jews had been waiting for and looking for the coming of the Messiah.

But there had been four hundred years of silence. It was even longer, seven hundred years since Isaiah had spoken about the coming of ‘The Messenger’, but the time had now come, **Mark 1:3 / Isaiah 40:3**.

By the way, unless you look closely at Malachi’s prophecy, you will miss something which is most important, **Malachi 3:1**. The prophecy speaks of someone called ‘my messenger’, that is, God’s Messenger, but it also speaks of ‘the messenger of the covenant’.

Notice there are two people mentioned in **Malachi 3:1**, one is the Messenger who prepares the way, that is, John. In **Matthew 11:14**, Jesus tells us ‘HE, John, is Elijah who was to come!’ The other is the messenger for whom the way is prepared, who is the bearer of the New Covenant is Jesus.

Mark sums up the mission of John in one word, the word ‘prepare’, **Mark 1:2-3**, and he wants us to know that when John was unable to preach, Jesus moved into Galilee, John’s territory, and took up the preaching of the message Himself.

Luke sums up the mission of John with the same one word, the word ‘prepare!’ **Luke 3:3 / Luke 13:3 / Acts 3:19 / 2 Corinthians 7:10**. John has a message concerning the kingdom of God, **Isaiah 2:2-3 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 11:11 / Matthew 19:23**.

JOHN’S MIRACULOUS BIRTH

‘And so, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: ‘After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’ **Mark 1:4-8**

The story of the birth of the one who came to be known as John the Baptist gives signs of the greatness to come. John’s parents were an older couple named Zacharias and Elizabeth. They were both descended from the priestly family of Aaron, **Luke 1:5**.

The Bible says, ‘they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old,’ **Luke 1:7**. Then came the day when Zacharias, while burning incense at the temple, saw an angel, **Luke 1:11**. Zacharias was startled by the appearance of the angel, but perhaps he was even more surprised by what the angel told him. Elizabeth would bear a child in her old age! They would name him John, and he would be set apart for a special purpose, **Luke 1:13-17**.

Zacharias was shocked! **Luke 1:18**. Because Zacharias had doubted the angel’s words, Gabriel gave him a sign that he wouldn’t be able to talk until the birth of his son. Of course, the angel proved to be correct, and after nine months, the priest and his wife had a son, **Luke 1:57**.

There’s much more to this story, including the fact that Elizabeth and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were related and that in the womb John leapt for joy in recognition of Jesus, **Luke 1:41**. The birth of Jesus came about six months after John’s birth. God had performed a miracle and brought John into the world for a special purpose!

JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

John's message focused on two themes that will help us get ready to receive Christ.

1. He preached about repentance.

To repent means to decide to change, **Mark 1:4**. John was telling his hearers that they had to reverse their life's direction to get ready for Christ. Those unwilling to change could not come to Him.

John appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, **Mark 1:4**. People would come from all around to hear John preach, and after being convicted of their sinfulness, they would confess their sins and be baptised in the Jordan River, **Mark 1:5 / John 1:9-18 / John 3:23 / Luke 3:1-20**.

John's clothing and the food he ate, **Mark 1:5 / Leviticus 11:22**, demonstrated humility, self-sacrifice and self-denial, **2 Kings 1:8 / Matthew 3:4 / Matthew 17:9-13**. Interestingly, locusts are very nutritious and are sixty per cent protein compared to the twenty per cent protein content of chicken and beef.

This shows us he led a secluded and even rough life, perhaps because of a vow he had taken. We do know his father said he would not drink wine, which would indicate maybe he would take the Nazarite vow, **Luke 1:15 / Matthew 11:18**.

While it isn't necessary to live like that for everyone, there are a few characters in the Bible, such as Elijah, who live similarly. It's almost like a lifelong fast, ridding themselves of temptations of more luxurious living and practising self-control and discipline to focus on the Lord and the ministry that was given to them.

God had set John apart for a special mission; he was to preach about repentance and to baptise people in water. He was also to preach about the Kingdom of God and prepare a people for the Messiah's coming.

That is exactly what John did; instead of serving at the temple as a priest, he dressed in a camel's hair garment and a leather belt. He ate locusts and wild honey, **Mark 1:6 / Matthew 3:4**.

2. John declared the greatness of Jesus.

He said Jesus was so great that he himself was not even worthy to stoop down and untie His shoes, **Mark 1:7**. This was an amazing declaration because one does not have to have much worth to untie somebody's shoes.

In fact, in John's day, untying shoes was considered to be a slave's lowest duty. John wasn't worthy to be Jesus' humblest slave! So, for us to be ready to receive Jesus, we must repent, change our lives, and recognise His awesome greatness.

Crowds came to him, but he constantly told them that he was nothing, but the coming Messiah was everything, **Mark 1:7**. In the end, his life was cut short because he criticised a king for sinning, **Luke 3:19**. But John was given such high recognition by Jesus Himself in **Matthew 11:11**.

John came to prepare a people but not for the purpose that the people imagined! For centuries, they had prayed for His Coming. They believed that when the Messiah came, he would drive out the unclean Gentile Romans who were walking the holy streets of Jerusalem and establish a kingdom that would bring back the glorious days of Solomon.

The result was that when Jesus came, they failed to recognise Him, and they rejected Him, **John 1:10-12**. I know this shocks us. But perhaps we should not be too shocked because, after all, John himself did not recognise Jesus at first! Only when, at His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus did John realise who it was whom he had baptised! **John 1:31-33**. And even then, when he was in prison, he expresses a troublesome doubt when he sends two messengers to Jesus with a question, 'Are you truly the one who was to come, or should we look for someone else?' **Luke 7:20**.

John says that he baptises with water, but Jesus will baptise you with the Holy Spirit, **Mark 1:8**. The promise of Holy Spirit baptism is a reference to the apostles. The Saviour's testimony in **Acts 1:5** establishes this. It will hardly be denied that there is a connection between **Acts 1:5** and **Mark 1:8 / Matthew 3:11**.

The promise was fulfilled on Pentecost when the apostles received an 'overwhelming' measure of the Spirit's power, **Acts 2:1-5**. John's baptism, though it required repentance, **Mark 1:4**, looked forward to the coming of the One for whom John was a forerunner, Jesus.

Jesus had not yet died when John baptised people. It was a baptism of preparation, looking forward to Jesus' death, **Matthew 3:3**. This shows that John's baptism cannot be the baptism which Jesus commanded people to receive under the Gospel, **Mark 16:15-16 / Matthew 28:18-20**.

The baptism of the Gospel looks backwards to Jesus' death and resurrection as accomplished facts. We are baptised into His death, picturing His death, burial, and resurrection, **Romans 6:4 / Colossians 2:12**. Clearly, John's baptism cannot be Scripturally applied to anyone after Jesus' death.

THE BAPTISM AND TESTING OF JESUS

'At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. **Mark 1:9-13**

Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, **Mark 1:9 / Matthew 3:13-17 / Luke 3:21-22**.

DISTANCES IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Bethlehem to Jerusalem was six miles.

Bethlehem to Nazareth was ninety-one miles.

Nazareth to Jerusalem was sixty-five miles.

Jerusalem to Capernaum was eighty-five miles.

Nazareth to Capernaum was twenty miles.

Consider the places where Jesus had lived.

1. Joseph and Mary were both of the lineages of David; therefore, when the Romans called for a census, requiring citizens to return to 'their own city' to register, they travelled to Bethlehem, 'The City of David', where Jesus was born, **Luke 2:4**.

Bethlehem is only six miles south of Jerusalem, and therefore it was easy for the parents to take the child to the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfil the requirement of the Mosaic Law concerning circumcision.

2. They appear to have remained in Bethlehem for a short time until they were commanded by a heavenly messenger to take the child farther south into Egypt because Herod sought to kill Him, **Matthew 2:13-14**.

Herod's edict called for the deaths of all boys under two years of age, obviously thinking that the child whose death he sought would be included in this period.

3. How long the family remained in Egypt cannot be calculated, but what we do know is that Joseph received another divine command to return because Herod had died, **Matthew 20:20-23**. No specific instruction was given to Joseph relating to their destination. He was simply told to return to the land of Israel.

When he learned that the cruel Archelaus ruled in Judah in the place of his father, Joseph decided to avoid the Jerusalem area and travelled to Nazareth, an obscure and insignificant little village ninety-one miles from Bethlehem and sixty-five miles from Jerusalem.

Here, Jesus lived in obscurity until John the Baptizer began his ministry. We know virtually nothing about this period in the life of Nazareth, but it is most likely that, since Joseph was a carpenter, and the Mosaic law said that a father must teach his son a trade, Jesus worked at his father's bench in Nazareth.

Luke 2:42 records the only occasion when the veil is drawn aside to allow us to see Jesus at twelve years of age going up to Jerusalem for what I believe was a 'Bar Mitzvah'.

It was about thirty years later that He began His own ministry, and almost immediately left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum, which the scriptures describe as 'His own city,' **Matthew 9:2**. The question needs to be asked: Why did He move? The answer is simple: to fulfil prophecy, **Matthew 4:13-17**.

Just like thousands of others, Jesus came to John to be baptised, **Mark 1:9**. But as He emerged from the water, something startling occurred. The Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' **Mark 1:10-11**. God was showing His approval of Jesus in a dramatic way.

The Lord's baptism was an important event in His life. We need to understand that it wasn't something that He accepted casually; on the contrary, it was an act about which He had clearly given deep thought. How do we know this?

We know this because He made a special journey in order to be baptised. The Lord travelled 'from Galilee to Jordan' to John, for a specific purpose, namely, 'to be baptised by him,' **Mark 1:9 / Matthew 3:13-17**.

This means that His baptism was an event that He obviously regarded as of deep significance. Indeed, it isn't too much to say that His baptism was only equalled in its importance by His later Transfiguration.

Matthew reveals that when Jesus took Peter, James and John 'apart' to the high mountain, this, too, was a deliberate and purposeful act. He had chosen these three apostles to become the witnesses of a very special event, as He was 'transfigured before them', **Matthew 17:2**.

They were meant to hear the Voice which said, 'this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, Hear Him' and, as we know, this was the Voice which, at His baptism, had said, 'this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' **Matthew 13:17 / Matthew 17:5 / John 12:28-30**.

The timing of the Lord's baptism was deliberate. Luke tells us that it was after 'all the people' had been baptised that Jesus came to John to be baptised, **Luke 3:21**. John had come as the 'forerunner' of the Messiah, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, **Luke 1:7**.

His task was 'to make ready a people prepared for the Lord', **Mark 1:2-3**, and the baptism of Jesus marked the culmination of John's own ministry, and he was able to say, 'this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, and I must decrease,' **John 3:30**.

Its special message to John the baptiser. In a lesser sense, the baptism of Jesus also carried a more personal significance for John the Baptizer because it was the manner in which the identity of the Messiah was revealed to him, **John 1:33**.

Jesus wasn't a stranger to John; he already knew Jesus as a relative because of the relationship that existed between their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, **Luke 1:36**, and he was aware of the sinless character of Jesus.

How otherwise, when Jesus asked to be baptised, could John have said, ‘I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?’ **Matthew 3:14**. This surely indicates prior acquaintance. My own view is that this, from John, wasn’t so much a question as an exclamation of surprise, of amazement!

That one whom he knew to be so holy should request to be baptised by him. But, although John knew Jesus, he didn’t know Him as the Messiah, until the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism, **Mark 1:10 / Luke 3:22 / John 1:32-34**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the ‘dove’, **Mark 1:10**.

1. The dove was a ‘clean’ creature under the ceremonial laws of the Jews.
2. It was used in their religious sacrifices, two, in fact, being offered upon the presentation of our Lord in the temple, **Luke 2:24**.
3. It is a monogamous creature!
4. It is a symbol of peace.
5. It is a marvel of gentleness, love, and affection.
6. It is a messenger; the homing pigeon is a dove.
7. The dove has no gall, suggesting that there is no bitterness in the service of God.

WHAT IS MEANT BY TO FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Although He lived as a Jew, faithful to the Mosaic law and all its requirements, Jesus wasn’t baptised ‘to fulfil the Law’, because baptism wasn’t commanded by the Law of Moses.

When John issued the call to his fellow Jews to ‘repent and be baptised’, this message was unique in Jewish history, and it was this new message that brought about the confrontation between Jesus and the chief priests and elders, **Matthew 21:24-27**.

This passage tells us that Jesus challenged the religious leaders to say where John’s baptism originated. Was it from heaven, or from men? But of course, had there been prior provision in the Law of Moses for such a baptism as John’s, the discussion would not even have taken place. It was this very uniqueness of John’s baptism that was the cause of the debate.

The Jewish religious leaders didn’t accept John’s baptism because it wasn’t a requirement imposed by the Mosaic Law, and, therefore, they refused to submit to it. They were probably contemptuous of those who were influenced by John and regarded them as ignorant and foolish.

As for it being ‘from God’, the religious leaders couldn’t accept the baptism commanded by John as a new revelation from God, because it hadn’t come through themselves. After all, they were the authorities who determined what was permissible in Judaism!

They were the arbiters of true and false revelations! And, again, these priests, scribes and Pharisees would have argued that they, as ‘children of Abraham’ and members of a nation that was in a covenant relationship with God, didn’t need baptism, **Matthew 3:7-9**.

They believed in the ritual washing of both their persons and their possessions, as Mark explains, **Mark 7:3-4**. They saw baptism as a rite intended only for non-Jews who wished to become proselytes of their religion. The strict rule was that any male Gentile who wished to embrace the Jewish faith must undergo the first circumcision, then be baptised and then offer sacrifice, whilst the law for a female declared that she must first be baptised and then offer sacrifice.

This is because the act of baptism was regarded as the means of cleansing from the old, ‘heathen’ life and its sins, and the beginning of a new life in the Jewish faith. The converts were then said to be received, ‘under the wings of the Divine Presence’, the expression that was used to describe proselytism.

These rules meant that no devout Jew would have considered himself a subject for repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, **Luke 3:1**. For this reason, John’s message fell on the ears of the people as both utterly new and startling.

In the light of the discussion between Jesus and the Jews on the subject of John’s baptism, we have to say that ‘to fulfil all righteousness’ means ‘to do everything commanded by God’, because the Lord made it clear that John’s baptism was commanded by God.

WHY WAS JESUS BAPTISED?

This is an interesting question because many people have come up with all kinds of theories and explanations over the years to try to explain why Jesus was baptised. Jesus wasn’t baptised to please his mother.

There is an ancient document known as ‘the Gospel of the Nazarene’, sometimes called ‘The Gospel of the Hebrews’, but never regarded by the early Christians as divinely inspired, which claims that Mary and His brothers said to Jesus, ‘Behold, John the Baptist baptises to the remission of sins. Let us go and be baptised by him. Jesus replied, ‘How have I sinned that I should go and be baptised by him? Perchance this very thing that I have said is ignorance.’

The story continues to claim that Jesus was compelled, unwillingly, by Mary to go to John to be baptised. Is it any wonder that the early Christians rejected a document that heard such unlikely tales?

Jesus wasn’t baptised for the forgiveness of sins, **2 Corinthians 5:21**. Unlike the multitudes who flocked to John from all quarters, confessing their sins, Jesus had no sins to confess, **Hebrews 4:15**. Jesus was baptised to mark the commencement of his own ministry.

As the ministry of John ended, the ministry of Jesus began. After recording the descent of the Spirit and the message of the heavenly voice, **Mark 1:10-11**, **Luke 3:23**, reveals that after His baptism, at about thirty years of age, Jesus commenced His own public ministry.

As a boy, in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus had revealed that He was aware of having a mission to fulfil, **Luke 2:47**, and through many years had waited for the moment to arrive when His work should commence.

The ‘forerunner’ had come as promised by the Scriptures, **Mark 1:2-3** / **Matthew 11:10**, with a message which had disturbed, convicted and prepared the people for the coming of the longed-for Messiah. They were ready, and Jesus knew that His time had arrived.

When He asked John to baptise Him, John had protested, but Jesus had insisted, ‘let it be so now’, **Matthew 3:15**. The ‘now’ is emphatic and it means ‘at this time’. Therefore, the baptism of Jesus was both an act of identification with the repentant people whom He had come to save and an act of commitment to the task the Father had laid on Him, **John 1:11-12**.

Just as Christ received the Holy Spirit to mark the beginning of His ministry, **Mark 1:10**, as Christians, we too, at our baptism, receive the Holy Spirit to mark the beginning of our ministry for Him, **Acts 2:38**.

Then Jesus entered the wilderness where the devil tempted Him, **Mark 1:12-13**. In the temptation of Christ, we see the devil tempting Christ in various ways, with various things, but the good news is Christ resisted all those temptations, **Hebrews 4:15**. We must remember that this event wasn't the only time Christ was tempted, **Luke 4:13 / Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:39 / Hebrews 2:18**.

TEMPTATION

The English dictionary defines the word temptation as 'the desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise.' Easton's Bible Dictionary defines the word temptation as 'solicitation to that which is evil'.

What the English dictionary calls something 'wrong' or 'unwise', the Bible calls 'evil'. Let's be clear here, the temptation is powerful enough to lead us into sin.

TEMPTATION AND TEST

We should note there is a difference between the word 'temptation' and the word 'test'. Satan is the tempter, not God, **Genesis 3:1-6 / Matthew 4:1-11 / James 1:13**.

He tempts us to sin and lures us away from God and to bring out the worst in us, but testing is done by God, to draw us closer to Him and to bring out the best in us, **Genesis 21:1 / Genesis 22:16-18 / James 1:2-4**.

The Greek word for tempt, 'peirazo', is the same Greek word for test, but we can understand the difference when we look at the context and what the motivation is.

Satan 'tempted' Jesus in order to draw Him away from the Father, but God allowed Jesus to be 'tested' in order to allow Jesus to exercise His free will. His choice was to follow His Father's will or follow Satan's will.

While Matthew and Luke provide more specific information about the temptations, **Matthew 4:1-11 / Luke 4:1-13**, Mark's brief account shows two things.

1. Jesus experienced temptation as all men do.
2. Doing what pleases God, as Jesus did when He was baptized, does not exempt one from temptation. Satan often intensifies his efforts when a person begins to serve God.

After the temptations, Jesus commands the devil to go away and he obeys, **Matthew 4:11**, but this wasn't to be for long, he would come at Jesus again very soon, **Luke 4:13 / John 14:30**.

As the devil leaves, angels come to attend to Jesus, they came to attend to His physical needs after fasting for forty days and nights, **Mark 1:13 / Matthew 4:11 / Hebrews 1:14**.

JESUS ANNOUNCES THE GOOD NEWS

‘After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’ Mark 1:14-15

After John was put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee to proclaim the good news, Mark 1:14-15 / Matthew 4:18-22 / Luke 5:2-11 / John 1:35-42. The time was fulfilled to redeem those who lived under the curse of the law, Galatians 4:4-5.

This was the time of the fulfilment of all prophecies concerning God’s work to bring the Redeemer into the world, Genesis 3:15 / Luke 24:44 / Daniel 9:24-27. This was the time for the establishment of the new covenant, Jeremiah 31:31-34. It was the end of national Israel, for Israel had accomplished her purpose.

The purpose for the existence of national Israel was to preserve the seed line of woman in order to bring the Seed of woman, the Christ, into the world for the redemption of all men, Genesis 3:15 / Galatians 3:16.

The phrase ‘Kingdom of God’, Mark 1:15, is one of Mark’s key phrases in reference to the kingdom’s reign. It emphasises the sovereignty of God that originates from heaven.

Matthew uses the phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’, whereas Mark emphasises the original source of the kingdom’s reign. He thus uses the phrase ‘kingdom of God.’ Throughout His ministry, Jesus used both phrases interchangeably in reference to the sovereignty of God that originates from heaven.

Jesus says, ‘Repent and believe in the good news’, Mark 1:15. Israel was to turn to the message that Jesus preached. All men were to prepare their hearts for His ascension to the throne of God, Matthew 3:2.

Jesus’ call was that people turn to Him in order to believe that He was the Christ and Son of God, John 20:30-31.

Unless a person repents, they will not respond to the death of Jesus on the cross, nor will they believe the good news of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

With these messages of repentance by Jesus and the early disciples, we must always keep in mind the coming destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70. The Jews’ repentance not only meant that they would be delivered from their condemnation in sin, but also from the national calamity that was about to befall Israel. Since Jesus was the Messiah, the fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the consummation of Israel was ‘at hand’.

The Jews, therefore, must turn to Jesus as the Messiah and thus turn away from that which was coming to an end.

Their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, therefore, in many cases meant the saving of their own lives as they stayed away from Jerusalem in A.D. 70 when over one million Jews were killed in the destruction of Jerusalem.

JESUS CALLS HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

‘As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once, they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James, son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.’ Mark 1:16-20

As Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, He saw two of His friends, Peter and Andrew, who were professional fishermen, Mark 1:16. He asked them to follow Him and become fishers of men, Mark 1:17 / Matthew 4:18-22 / Luke 5:2-11 / John 1:40-42.

At once, they quit their jobs and began following Christ, Mark 1:18. He next found James and John and requested that they do the same, Mark 1:19-20. With no hesitation, they left not only their occupation but also their father and began to accompany the Lord.

These men recognised Jesus' greatness. He was the one whose shoes John was unworthy to untie, **Mark 1:7**. God had specially acknowledged Him by His own voice from heaven, **Mark 1:9-11**. So, when Jesus demanded radical action, to drop everything and follow Him, they responded immediately.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE CALLING

The apostle John records who the first five people were called to follow Jesus. John and Andrew were the initial two people called to be disciples by Christ, **John 1:35-39**.

Then came Peter, also called Simon or Simon Peter, **John 1:40-42**, followed by Philip, **John 1:43-44**, and then Nathanael, Bartholomew, **John 1:45**. The book of Matthew then records that James, a son of Zebedee and brother of John, was called, **Matthew 4:21-22**, followed by Matthew's own calling, **Matthew 9:9**.

THE RABBI DISCIPLE SYSTEM

Every young Jewish boy grew up wanting to be a rabbi, and every young Jewish boy and girl would at least go to an elementary school called Bet Sefer, that is, 'House of the Book'. Their job was to memorise the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

And the best of the best would be able to graduate and go on to the next school of learning, a type of secondary school called Bet Talmud, or 'House of Learning', and their job was to memorise the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

From there, the best of the best of that group would be allowed to apply to Bet Midrash, or 'House of Seeking', which was a type of school for would-be rabbis. A student would find a rabbi that he respected, someone that he wanted to be like, and he would say to that rabbi, 'Rabbi, I want to follow you.'

Now the rabbi's job was to question the would-be disciple to seek to determine, not whether or not he knew the Scriptures, but whether or not he could imitate his teachings, become like him, and pass on his way of life. And if the student could answer the rabbi's questions to his liking, then he would say to his student, 'Come follow me.'

And these are the words that every student longed to hear. And he would leave behind his family, his job, his vocation, and he would go and become a disciple of that rabbi.

Now, if the student didn't quite make the cut, the rabbi would say, 'Ah, my son, you know the Torah, you know the teaching well, but I'm afraid that you cannot be my disciple, go home, make babies, and pray that they become rabbis.'

The very fact that these men were fishermen shows that they were not the best of the best, and they did not make the cut, and so when Jesus, a respected teacher of the law, a teacher of God's Word, comes along and says, 'Come follow me', they could hardly believe it, and so they leave everything behind. Jesus was inviting them to become like Him.

Note the characteristics of followers of Jesus, **Mark 1:14-20** / **Matthew 4:18-22** / **Luke 5:1-11** / **John 1:35-42**. These fishermen demonstrated the meaning of discipleship. When Jesus called, they did the following.

1. Acted immediately.
2. Left both job and family.

3. Started following Him.

Christ calls today through His Word, and when we perceive His greatness, we too will do the following.

1. Obey immediately all He says.
2. Put Him ahead of everything, including our job and family.
3. Follow Him, allowing His example to direct every step.

People, who know that Jesus wants them to change, but put it off, are not like these four fishermen.

SIMON PETER

Peter was a Galilean fisherman who lived on the shores of the Sea of Galilee with his wife, his brother Andrew and his mother-in-law. People at the time worked as a family unit, so the men and women of Peter's family worked together to catch and preserve, dry fish for export to the surrounding towns. This particular family was probably in partnership with Zebedee and his sons, James and John, **Matthew 4:21**.

Like his father and brother Andrew, Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade, working on the Lake of Galilee. His family seems to have been caught up in the revival movement led by John the Baptist. Peter met Jesus at Bethany through his brother Andrew and was immediately impressed.

Jesus called him 'Peter', the rock, an odd choice of name since Peter seems to have been passionate and impulsive rather than rock-like. Jesus actually called Peter 'Cephas', which is the Aramaic equivalent of 'Petros', a rock, **John 1:40-42**.

ANDREW

The name Andrew is a Greek name which means 'manly' or 'of valour.' Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter and the son of Jonah. He was born in Bethsaida in the province of Galilee and was a fisherman like his brother Peter.

Before he met Jesus, Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. However, when John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, he realised that Jesus was greater and immediately left John, found his brother Peter and became a disciple of Jesus, **John 1:25-42**. After this, Andrew and Peter continued to be fishermen and lived at home until being called permanently by Jesus to be 'fishers of men,' **Matthew 4:18-20**.

Later, Jesus is teaching the multitudes on the mountainside, and he asks Philip where they could find food to feed the crowd, and Philip says, 'eight months' wages could not buy enough bread' to feed them.

It was Andrew who brought the boy with five barley loaves and two fish to Jesus, who miraculously multiplies into enough food to feed everyone, **John 6:8-9**.

And it was Andrew who, during the Passover Feast, brought a group of Greeks, Gentiles, to meet Jesus, which prompts Jesus to remark, 'when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to myself,' **John 12:20-32**.

Andrew knew that Jesus came not only to save Israel but also everyone on the earth. The last time Andrew is mentioned in the Bible is in Acts chapter one, where he is listed as one of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and His ascension into Heaven, **Acts 1:13**.

JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE

The apostle James was honoured with a favoured position by Jesus Christ, as one of three men in his inner circle. The others were James' brother John and Simon Peter. When Jesus called the brothers, James and John were fishermen with their father Zebedee on the Sea of Galilee.

They immediately left their father and their business to follow the young rabbi. James was probably the older of the two brothers because he was always mentioned first.

Three times, James, John, and Peter were invited by Jesus to witness events no one else saw: the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead, **Mark 5:37-47**, the transfiguration, **Matthew 17:1-3**, and Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, **Matthew 26:36-37**.

But James wasn't above making mistakes. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, he and John wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the place; this earned them the nickname 'Boanerges,' or 'sons of thunder,' **Mark 3:17**.

The mother of James and John also overstepped her bounds, asking Jesus to grant her sons special positions in his kingdom. **Matthew 20:20**. James' zeal for Jesus resulted in his being the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred. He was killed with the sword on the order of King Herod Agrippa I of Judea, about 44 A.D., in a general persecution of the early church. **Acts 12:1-2**.

JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE

John was the brother of the apostle James, and he was also the son of Zebedee, a fisherman of Galilee. His mother's name was Salome, who is believed to be a sister of Jesus' mother, Mary.

John, his brother James and the apostles Peter and Andrew were all partners in a fishing business prior to their calls by Jesus to follow Him; Zebedee was also a partner.

It is said that John owned a home in Jerusalem and that it's possible that the interview Nicodemus had with Jesus was held there. John, with his brother James, wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the place; this earned them the nickname 'Boanerges,' or 'sons of thunder,' **Mark 3:17**

The apostle John rose to a position of influence within worldwide Christianity, and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., he moved to Ephesus.

He became the elder of the church in Ephesus and had a special relationship with other churches in the area, as we know from the letters to the Seven Churches in Asia, in the Book of Revelation.

John's brother, James, was the first of the apostles to die; on the other hand, John was the last. All of the apostles met a violent death; however, John died peacefully in Ephesus, at an advanced age, around the year 100 AD.

There is a church tradition which says that while John was living in Ephesus, he had with him Mary, the mother of Jesus, for a few years. While in Ephesus, by order of the Roman emperor Domitian, John was exiled to an island called Patmos.

In what is known as the cave of the Apocalypse, located on this island, the sacred text of the Book of Revelation was given to the apostle John by Jesus. It is here that John recorded what is written in the New Testament Book of Revelation.

Other New Testament books accredited to John are the Gospel of John, along with 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. When he was released from exile, he returned to Ephesus and lived till the time of the Roman emperor Trajan.

It's said that John, who founded and built churches throughout all of Asia, and worn out by old age, died at the age of sixty-eight years after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city, Ephesus.

What does Jesus' choosing of Peter, Andrew, James and John tell us about the character of a person who can take Jesus to the world? They all had their strengths and weaknesses; they were ordinary people who weren't highly educated.

Jesus later calls Philip and Nathanael, also named Bartholomew, **John 1:43-51**. Matthew, also called Levi, **Matthew 9:9-13 / Mark 2:14-17 / Luke 5:27-32**. Thomas, James, son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus or possibly named Jude, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, **Mark 3:16-19 / Luke 6:13-16**. When we reflect upon the apostles, we need to remember that Jesus can use anyone for His purposes.

JESUS DRIVES OUT AN IMPURE SPIRIT

‘They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.’
Mark 1:21-22

CAPERNAUM

For most of Jesus' ministry, He lived among fishermen and went back and forth from Capernaum, **Mark 1:22**. The Sea of Galilee wasn't a sea but a lake and also called Gennesaret, Chinoreth Tiberius, because it was shaped like a harp; it was one of several fishing towns and villages.

Capernaum's population is believed to have been less than two-thousand and had one long street on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. It had a fish market, the location of which has been discovered. Josephus records that, at one time, two hundred and thirty fishing boats worked on the Sea of Galilee.

Though small, it was important because of its location near the main highway running from Egypt in the South to the northern provinces of the Roman Empire. It also had a tax office, **Matthew 9:9**, where taxes were collected for both the occupying Romans and Herod, who ruled over Galilee.

You might imagine that Capernaum was a famous, large, ancient city, but it was not. Even though the name, Capernaum, means 'city of Nahum', it had nothing to do with the prophet Nahum, who lived about 740 BC, because it was only established about two-hundred years before the birth of Jesus, and, consequently. It is never mentioned in the Old Testament.

However, even in these troubled times, Capernaum remains one of the most popular tourist attractions in Israel, because of its many associations with Jesus, who made His home there, **Matthew 4:13**.

Matthew also tells us that it was 'His home town', **Matthew 9:1**, and points out that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy made by the prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 9:1-2**.

There are too many things that happened in and around Capernaum to mention them all, because most of the events concerning the Lord's ministry, recorded in the first nine chapters of Mark's account, occurred in and around Capernaum. Not only is it where Jesus made His home, but it is also where He did the following.

1. Where He called His first four disciples. Peter, James, John, Andrew, **Mark 1:16-20**.
2. Where He called Matthew, the tax collector, **Mark 2:14**.
3. Where Peter's House was situated, **Mark 1:29-31**.
4. Where He called His Twelve Apostles, **Mark 3:13-19**.
5. Where He healed Peter's mother-in-Law, **Mark 1:29-31**.
6. Where He taught in the Synagogue, **Mark 1:21**.
7. Nearby is where it is believed that He delivered the Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 5-7**.
8. Where He fed the five-thousand, **Mark 6:30-44**.
9. And also where many miracles occurred, **Mark 1:21-28**.

THE SYNAGOGUE

Jesus went into the 'Synagogue', **Mark 1:21**, indicating that at this time, Capernaum had only one synagogue, so we may be quite sure which synagogue is meant. In **Luke 7:5**, we hear the people of Capernaum speaking about 'our synagogue.'

They state that it had been built for them by a Roman Centurion, and it seems reasonable to conclude that the revelation in Mark's account that the synagogue was given to the town by a benevolent Roman soldier reveals that it was originally written for Roman readers.

Archaeologists are fairly certain that the ruins which may still be seen in the town are not those of the original synagogue in which Jesus entered and preached, but are the remains of a second-century building that had later been built on the same spot.

It's necessary to first consider how and why the Synagogue came into existence, and the first thing that must be noted is that there is no mention of it in the Old Testament and nothing which suggests that God commanded its institution.

The only verse in the Old Testament in which the English word 'synagogue' occurs is **Psalms 74:8**, in the 'Authorised Version' 1611, where it is the rendering of the Hebrew word 'moed', and simply means 'meeting place' or 'assembly.' **Psalms 74:8**.

Later versions invariably and correctly translate it that way, because it's absolutely certain that its use in the Psalm doesn't relate to the 'synagogue' which appeared in later times. After all, the word 'synagogue' is a transliteration of the Greek word 'sunagoge'.

However, it shouldn't surprise us, when we consider how important the Synagogue system became to Judaism, that later Jewish historians such as Josephus and Philo claimed to trace the Synagogue's origin back to the time of Moses. But there is no evidence whatsoever to support this idea, and scholars outside of Judaism give it no credence.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SYNAGOGUE

Was the synagogue ‘an expedient’ to meet a particular need? The period in Jewish history, over five-hundred years before the birth of Christ, when the Kingdom of Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, because it was the Babylonian captivity, which gave rise to the synagogue.

The policy frequently adopted by empires such as those of Assyria and Babylon, in their treatment of the nations whom they defeated, was one of ‘assimilation’. It was a policy designed to destroy the national identity of the captives by dispersing them throughout the empire. The Jews in Babylon, however, effectively countered this move by establishing assemblies, which later developed into the institution known as the Synagogue.

Since they could no longer meet the requirements of the Mosaic law, which decreed that priestly worship should be carried out in the Temple in Jerusalem, a temple which, in any case, had been destroyed, it became necessary to devise some other means of keeping both their race and religion pure and alive whilst they were in captivity. For that purpose, these assemblies were established.

This means that we may accurately describe the Synagogue as ‘a man-made expedient’, for that is exactly what it was. But it served several significant purposes.

1. The Synagogue maintained the Jewish national consciousness and became the social centre for the life of the captives, so that even in captivity, they never forgot that they were Jews.
2. It promoted a renewed interest in and respect for the Scriptures and became the place where the collective study of the word of God was conducted.
3. Because it was no longer possible to observe the feasts, fasts and sacrifices prescribed by the Law, there being neither priesthood nor temple, the synagogue also became a place for communal prayer.

So effectively did this ‘expedient’ work that when the people returned to their homeland, they took it with them and developed it, so that with the passing of time, the Synagogue was accepted as a uniquely Jewish ‘institution’, and the Synagogue services became more formal and ritualistic.

As for the buildings in which the services were held, these varied in grandeur and style according to the congregation’s size and affluence. Externally, the buildings weren’t usually impressive, because in the Middle Ages, the height of synagogues was restricted by law; a manifestation of the anti-Semitism which was fairly common in those days.

But, whatever physical differences there may have been between the buildings themselves, there were certain items of furniture which came to be common to all of them and which can be identified to this day.

Since the Middle Ages, the sacred scrolls containing the Law have been housed in the ‘Ark’, a kind of cupboard or chest, which is always located on the wall which faces Jerusalem.

In front of this ‘Ark’, there is the ‘Perpetual Light’, symbolising the constant Presence of God, and which is said to remind the congregation of the fire on the altar which, in the days of the tabernacle and the temple, was never allowed to go out.

There is also the ‘Bimah’, a raised platform on which stands a reading desk from which prayers are led, the Scriptures read, and announcements are made. This used to be situated at one end of the Synagogue, but these days it is usually placed in the centre of the building.

Incidentally, one may be forgiven for supposing that those who attend the Synagogue have no problem in allowing their left hand to know what their right-hand does!

According to one rabbi, the Bimah is also the place where ‘acts of benevolence are made, in the form of donations, which those who are called up to the Reading of the Law want to make’!

THE MODERN SYNAGOGUE

If anything, therefore, over the centuries, the Synagogue has become even more important in Jewish life. Modern Jewish leaders teach that it is surpassed in importance only by the home, and, like the home, it serves as ‘a training ground in Holiness’.

Regardless of what changes it has undergone since the days of the Babylonian captivity, the purposes it serves are still essentially the same. It remains as follows.

1. A place for the study of the Scriptures.
2. A place for Worship.
3. A Centre of Social Life.

These three functions have come to be described as:

1. Torah, the study of the Law of God.

I think that it is a fact not generally understood by Christians, amongst whom the private study of the Word is encouraged, that Judaism actually discourages private or individual study.

It prefers communal study and regards knowledge gained in the synagogue, where different views and opinions are expressed, as the proper method of arriving at a true understanding of the Scriptures.

2. Abodah or Worship.

Here, again, Judaism stresses the communal nature of worship and displays what can only be described as a ‘negative attitude’ towards private worship, or what it calls ‘worship in isolation’.

3. Gemiluth Chasidim.

This is the term that describes the practice of Benevolence and good deeds, and for this aspect of Jewish life, the synagogue is also considered to be the ideal place.

The Jews describe this as ‘social service’ because the Synagogue has become the place where their leaders meet together to make decisions affecting the life of their community and where benevolence is dispensed.

So, we see that an ‘expedient’ which was devised in a time of national distress, eventually became an important institution in Judaism. Let us now think about that word, ‘expedient’. We must remember that although the word doesn’t occur in the Scripture, we shouldn’t confuse it with such words as ‘un-scriptural’ or ‘anti-scriptural’.

‘Expedient’ simply means ‘beneficial, advantageous or useful’, and, for this reason, there is nothing wrong with the proper use of an ‘expedient’. If anything is adopted which isn’t in harmony with the Scriptures, it cannot be said to be ‘beneficial’ or ‘advantageous’, and therefore it cannot properly be called an ‘expedient’.

As for the Lord Himself ‘endorsing by presence, in the Synagogue, a man-made expedient’, and there is no doubt that he did so regularly, **Luke 4:16**. We have to remember that nothing that was done in the Synagogue could be condemned as a violation of the Law of God.

Since the Law commanded worship, benevolence and obedience to God's Word, it could be argued that the Synagogue encouraged and assisted the Jews to understand and obey the Law. For this reason, the Lord Jesus would have no objection to it.

Notice also the language which Mark uses in **Mark 1:21**. Notice, particularly, the number of times He uses the word 'immediately' KJV. It occurs ten times. Mark aims to show Jesus to be a man of action, a man who acted decisively and positively. As soon as He arrived in Capernaum, He entered the synagogue and began to teach, **Mark 1:21**, and, furthermore, His discourse was of some length.

It was not a friendly chat or comment, or casual exchange of views. It was a full-length discourse! This is shown by the words of His teaching and the description of its effect on the people recorded in **Mark 1:22**. 'His teaching' is accurately rendered as 'His doctrine', which reveals that it was a formal presentation. We are not told precisely what His teaching was.

Mark is more concerned that we should know its effect on the people who heard it. They were 'amazed', **Mark 1:22**, the word 'explesso', tells us that the listeners were not just temporarily filled with amazement but quickly passed away. It did not leave merely a fleeting impression.

What Jesus said had a strong and lasting effect on them. Why? Because His teaching was with authority, 'exousio', which means 'to be out'. It describes authority that has been given to the speaker by someone else.

The one who GIVES the authority is, so to speak. Bear in mind the fact that, at this stage, the people were unaware of the identity of the one speaking to them, or that it was because of His identity that He possessed the authority to speak as He did! All that they felt at that time was that what he said had a ring of authority that was lacking in what they heard from their scribes.

Let me emphasise this! The authority with which He taught struck them with amazement. They received a shock! The word is in the 'imperfect tense', which means the shock stayed with them!

Their Rabbis and other teachers just quoted the scriptures and then quoted each other's opinions or referred to 'tradition'. A Rabbi would say, 'Rabbi Ben so and so says that this verse means whatever he believes, but Rabbi Ben so and so says and believes this.'

These men never spoke with authority. Jesus was different. He did not collect different views and opinions and traditions and offer them to the people as possible alternatives for them to consider and sort out for themselves. He had authority.

Therefore, to hear Jesus speak was an entirely new experience, and they said, 'Never has a man spoken like this Man,' and His contrast was so stark that they even said, 'He speaks as one who has authority, and not as the scribes!' **Matthew 7:28-29**.

"Just then, a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!' 'Be quiet!' said Jesus sternly. 'Come out of him!' The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.' **Mark 1:23-26**

There was demon possessed man who was in the synagogue, **Mark 1:23**. The word 'us', **Mark 1:24**, suggests there was more than one evil spirit. They asked Jesus what they wanted from them, whether He was going to destroy them. The demon or demons testified that Jesus was holy and pure, **Mark 1:24**.

Notice, He cast out a demon, **Mark 1:25**. How? By His words! Nothing more, **Luke 4:31-37**. When Jesus merely said, 'Be quiet and come out of him,' **Mark 1:25**, the demon left the man, **Mark 1:26**. His words had authority even over demons.

The calmness with which Jesus expelled demons reflected His power. He never argued or struggled or created a scene. He simply ordered the demons to leave, and they left. No wonder people were amazed, **Mark 1:27**. He had demonstrated the credentials to prove His authority.

In every area, authority is essential. To determine distance, it is necessary to have a yardstick or standard of measure by which to calculate length. Thus, if someone wishes to know how long a room is, he measures it.

There is no other way to know for sure. God has provided a yardstick in religion, Jesus and His words. When we wish to know whether something is right or wrong, we should evaluate it by the standard of the Scriptures. This should be done with every teacher and teaching.

Therefore, you need to have a Bible at your side while you are studying, and continually refer to it to be sure that what is taught in these lessons is true. The Bible is our measuring rod.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN JESUS' MIRACLES AND SO-CALLED MODERN-DAY MIRACLES

1. In the miracles of Jesus, the result was immediate, **Matthew 8:3 / Matthew 8:15**.
2. Faith was not always required on the part of the one involved, **John 11:39**.
3. Everyone was allowed to come, **Matthew 4:24**.
4. Jesus healed organic diseases, not just functional ones, **Matthew 15:30**.
5. The miracles were always public, not private, **Matthew 12:9**.
6. The person being healed was always made complete, made whole, **Matthew 12:13**.
7. Miracles were always acknowledged by his enemies, **Matthew 12:13**.
8. They were not used to make money, **Matthew 10:8**.
9. The miracles gave God the glory, **Acts 3:2**.
10. The miracles were always used to support the truth, **Hebrews 2:3**.
11. They were not used to establish a denomination or promote any sect.
12. The person healed didn't always have to be present, **Matthew 8:5**.
13. Sometimes they were performed at the protest of the one being healed, **Matthew 8:28**.
14. Sometimes they were performed because of the faith of others, **Matthew 8:8**.
15. He didn't heal others while having an illness himself.
16. There was no prior investigation to weed out the wicked.
17. Jesus never tried and failed. Never blame the recipient for lack of faith.
18. Jesus didn't fail to perform a miracle and then blame the presence of an unbeliever.
19. Jesus didn't fail and then say it was God's will.
20. The miracles always proved the power of God, **Matthew 9:6**.

DEMON POSSESSION

Why do we read of so many cases of demon possession in the New Testament? Well, consider for a moment. Let me ask another question: what, since the Fall of Man, has been the greatest and most important event in human history?

The answer must surely be the coming into the world of the Lord Jesus Christ. His birth marked the culmination of God's plan of redemption, first hinted at in **Genesis 3:15**, when, after the Fall, He promised that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent.

In **Ephesians 1:10**, Paul writes about that plan, which, he says, God 'put into effect in Christ'. It was to be a plan intended, 'in the fullness of time' that is, when the right moment, 'chronos' came 'to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.'

The phrase 'in the fullness of time' is the rendering found in the Authorised Version of the word 'unakephalaioo', a word which literally means 'to head up', or 'to gather together under one head'.

In his definition of this word, Thayer states that 'In Ephesians, 1:10 God is said to bring together for Himself, all things and beings hitherto disunited by sin, into one combined state of fellowship in Christ, the universal bond'.

In other words, God's plan, in sending His Son into the world, was that the unity and harmony destroyed by the first temptation, and constantly opposed by Satan, should be fully restored.

In **Galatians 4:4**, Paul reveals that, when the fullness of time came, God sent His Son into our world, 'born of woman', thus becoming truly human, born 'under the law', thus Himself subject to law, in order that He might redeem those who are also under law.

To accomplish this restoration, Satan and his works had to be defeated, and this is why the brief period of the life and ministry of Jesus was marked by a greater demonstration of miraculous activity than any other period in human history.

The Gospels tell us that, as He presented Himself as God's Champion sent to overthrow Satan, Jesus performed no fewer than forty miracles, the details of which are recorded for us by the Gospel writers.

Furthermore, John explains in **John 20:30-31** and **John 21:25**, that the recorded miracles of the Lord represent only a small selection of His 'many other signs' which are not written in this book.' These miracles both fulfilled prophecy and established His Messiahship and constituted proof of His Deity.

THE CONFLICT WITH SATAN

Since, therefore, Satan, who had made himself the prince of this world, **John 12:31** / **John 14:30**, was being challenged and was to be defeated, should it surprise us that the period of the life and ministry of Jesus witnessed an increase of Satanic activity?

The aim of Satan has always been to oppose God's plan. He had established a kingdom for himself, **Matthew 12:26**, and had demons who served him, **Luke 11:13**. Is it surprising that he should do anything within his power to attempt to defend his kingdom?

Satan was defeated by One stronger than he, **2 Corinthians 4:4**, even describes Satan as 'the god of this world' and in **1 John 5:19**, the apostle states that, 'the whole world is under the control of the evil one'.

Jesus, Himself figuratively refers to Satan in **Luke 11:13**, as a 'strong man, fully armed, guarding his own house' but also in that chapter, Jesus is presented as the 'one stronger' than Satan who has come into the world to defeat Satan and strip him of his possessions.

Furthermore, the Lord said, ‘Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out,’ **John 12:31-32**. That sentence has already been passed, ‘the prince of this world has been judged,’ **John 16:11**.

Hebrews 2:14 tells us that it was by means of His death that Jesus destroyed the one who had the power of death, ‘that is, the devil’. Satan saw this defeat coming, and therefore we read, in **Revelation 12:12**, of Satan having ‘great wrath, because he knows that his time is short’.

In fact, Jesus revealed that the final punishment of Satan is already prepared for him, when, in **Matthew 25:41**, He speaks of ‘the everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels’. An intense but foregone outcome!

For this reason, I regard the increased instances of demon-possession and satanic activity about which we read in the Gospels as Satan’s greatest and most futile attempt to prevent the Lord Jesus from accomplishing His great purpose.

It was a resistance that was destined to fail, because of God’s promise in **Genesis 3:15**, even though a defeated and weakened Satan continues to seek to do as much harm as he possibly can before he is eternally destroyed, **Revelation 20:10**.

In his book, familiarly referred to as ‘the Pilgrim’s Progress’, John Bunyan likens Satan to a defeated, toothless giant, who sits in a cave, impotently gnashing his teeth at the pilgrims to whom he can no longer do any harm!

Satan may still be roaring! But he can no longer harm those who have been ‘delivered from the dominion of darkness, and translated to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,’ **Colossians 1:13**.

The topic of ‘demon possession’ is an interesting subject, to say the least, and I know most people have their own thoughts and ideas about it. Some believe it still happens today, and others say there’s no way it can happen today, and still others are not sure.

I remember many years ago, a friend of mine witnessed someone who was a member of a certain ‘church’ being literally beaten up by the ‘pastor’, as he says, this was the only way to drive out this ‘evil spirit’ from the young boy. Anyone who knows anything about the Scriptures will know that ‘beating’ someone up to drive out some ‘demon’ is nowhere found in the Bible.

There was a documentary on TV a few years ago where certain ‘churches’ were being investigated for this very subject. Their pastors were claiming that some members were ‘possessed’ because they stole something from a shop, some were claiming that members were ‘witches’ because, since those individuals joined the ‘church’, nothing but ‘bad luck’ has happened to other members.

Our television is filled with programmes that speak about demon possession, films have been made about demon possession, someone heard about someone else in the middle of some far-off country, in the middle of some village, of someone who possessed.

You can go on YouTube and see videos of people who are supposedly possessed, and you can see videos of people having those demons driven out. I mean, it’s everywhere, and people’s minds are slowly being filled with all kinds of wonderful ideas about the subject.

However, whether we like it or not, these practices are still rampant within some religious circles today. Possibly because of ignorance, possibly because some so-called ‘pastors’ have a desire for power and financial gain.

The whole purpose of this lengthy discourse is to try to compare what people believe is demon possession today with the Scriptures, and then you can make up your own mind about the subject at hand.

We can either believe ‘people’s testimonies’ or the Word of God. And please know that I’m not disputing what people are claiming they have seen and witnessed, but I am disputing whether what they saw and witnessed was

genuine. Some people claim that they have been possessed by a demon, or they at least claim they know someone who has been possessed.

DO DEMONS EXIST?

We can't deny that demons or 'evil spirits' exist because the Bible tells us so, **James 2:19**. We know that demons were under the power of Satan, who is the commander of all evil spirits. This is what the Jewish leaders were accusing Jesus of in **Matthew 12:24**.

HOW DID DEMONS OPERATE?

We know from the Scriptures that these demons entered into people's bodies and controlled their lives, **Matthew 8:28-34**. They often caused sickness in the people they entered, such as not being able to speak or see, **Matthew 12:22**.

They caused people to become insane and mad, **Luke 8:26-36**. They often caused people to cause personal injuries to themselves, **Mark 9:14-27**. They often caused other kinds of bodily infirmities, **Luke 13:10-17**.

WHAT DO DEMONS KNOW?

Well, unlike most of the people in Jesus' day, they certainly knew who Jesus was and they understood why He came into the world in the first place, **Luke 4:41**. There are no doubts that they actually believe in God too, **James 2:19**. They are well aware of the coming Judgement and they fear the Judgment and their eternal punishment, **Matthew 8:28-29**.

All of the above text shows us that demons are not some kind of disease as some people have claimed, but these demons or evil spirits are just that, they are spirit beings who think, speak, and act.

WHO WAS CAPABLE OF CASTING OUT DEMONS?

Now, this is an important question which we'll get back to later but for now, we see in clearly Scripture that Jesus often cast demons out of people, **Matthew 8:16**. Jesus also gave the ability to cast out demons to His early disciples, **Luke 10:17**.

Jesus also gave the ability to cast out demons to His apostles, **Mark 16:17-18** / **Acts 5:16** / **Acts 8:7** / **Acts 16:16-18** / **Acts 19:11-12**. The apostles were able to give miraculous gifts to others by laying their hands on them, **Acts 6:6-8** / **Acts 8:14-21** / **Acts 19:1-6**. Please remember that these miraculous powers would have included the power to cast out demons, **Acts 8:4-8**.

DO DEMONS STILL POSSESS PEOPLE TODAY?

1. There is no indication that demon possession occurred before the ministry of Jesus and His apostles.

We have no references to it in the Old Testament; Saul was not demon-possessed, **1 Samuel 18:10**. And the first we hear of this is in the Gospels during the ministry of Jesus. The last we hear of it is during the ministry of the apostles. This suggests that demon possession was something God allowed for a short time in order to demonstrate the power and authority of the Lord Jesus and His apostles.

2. There is no instruction in the epistles on how to cast out demons.

If demon possession is a problem for the church today, then surely believers need to be able to cast out demons and to do so, we must know how. Because there is no such instruction, suggests this isn't a problem now.

If demon possession continued today, Satan would have more power than God, for he could send his demons into people, but God's people couldn't cast them out.

3. What is sometimes called demon possession today doesn't match up with the accounts we find in Scripture.

We don't find people, for example, who break the strongest of chains, as the possessed man of Gadara did, **Mark 5:3-4 / Luke 8:29**.

4. Most alleged demon 'exorcisms' today are secluded, back-room affairs that are only later publicised.

Yet when Jesus expelled evil spirits, his miracles were publicly viewed by astonished multitudes, **Luke 4:36**. When did demon possession end? Zechariah, an Old Testament prophet, spoke of the time when Christ would come, **Zechariah 13:1**. This fountain was opened when Jesus shed His blood on the cross for the sins of the world, **Zechariah 13:2**.

Following the time when the Lord would die for our sins, prophets, men who spoke by the Holy Spirit, and unclean spirits, demons, would no longer be in the land, earth.

So, I guess the question is, when did this happen? As we saw earlier, only the early disciples, just before Jesus ascended back to the Father, only the apostles could drive out demons. Later, it was only those whom the apostles laid their hands on who had the ability to drive out demons and perform other miracles.

In other words, since no early disciples are still alive today, since no apostles are still alive today and since no Christians of whom the apostle's laid their hands on to bestow upon the gift of casting out demons are still alive today, we can safely say that demon possession can't exist today because no one has the power to drive them out today. We understand that the purpose of these miracles was to confirm or prove that what they were saying was God's Word, **Mark 16:20 / Hebrews 2:2-4**.

One of the nine spiritual miraculous gifts in the first century, according to **1 Corinthians 12:8-11**, was 'the discerning of Spirits'. We must remember to try to understand these gifts in the context of the historical period during which they were exercised. This verse, which seems so strange to us, would be perfectly understood by the people alive at the time of the writing of Paul's letter.

For example, his readers would understand that, when he writes in **1 Corinthians 14:37**, about those whom he describes as 'spiritual'. Paul was referring to those who were believed to be possessed by a spirit because this was the name by which such people were known.

Also, Christians weren't the only ones who believed in 'spirit-possession', i.e. individuals who were regarded as being under the influence of spirits that used them as their 'instruments'.

Both Jewish and Pagan religions also had their prophets, whom they believed were under spirit control. Paul hints at this in **1 Corinthians 12:1-2**. But because men recognised the existence of both good and evil spirits, it was essential to determine by which spirit a person was being ‘possessed’ and ‘controlled’.

We know that during the ministry of the Lord Himself, there were times when He encountered and dealt with people who were possessed by evil spirits. The man at Gadara, and the spirit-controlled son of the man who came to Jesus because he said, the disciples couldn’t cure the lad, **Matthew 17:14-20 / Acts 16:16-19**.

Luke records the experience of Paul at Philippi in dealing with a spirit-possessed girl. With this in mind, Paul lays down two criteria that must be used in making this judgment.

1. ‘Sanity’.

For centuries, about 500 B.C., in fact, the Greeks had flocked to temples where priests or priestesses were believed to contact and be controlled by the gods, for whom they acted as ‘mouthpieces’, as the gods spoke through them to deliver messages.

Whether it was real or fake, when these people were under the control of their gods, they foamed at the mouth, their hair streaming out, and their limbs wildly flailing, as in an epileptic fit, all of which was taken to prove that they were being ‘moved’ by the spirit of the god whom they served.

Not so the prophets of the church, they did not scream or foam at the mouth, or roll on the ground! The Holy Spirit enlightened their minds and sharpened their vision. They didn’t claim that they were the mouthpiece of God, but the messengers of God.

2. The credit of honour to Christ.

The well-used Christian confession of faith in New Testament times was ‘Jesus is Lord’, and as Paul reveals in **1 Corinthians 12:3**, this was the formula by which the prophets were to be judged either true or false.

Bear in mind that, beginning with Caesar Augustus, Roman Emperors had begun to regard themselves as ‘gods’, and everyone in the Empire was required to recognise and acknowledge this! Citizens had to declare their loyalty to Caesar as a god by saying the words, ‘Caesarea Kyrios’, ‘Caesar is Lord’.

In fact, at the entrance to every Roman Camp there was an altar onto which the soldiers were expected to throw a pinch of incense in the worship of the Emperor, whilst saying those words, ‘Caesar is Lord’, and woe betides any man who failed to do so!

But when the favour with which Rome had originally looked on Christians turned into persecution, this affirmation of loyalty to Caesar was something that the Christians also were required to make, and failure to make it usually meant death.

At the same time, there was a quite different affirmation that was being freely made by both Jewish and Pagan enemies of the church. They were saying, as Paul records in **1 Corinthians 12:3**, ‘Jesus is accursed’, and obviously, only the enemies of Christ would utter those words!

Furthermore, when a Christian refused to speak those words, which were taken as an acknowledgement of Caesar’s deity, their refusal was taken as a denial of his deity, and that was treason that brought the death sentence.

Thus, the distinction between the prophet inspired by the Holy Spirit and the false prophet was, in this way, easily made. The one was happy to say, ‘Jesus is Lord’, whilst the other, because he was under the influence of an evil spirit, said, ‘Jesus is accursed’. John also writes about the importance of making this distinction in **1 John 4:1-3**.

One needs little imagination to understand that in a pagan world, there were many who pretended to be possessed and controlled by the gods so that they might claim to be speaking in their names. The significant contrast between these frenzied fakers and the calmness of the Spirit-led Christian prophets is, as Paul states in **1 Corinthians 14:26-33**. Notice ‘The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets’, **1 Corinthians 14:32**. In other words, there was no wild abandonment in the manner in which they delivered their message. Everything was done in an orderly manner, because ‘God is not the author of confusion, but of peace’.

A final observation, the exercise of the ‘gift of discerning of spirits’ was to be used when several prophets spoke in the service, **1 Corinthians 14:29**. Now Paul said these spiritual miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit would fail, cease, and vanish away, **1 Corinthians 13:8-10**.

These miraculous gifts would cease when that which is perfect has come. This refers to the New Testament, which is called the perfect law of liberty, **James 1:25**.

As we noted a moment ago, one of these miraculous gifts was the power to cast out demons. Therefore, evil spirits possessing men, along with the power to cast them out, ceased when the New Testament was completed and confirmed.

Some people often go to **Matthew 7:21-23**. Notice that Jesus didn’t say they did prophecy or drive out demons in His name; He was simply saying what they would claim. And the very fact that He says, He didn’t know them and called them evildoers, suggests that what they were doing was fake, **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**.

WHY DEMON POSSESSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The New Testament clearly indicates that demons were under the control of divine authority. Jesus, for example, could command them to leave a person, **Matthew 8:16**, or even to keep quiet, **Mark 1:34**. The demons that tormented the man in the country of the Gerasenes couldn’t enter the nearby swine herd except by the Lord’s concession, **Mark 5:13-14**.

Since it’s the case that demons could do nothing except by divine permission, the intriguing question is, why did God allow these spirits to enter people? The truth of the matter is that the Bible doesn’t give a specific answer to this question.

I personally believe that God permitted demons to possess certain people in the time of Christ and the apostles so that His power could be seen. Not only did Christ have power over nature, disease, and death, but He also had power over the spirit world.

The Devil and his demons were proved to be powerless before the Son of God, **Colossians 2:15** / **1 John 3:8**. And we do know that the ability to cast out demons in the first century was given in order to confirm the truth of the Gospel message, **Mark 16:17-20**.

Demons still exist, but they don’t possess people today. Today, we need to be concerned about Satan, the Devil, who tempts us to sin. We know that the devil is still working today, but he doesn’t have the power he once had, and so he can only work through lying and deceit.

Note the following passages which speak about how the devil operates today, using lies and deceit: **John 8:44** / **2 Corinthians 11:3** / **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** / **Ephesians 6:11** / **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12** / **Revelation 12:9** / **Revelation 13:12-14** / **Revelation 19:20**.

The purpose of the church, especially the duties of elders, preachers, and teachers, is to teach people so that they are not as vulnerable to such deceit. These were all in place ‘to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.’ **Ephesians 4:12-14.**

Like I said at the start of this subject, the whole purpose of this is to try to compare what people claim is demon possession today with the Scriptures, in order for you to make your own mind up about the subject at hand.

And to know that I’m not disputing what people are claiming they have seen and witnessed, but I am disputing whether what they saw and witnessed was genuine.

“The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits, and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.” **Mark 1:27-28**

The people weren’t just amazed about what Jesus just done with the demon, they were also amazed at His teaching, **Mark 1:27.**

1. What new thing is this? **Mark 1:27**, referring to both the coming and the Ministry of Jesus.

2. What new doctrine? **Mark 1:27**, i.e. the teaching they had just heard.

The word ‘new’ is significant. There are two Greek words for ‘new’, one is ‘kainos’, which means new in the sense of ‘different’. The other is ‘neos’, which means new but ‘of the same kind’. Here, in **Mark 1:27**, the word is ‘kainos’. The people recognised that the teaching of Jesus was not ‘neos’ ‘of the same kind’ as that of the Scribes. It was ‘kainos’ ‘new in the sense of different!’ It was a different kind of doctrine! **Mark 1:27** shows that they recognised that His doctrine was not just a new sort of teaching, it was teaching with power.

Jesus’ teaching astounded the multitude in the synagogue, which was like a church among the Jews. He taught with authority. He issued His commands as if He had the right to tell others exactly what to do! Jesus’ actions showed that He really had the authority that He claimed. It’s not surprising that news began to spread about Jesus throughout Galilee, **Mark 1:28.**

JESUS HEALS MANY

‘As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So, he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them. That evening, after sunset, the people brought to

Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.’ **Mark 1:29-34**

Jesus came into Simon Peter’s house and found his mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever, **Mark 1:29-30 / Luke 4:38.** This tells us that Peter was indeed married, **1 Corinthians 9:5.**

He spoke to her, raised her up, and the fever left her, **Mark 1:31.** She then began waiting on Jesus and the disciples, **Mark 1:31 / Matthew 8:14-17.** He also healed many others who were brought to Him, **Mark 1:32-34.** Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Here it was Matthew who provided the sparkling details that, 1. all the sick were healed, 2. the demons were cast out by a word, and 3. there was here a fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy, **Isaiah 53:4.** This is contrary to the view that Mark

more fully reported material common with the other synoptics. Luke more fully reported the incident of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, and Matthew more fully reported this.'

Several features of Jesus' healings are noteworthy.

1. He healed immediately, with no delay.
2. He healed everyone who came to Him regardless of their disease, **Matthew 8:16-17 / Luke 4:40-41**.
3. He healed so completely that Simon's mother-in-law was able to get up and start waiting on them.

After a fever breaks, it normally takes a few days for a person to recover their strength. Jesus' healings put people back as if they had never had their disabilities in the first place!

4. Jesus sought to avoid publicity.

He ordered the demons not to announce who He was, **Mark 1:34 / Mark 1:24-26**.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'They knew that he was the Messiah. If they had spoken, they would have made that known to the people. Jesus was not desirous at that time that that should be publicly known, or that his name should be blazoned abroad. The time had not come when he wished it to be promulgated that he was the Messiah, and he therefore imposed silence on the evil spirits.'

JESUS PRAYS IN A SOLITARY PLACE

'Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.'" **Mark 1:35**

Why did Jesus get up early in the morning? Why sunset? **Mark 1:35**. The answer is simple: they were confined to their homes and weren't allowed out until sunset, 6:00 am, **Matthew 8:16-17 / Luke 4:40-41**. Jesus frequently sought solitude for prayer, **Mark 1:35 / Luke 4:42-43**.

Prayer during the daytime was nearly impossible since the crowds continually pressed on Him, so He skipped sleep to be able to talk with His Father, whom He missed so much.

IF JESUS IS GOD, DOES THAT MEAN HE WAS PRAYING TO HIMSELF?

The question posed here is a common question which some Christians struggle to understand or explain to others, and it's a question that other religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Oneness Pentecostals, use to try to 'prove' that Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh.

The simple fact is that God is a Spirit, **John 4:24**, and Jesus was and is a physical being. So, while the two are one, **John 10:30**, they are also separate entities. Think of Jesus as the physical form of God, **Colossians 1:15**. When Jesus said that He and His Father are One, He was saying that though He has the form of a man, He also has the same divine nature as God the Father. This is exactly what Paul stated in **Philippians 2:5-8**. Jesus, therefore, has two natures; He is both God and man.

It's clear from Paul's words that while Jesus was on Earth, He put aside His Godly powers and made Himself only human, working through the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God's will for Him, and praying to the Father for guidance.

He did this to give us an example of how we should live, working through the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God's will for our lives, and praying to the Father for guidance.

OTHERS KNEW JESUS WAS GOD

According to the New Testament, there were several people who knew that Jesus was God in the flesh, the Gospel writer John knew that Jesus was God, **John 1:1**, the apostle Paul knew that Jesus was God, **Colossians 1:15**, the Hebrew writer knew that Jesus was God, **Hebrews 1:3** and of course Jesus Himself knew that He was God, **John 10:30** / **Hebrews 1:8**.

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Remember, we're speaking about the humanity of Jesus, as a man. He, like the rest of us, got tired and hungry. He cried, He got angry, saddened, etc. All these references speak of His humanity, that is, Jesus being a real man.

Passages of Scripture which describe Jesus' limitations refer to His humanity. He lived His life as a true man, depending upon His heavenly Father day by day, just as we are expected to do.

Even His miracles and supernatural knowledge were enabled by the Holy Spirit, not accomplished by switching back and forth between His divine and human natures. Jesus was completely human, but He also had a divine nature.

Notice the following:

AS GOD

Jesus is worshipped. **Matthew 2:2** / **Matthew 2:11** **Matthew 14:33** **Matthew 28:9**

Jesus is prayed to. **Acts 7:59** / **1 Corinthians 1:2**

Jesus was called God. **John 20:28** / **Hebrews 1:8**

Jesus was called the Son of God. **Mark 1:1**

Jesus is sinless. **1 Peter 2:22** / **Hebrews 4:15**

Jesus knew all things. **John 21:17**

Jesus gives eternal life. **John 10:28** / **John 17:2**

The fullness of deity dwells in Jesus. **Colossians 2:9**

AS A MAN

Jesus worshipped the Father. **John 17**

Jesus prayed to the Father. **John 17:1**

Jesus was called a man. **Mark 15:39** / **John 19:5**

Jesus was called the Son of Man. John 9:35-37 Jesus was tempted. Matthew 4:1

Jesus grew in wisdom. Luke 2:52

Jesus died. Romans 5:8

Jesus has a body of flesh and bones. Luke 24:39

Why did Jesus pray to the Father despite being God Himself? Like so much of Jesus' life as a man, He left us an example to follow, which includes praying; remember, the disciples didn't know how to pray, so Jesus had to teach them how to pray, **Matthew 6:10-14 / Luke 11:1**.

While on earth, He modelled dependence on God, and that prayer is more important even than food or rest. God is our source of life and strength and hope, and we must remain connected to Him; we must remain connected to God the Father through Christ. Jesus demonstrated this by remaining in visible fellowship with the Father, **Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 2:17-18**.

Jesus was fully God and fully man, and He left us an example of what we must do when we hunger, thirst, get weary and sorrowful. Just like Jesus, we should cry out to our Father in Heaven. It's all about our relationship with the Father, and Jesus gave us the supreme example in prayer, **John 13:15**.

As a man, Jesus needed to pray, and when He was praying, He wasn't praying to Himself but to God the Father. Jesus prayed to God the Father because it was an appropriate, natural, and essential part of His mission on earth. His prayers set an example for us to grow in intimacy with our Heavenly Father.

“Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: ‘Everyone is looking for you!’” Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So, he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. Mark 1:36-

39

After finally finding Him that morning, the disciples reported that everybody in the town where He had been seeking Him, **Mark 1:36-37**. Nevertheless, since He wanted to be able to get the message to as many people as possible, He insisted on moving on to other towns, **Mark 1:38-39**.

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

‘A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing,’ he said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately, the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ‘See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.’ Instead, he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.’

Mark 1:40-45

Painful open sores caused everyone to dread leprosy. Those who contracted it were quarantined because the disease was highly contagious. In this story, Jesus did what no one else dared do: He touched a leper, **Mark 40-41 / Matthew 8:2-4 / Luke 5:12-14**. When he did so, the man was healed immediately, **Mark 1:42**.

THE LIFE OF A LEPER

We can't begin to imagine what life would have been like for a leper as they lived in their own colonies, separated from society. Their food and clothing needs would have been provided by their families and close friends.

Living in isolation can never be easy, not being able to shake someone's hand or hug your husband or wife or even your children. This explains why they stood at a distance. Imagine never being able to go to the temple to worship God, imagine not being able to work, imagine the itchiness and daily struggles they would have had!

This was through no fault of their own, but because they were lepers, they couldn't associate with society because they were classed as unclean by the law, **Leviticus 13:45-46 / Numbers 5:2**. The man's faith in Jesus is obvious as he requests Jesus to heal him if He is willing, **Mark 1:40**. He is in great need, but he knows who can heal him.

Jesus' response is far more than a momentary pang of conscience, a tug at the heartstrings that lasts a few moments and is then forgotten. Compassion speaks of sympathy that desires to remove the cause of the suffering. This provides us with an insight into the heart of God. He is a compassionate God.

Jesus reaches out and touches him, **Mark 1:41**. Touching is an effective way of communicating. When He did so, the man was healed immediately, **Mark 1:42**. Jesus didn't have to do this; a spoken word would have sufficed, but so much is said by a touch.

Jesus was coming into contact with the untouchable; he was entering into his world. Jesus did what no one else dared do: He touched a leper. Jesus' touching the leper tells us something about the ministry of Jesus; alienation is being removed, and reinstatement is taking place.

Jesus doesn't rebuke him for the uncertainty in his words. Jesus didn't say, 'What do you mean, if?' **Mark 1:40 / Matthew 8:2**. What kind of faith is that? Compassion doesn't respond in that way. Jesus was more than willing, and with the words, 'Be clean, the man was healed, **Mark 1:41-42**.

Notice he was healed from his leprosy immediately, **Mark 1:42**. The healing is instant; there's no need for a medical examination. His sores were instantly transformed into smooth skin.

No need to place him on a period of probation just to make sure that the leprosy has really gone. Jesus made no deal with the leper, no money changed hands, and no performance was given, only love from the compassionate Christ.

Jesus said to the leper, 'Don't tell anyone', **Mark 1:43-44**, simply because at this point in His ministry, He didn't want to be bombarded with other people coming to be healed. He still had a lot of work to be done at this stage, **Mark 1:44 / Matthew 9:30 / Matthew 12:16 / Matthew 17:9 / Mark 3:12 / Mark 5:43 / Luke 4:41 / Luke 9:21**.

Luke 5:16 implies that Jesus wanted to go somewhere to spend time with His Father in prayer, as He often did, **Luke 4:42-44 / Luke 4:9-10**. Jesus tells him to show himself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them, **Mark 1:44**.

After any leper was cleansed of his disease, the law said they were to present themselves to a priest in order to receive confirmation that he was clean, **Deuteronomy 24:8 / Leviticus 13:1-6 / Leviticus 13:45-49 / Leviticus 14:1-32 / Luke 5:14**.

The man, however, went out and told everyone, the exact opposite of what Jesus had said, **Mark 1:45**. Undoubtedly, he was thrilled that he had been healed and probably imagined that spreading the news about Jesus would honour Him.

But the fact remains that he did just what Jesus had said not to do. As a result, the Lord was thronged by such large crowds that He could no longer publicly enter into cities but had to remain in unpopulated areas, **Mark 1:45**.

LIFE-CHANGING HEALING

Imagine how his life would have been changed after his healing, imagine them hugging their wife or husband and children for the first time in whatever amount of time they've had this disease.

Imagine being able to go to the priests to show themselves and to be able to socialise again and worship God in the temple again. To get a mainstream job and walk through the marketplace places in Jerusalem.

This healing was life-changing on all kinds of levels, physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually. We should learn a lesson here, and that is that all disobedience, even well-intentioned, hurts Jesus' work.

SUMMARY

This chapter shows the greatness of Jesus. John was unworthy to untie His shoes. God spoke from heaven endorsing Him. He expelled demons by a mere word. He healed the sick immediately, regardless of the nature of their infirmity.

This chapter also indicates how we should respond to His greatness. Immediately obey everything He says, no matter what sacrifice is required, respect the authority of His message, and obey Him even when His command seems unreasonable.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

‘A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now, some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.’ So, he said to the man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’ He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ Mark 2:1-12

JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYSED MAN

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is one of those ‘mighty works’ mentioned by Jesus in his reproach of Capernaum, [Matthew 11:23](#) / [Mark 2:1](#). Important details are mentioned in [Mark 2:1-12](#) and [Luke 5:17-26](#), which are not contained in [Matthew 9:1-8](#). Mark says that he was carried by four men, and Luke relates the breaking up of the roof to let him down to Jesus.’

As a result of His teaching and miracles, Jesus' popularity grew rapidly. So many wanted to hear Him that they filled the house in Capernaum where He was teaching and crowded around it, [Mark 2:1-2](#). Just then, five men arrived, eager to see Jesus too. One of them was paralysed, and the other four carried him on a stretcher, [Mark 2:3](#).

It was impossible for them to get in through the door, so they climbed up on the roof, dug a hole in it and let the paralytic down through the opening they had created, [Mark 2:4](#). We can imagine the commotion among the crowd in the house below. We can only imagine what is going through the minds of those who owned the house.

Notice Jesus saw their faith, [Matthew 9:2](#) / [Mark 2:5](#) / [Luke 5:20](#), but He speaks directly to the lame man and tells him that his sins were forgiven, [Matthew 9:2](#) / [Mark 2:5](#) / [Luke 5:20](#).

Did the lame man demonstrate any faith, or was it just his four friends' faith? It's hard to tell from the text, but it does appear that Jesus is speaking about the faith of the four men.

The lame man may have demonstrated his faith in Jesus by allowing his friends to take him to Jesus in such a dramatic way, with the hope of being healed. Maybe his four friends told him about Jesus, and they believed Jesus could heal him, and so the lame man just went along with the idea, thinking he had nothing to lose.

Nevertheless, Jesus tells the lame man his sins are forgiven, [Mark 2:5](#). That was probably not what the man or his four friends had expected, but it is every man's greatest need. We are not told what the man's disability was, perhaps he had an accident, perhaps he was born with his disability.

Perhaps, as the popular view was at the time, his disability may have been caused by some sin he was involved in during his life, [John 9:2](#). We can't be sure, but we do know that sin can have a devastating consequence in our lives. Notice the lame man, those who brought him in and everyone else didn't say a thing; it was only the teachers of the law who were present who thought Jesus had blasphemed because God alone can forgive sins, [Mark 2:6-7](#).

The scribes and Pharisees thought it blasphemy to assume the position of God by forgiving sins, [Mark 2:7](#) / [Matthew 9:3](#) / [Luke 5:21](#) / [John 10:31-36](#) / [Leviticus 24:15-16](#). Although they were right, they didn't recognise that Jesus was indeed God in the flesh, [John 1:1-3](#) / [John 1:14](#).

Jesus knew in His spirit what they were thinking, [Mark 2:8](#) / [Matthew 9:4](#) / [Luke 5:22](#), and so, He read their minds and asked, 'Which is easier to say, your sins are forgiven, or get up and walk? [Mark 2:9](#) / [Matthew 9:5](#) / [Luke 5:23](#) / [Matthew 12:25](#) / [Psalm 139:2](#) / [Luke 6:8](#) / [Luke 9:47](#) / [Luke 11:17](#).

The answer to this question was simple: both were possible with God, but impossible with men, [Mark 10:27](#). If Jesus has the power to heal someone, then He certainly, as the Son of man, has the authority to forgive someone's sins, [Mark 2:10](#) / [Matthew 9:6](#) / [Luke 5:24](#) / [John 3:2](#) / [John 20:30-31](#) / [Acts 2:22](#).

To prove His ability to forgive sins, which was something invisible and therefore impossible to verify, He healed the paralytic who then got up and walked, [Mark 2:11-12](#) / [Matthew 9:6-7](#) / [Luke 5:25](#).

Jesus proved His power to conquer the invisible, that is, spiritual problems, by overcoming a visible, physical problem. The crowd was dumbfounded, [Mark 2:12](#) / [Matthew 9:8](#) / [Luke 5:26](#). They had never seen anything to compare with Jesus, [Mark 2:12](#) / [Luke 5:26](#).

WHO WILL REACH JESUS?

Consider the five men as they approached the house in which Jesus was teaching. They had come in order to see Him, but their way to Jesus was blocked by a big obstacle, the crowd. Many would have simply turned around and gone back home. Not these men.

They were determined, even desperate, in their desire to see Jesus. Their procedure, un-roofing the roof, was radical, but it worked. Even today, those who want to come to Jesus frequently encounter barriers in their path.

The only ones who actually reach Him are those who are absolutely determined and who refuse to allow anything to keep them from following Him. How determined are you to be with Jesus?

JESUS CALLS LEVI AND EATS WITH SINNERS

‘Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ Mark 2:13-17

Because Capernaum was the location of the tax office, where taxes, tolls and land duties were collected for both the Romans, who occupied Palestine and the Herodians, who ruled Galilee.

It hardly needs to be said that those who were involved in the work of collecting money for either Romans or Herodians were despised and hated by the general public, so they had to find their friends among other ‘social outcasts’, who included prostitutes.

One of Jesus’ more surprising actions was calling Matthew to be a disciple. Matthew, also called Levi son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector, [Mark 2:13](#) / [Luke 5:27](#).

In that era, tax collectors were viewed as both thieves and traitors because they used dishonest tactics to raise funds for the hated Roman invaders, [Matthew 10:3](#) / [Luke 6:15](#) / [Mark 3:18](#) / [Acts 1:13](#).

Zacchaeus is a perfect example who may have taken more than he needed to from the people, [Luke 19:8](#). Adding a tax collector to His inner circle was hardly a move that could be expected to increase Jesus’ popularity!

Jesus asks Matthew to follow Him, [Mark 2:14](#) / [Matthew 9:9](#) / [Luke 5:27](#), and immediately he left everything behind and did so, [Mark 2:14](#) / [Matthew 9:9](#) / [Luke 5:28](#). The word ‘followed’ is in the imperfect tense, and means that he ‘kept following’ Jesus. It was a defining moment in his life.

The expression ‘many tax-collectors’, [Mark 2:15](#) / [Matthew 9:10](#), is also significant, because it reveals how lucrative the business of tax collection was for both the authorities and the officials who served them! We have evidence of this when Mark records the call of Levi, later named Matthew, [Mark 2:13-14](#).

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF THE CALLING

The apostle John records who the first five people were called to follow Jesus. John and Andrew were the initial two people called to be disciples by Christ, [John 1:35-39](#).

Then came Peter, also called Simon or Simon Peter, [John 1:40-42](#), followed by Philip, [John 1:43-44](#), and then Nathanael, Bartholomew, [John 1:45](#). The book of Matthew then records that James, a son of Zebedee and brother of John, was called, [Matthew 4:21-22](#), followed by Matthew’s own calling, [Matthew 9:9](#). Why did they leave everything to follow Jesus?

THE RABBI DISCIPLE SYSTEM

Every young Jewish boy grew up wanting to be a rabbi, and every young Jewish boy and girl would at least go to an elementary school called Bet Sefer, that is, ‘House of the Book’.

Their job was to memorise the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

And the best of the best would be able to graduate and go on to the next school of learning, a type of secondary school called Bet Talmud, or ‘House of Learning’, and their job was to memorise the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

From there, the best of the best of that group would be allowed to apply to Bet Midrash, or ‘House of Seeking’, which was a type of school for would-be rabbis. A student would find a rabbi that he respected, someone that he wanted to be like, and he would say to that rabbi, ‘Rabbi, I want to follow you.’

Now the rabbi’s job was to question the would-be disciple to seek to determine, not whether or not he knew the Scriptures, but whether or not he could imitate his teachings, become like him, and pass on his way of life. And if the student could answer the rabbi’s questions to his liking, then he would say to his student, ‘Come follow me.’

And these are the words that every student longed to hear. And he would leave behind his family, his job, his vocation, and he would go and become a disciple of that rabbi.

Now, if the student didn’t quite make the cut, the rabbi would say, ‘Ah, my son, you know the Torah, you know the teaching well, but I’m afraid that you cannot be my disciple, go home, make babies, and pray that they become rabbis.’

The very fact that Matthew was a tax collector and the other disciples were fishermen, shows that the disciples, were not the best of the best and they did not make the cut and so when Jesus, a respected teacher of the law, a teacher of God’s Word, comes along and says, ‘Come follow me’, they could hardly believe it and so they leave everything behind.

Jesus was inviting them to become like Him. Matthew was not moved by a passing curiosity in this remarkable Teacher. He made a commitment that day! After deserting his Tax Office at the call of Jesus, Matthew called together ‘many tax collectors and sinners’ to a feast, [Mark 2:15](#) / [Matthew 9:10](#) / [Luke 5:29](#).

I think that this ‘great feast’ or ‘great banquet’, as Luke records, [Luke 5:29](#), was his way of marking his break from his past life, and used as an opportunity of introducing his friends to Jesus.

This calls to mind another incident that occurred about that time and in that region when Andrew broke the news to his brother Simon Peter that he had found the Messiah, [John 1:40-42](#). His response to Peter’s scepticism was ‘Come and see!’

At that stage, neither Matthew nor Andrew knew enough to say very much about Jesus, but they could bring people to personally meet Jesus! What a great way to evangelise to your friends in an informal way. You invite all your Christian friends and all your non-Christian friends and just let them mix.

It is also interesting to compare Mark’s account with that of Luke. Luke describes the meal to which these guests were invited, as a ‘great feast’, but his language used in describing them is different from that of Mark, [Mark 2:15](#) / [Luke 5:29](#).

Luke describes them as ‘a great company of tax-collectors’, [Luke 5:29](#). As a Greek, himself, i.e., a Gentile, Luke does not use the religious designation used by Mark who was a Jew, who describes them as ‘sinners’, [Mark 2:15](#).

I wonder if Luke realised that he, also, as a Gentile, would have been included among the ‘sinners’? By the way, the difference in the use of the language used by Mark and Luke is an example of how divine inspiration worked. The Holy Spirit did not inspire Luke to use language that would have been foreign to his thinking.

Luke would never have described non-Jews as ‘sinners’ or ‘Gentiles’, which was an even more offensive expression. Greeks would not use such a discriminative term.

It is true that he does use the word ‘sinners’ in [Luke 5:30](#), but he does so because he is recording accurately, something that had been said by the Scribes and Pharisees.

The scribes and Pharisees were outraged because they thought it improper for a teacher of religion to eat with immoral people, [Mark 2:16](#) / [Matthew 9:11](#) / [Luke 5:30](#).

When Jesus overheard their criticism, He asked, ‘Who needs a doctor, the sick or the well?’ [Mark 2:17](#) / [Matthew 9:12](#) / [Luke 5:31](#). His purpose, He said, was not to call righteous, but sinners, [Mark 2:17](#) / [Luke 5:32](#). The Lord never hesitated to break society’s norms and customs.

Jesus tells them to go and learn what [Hosea 6:6](#) means, [Mark 2:17](#) / [Matthew 9:13](#). Sacrifice was a command of God, [1 Samuel 15:22](#), but the greater law of mercy must be practised in order to bring sinners to righteousness, [Matthew 23:23-24](#).

Jesus is basically saying to the teachers of the Law, ‘I have no message for you! You guys think you are not sick and think you are already righteous.’ I wonder what they thought when Jesus said those words!

JESUS QUESTIONED ABOUT FASTING

‘Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, ‘How is it that John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?’ Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day, they will fast. ‘No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.’ [Mark 2:18-22](#)

Some of the Pharisees and disciples of John came to Jesus, asking why He and His disciples didn’t fast as other religious people did, [Mark 2:18](#) / [Matthew 9:14](#) / [Luke 5:30](#). These events took place at a time of fasting when the disciples of the Pharisees and John’s disciples were fasting and praying, [Mark 2:18](#) / [Luke 5:33](#).

Jesus explained by illustration and said that no one would fast at a time of celebration, such as a wedding, [Matthew 9:15](#). Mark and Luke’s accounts both say, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?’ [Mark 2:19](#) / [Luke 5:34](#). His own presence on the earth made it a joyous time of feasting because He was the bridegroom. Since fasting should fit the occasion, it was inappropriate in this situation, but there will come a time when the bridegroom leaves, that’ll be the time to fast, [Mark 2:20](#) / [Matthew 9:15](#) / [Luke 5:35](#). Fasting was just not the right thing to do when the Son of God Himself was present.

He also explained that just as no one would put new wine in old bottles or a new patch on old jeans, it was equally out of place to put the newly revealed Gospel of Christ into the old traditional forms of the Jews, [Mark 2:21-22](#) / [Matthew 9:16-17](#) / [Luke 5:36-39](#).

The word, ‘new’ is in reference to Jesus’ teaching and the word ‘old’ is in reference to the Jewish system, [Colossians 2:14](#) / [Romans 7:1-4](#) / [Hebrews 10:9-10](#). Jesus is saying that fasting isn’t required under his new teaching, but was under the Jewish system. John was practising the old system requirements, [Acts 19:1-4](#).

ARE CHRISTIANS COMMANDED TO FAST TODAY?

Fasting was an accepted part of everyday life in Old Testament times. Bear in mind that Israel was not a political state, but a theocracy, which is a religious state in which the Law and will of God were preeminent.

The first reference to fasting is in the Book of Judges, Judges 20:26. The last reference is in the Book of Zechariah, and devout Jews fasted, Zechariah 8:19. Most of the fasting was undertaken voluntarily and was not undertaken at the command of God, but devout Jews undertook to fast for at least two reasons. Not for health reasons, but for the following reasons.

1. They believed it was a way of attracting the attention of God. If they fasted, they thought that God noticed them.
2. They thought that if they fasted, God would be prepared to do something about the situation that had caused them to fast.

If you think about this second reason, you will see that a man thought fasting had influenced God to act; it was very easy for him to imagine that he, personally, was someone special! Matthew 6:16-18.

The reality, although, through the centuries, the Jews, especially after the Babylonian Captivity, introduced fasts for a whole range of reasons, but only one fast was specifically commanded by God, and that was the fast associated with the Day of Atonement, the most important and solemn Day in their religious year.

In Leviticus 16:29, we find the expression, ‘deny yourselves’ or ‘afflict your souls’. This is the expression for fasting, and this was the only fast that the Jews observed faithfully every year.

When we examine the New Testament, it surprises some people to find that the Lord only mentioned fasting twice in Mark 2:18-22 / Matthew 6:16-18. Notice that both passages above record Jesus’ response to the practice of that time.

But also notice, although about sixteen times He says, ‘it was said by those of old-time, but I say to you’, Jesus doesn’t use these words because this kind of fasting about which He was speaking wasn’t covered by the Mosaic Law, but because it was something that the people had taken on themselves in the old law.

In the Book of Acts, Luke records that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul on the First Missionary Journey, with prayer and fasting. In the next chapter, they fasted in connection with the appointment of elders, Acts 13:1-3. Please note that the whole church didn’t fast, it was only those mentioned, ‘Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen and Saul,’ Acts 13:1.

In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Paul mentions sexual fasting, but neither here nor anywhere else does he impose it as a command. In 2 Corinthians 6:5 and 2 Corinthians 11:27, he refers to what he suffered for the sake of the Gospel and speaks of times when he went without food. But this wasn’t because he was ‘fasting’, but because he had no food to eat!

The answer to the question, Should a Christian fast? is therefore, yes! If they want to! But remember that fasting, like ‘bodily exercise,’ may do a little good, but ‘godliness is profitable for all things!’ 1 Timothy 4:8.

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH

‘One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’ He answered, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.’ Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’ Mark 2:23-28

At that time, is the time after the second Passover of Jesus’ ministry. Luke 6:1. It’s important to remember that the legalistic Pharisees weren’t accusing the disciples of stealing the grain, Mark 2:23-3:6 / Luke 6:1-11 / Matthew 12:1-2.

Under the Old Testament law, a person had a right to pluck the grain from someone else's field when travelling, though they couldn't put a sickle to the crop, [Deuteronomy 23:25](#).

They were accusing them of breaking their traditions of the Sabbath by doing the minor work of plucking out the grain on the Sabbath, [Mark 2:24](#) / [Luke 6:2](#) / [Matthew 12:2](#).

Jesus and the disciples were violating one of the numerous laws the Pharisees had bound as a result of the traditions of the fathers in order that the Sabbath be kept, [Exodus 20:10](#) / [Exodus 36:2-3](#) / [Numbers 15:32-36](#).

WHAT DID DAVID DO EXACTLY?

What David did was actually against lesser legalities of the law, [Mark 2:25-26](#) / [Luke 6:3-4](#) / [Matthew 12:3-4](#) / [1 Samuel 21:1-7](#), for only the priests were to eat of the showbread, [Exodus 25:30](#) / [Leviticus 24:5-9](#) / [Numbers 28:9-10](#) / [1 Samuel 21:6](#).

Though David's actions were technically unlawful according to the law that forbade anyone eating the showbread other than the priests, there was a higher law of God that superseded the original law.

That higher law was the preservation of David, God's anointed. The Pharisees recognised this. However, they justified David's actions while at the same time complaining that Jesus and the disciples were breaking the law of the Sabbath.

Jesus pointed out their inconsistent application of the law, though in this context, Jesus and the disciples didn't violate any Old Testament law. They violated the Pharisees' interpretation of the Sabbath law.

The priests had to work in violation of Sabbath laws in order to prepare sacrifices because they had to work on the Sabbath in preparation for the sacrifices, [Numbers 28:9-10](#). However, they were blameless because their God-ordained work to prepare sacrifices for the people superseded the law to rest on the Sabbath.

Someone greater than the temple is here, [Matthew 12:6](#), is a clear reference to Christ, [Isaiah 66:1-2](#) / [Matthew 12:41-42](#). Jesus was more glorious than the temple that the Jews honoured above all things on earth, [Haggai 2:7-9](#) / [2 Chronicles 6:18](#) / [Malachi 3:1](#) / [Hebrews 3:3](#).

Sacrifice was a law of God, [Matthew 12:7](#). However, mercy was a higher law of God. The Pharisees, in their legal understanding and application of the law, could not understand this principle concerning the laws of God, [Hosea 6:6](#) / [Micah 6:6-8](#).

Jesus here attacks the judgmental attitudes of the Pharisees that motivated them to criticise the plucking of the grain. The One who was in their midst was the One who had authority over the Sabbath. Jesus was of the triune God who instituted the Sabbath. Mark records that Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man, [Mark 2:27](#).

He explained that God had intended for the Sabbath command to provide relief for man, not be an additional burden. The Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, for on the Sabbath men were to rest from their labours, [Exodus 20:11](#). The Pharisees thought that man was made for the Sabbath. In other words, they believed that God made the Sabbath a holy day of worship in order that men renew their spiritual life and worship God on this day.

However, God intended it to be a day of rest for man, [Exodus 20:10-11](#). It was thus a law that was established for the physical well-being of man. Jesus proclaimed His authority over the Sabbath, saying that He Himself was Lord of the Sabbath, [Mark 2:27-28](#) / [Luke 6:5](#). If Jesus created the Sabbath, surely, He knew what activities violated it.

The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of blessings and relaxation, free from work, but the Jews had turned it into a bunch of rules which consisted of dos and don'ts, and with over six hundred and thirteen laws, they always found a way around them.

In reference to the nation of Israel, the Sabbath was given to the nation of Israel as a sign between God and the nation of Israel. When the Old Testament law was abolished, the Sabbath law was also taken away, Colossians 2:16.

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

‘Another time, Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ But they remained silent. 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. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.’ Mark 3:1-6

JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH A SHRIVELLED HAND

The events recorded here and in **Matthew 12:9-10** took place on another Sabbath than the one in the previous verses, **Mark 3:1-5 / Luke 6:1-5 / John 5:10 / John 7:23**.

The legalistic Pharisees are here more concerned over the violation of their Sabbath laws than the healing of this man. Such manifests the hypocrisy of religion that is based on an outward manifestation of a legal presentation of religiosity without concentration on the heart for spiritual change.

The Pharisees here seek another opportunity to accuse Jesus of violating their laws of the Sabbath, **Luke 6:6-11 / Matthew 12:9-13 / Mark 7:6-9**. They do so in order to accuse Him before the people that He violates the law. Mark records that at this time, Jesus was angered by their hardened hearts, **Mark 3:5**.

It seems that they didn’t doubt that Jesus could miraculously heal the withered hand, **Mark 3:2 / Luke 6:7**. They wanted to see if He would do such on the Sabbath. If He did such work on the Sabbath, then they could accuse Him of working against their laws of the Sabbath, **Mark 3:2 / Luke 6:7**.

Notice Jesus asks the man ‘to stand up in front of everyone’, **Mark 3:3 / Luke 6:8**. Jesus wanted to make a point to these teachers of the Law; He didn’t hide what He was doing.

By asking, ‘Is it lawful?’ **Luke 6:9 / Matthew 12:10**, Jesus was saying that it was always right to do good, **Galatians 6:10**. It was simply right to do good on the Sabbath in reference to human interests because men are more important than sheep, **Matthew 12:11-12**.

The real conflict here is between the legal and earthly interests of the Pharisees as opposed to the human interests of Jesus. Jesus pointed out that if the Pharisees’ material interests were in danger on the Sabbath, they would do what was necessary to rescue a sheep. However, they were here critical of Jesus because of His human interest in healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus then told him to stretch his hand out, **Mark 3:5 / Luke 6:10 / Matthew 13:13**. Apparently, He neither touched him nor did any other physical thing; He merely asked the man to reach his hand out. When he did, it was

healed, **Mark 3:5 / Luke 6:10 / Matthew 12:13**. Jesus' critics were furious and began plotting to assassinate Him, **Luke 6:11**.

TO SAVE A LIFE OR TO KILL!

In **Luke 6:9**, Jesus asks if it is lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? In **Mark 3:4**, Jesus asked His opponents, 'Should one save a life or kill on the Sabbath?' They chose not to reply, which showed that they were not interested in truth but only wanted to discredit Him.

It is always easy to find fault, but it's much harder to give a positive recommendation. Normally, Christ healed men by laying His hands on them or performing some other physical sign.

If He had accompanied the healing by physical action, in this case, they would have attacked Him for doing medical work on the Sabbath, something contrary to their tradition.

This time, however, Jesus did nothing; He merely told the man to reach his hand out, **Mark 3:5 / Luke 6:10**. Even Jesus' enemies didn't believe it wrong to stretch out their hand on the Sabbath. Thus, He outsmarted His opponents, and they were furious, **Luke 6:11**.

When a man in an argument begins to get angry, it is a sure sign that he is losing. As it turned out, Jesus' enemies are the ones who plotted to kill on the Sabbath, because He had done good. The Pharisees and the Herodians, who actually were enemies of each other, joined forces to get rid of Jesus.

The Pharisee's actions show the hardness of heart of those who profess a legal-oriented religion. The Pharisees cared nothing for the man with the withered hand.

Their concern was for their doctrinal strictness in keeping their traditions in reference to the keeping of the Sabbath. By upholding their legal practices in reference to the Sabbath, they were maintaining their arrogant positions of leadership among the people.

At this time in the controversy between Jesus and the religious leaders, the tension begins to grow. The Pharisees at this time in the ministry of Jesus schemed to remove Jesus, **Mark 3:6 / Luke 6:11 / Matthew 12:14**. He was in competition with their positions of leadership, their hypocritical lives and inconsistent beliefs.

They were infuriated because He manifested the inconsistencies of their theology and the callousness of their hearts. Because these religious leaders couldn't consistently argue with Jesus through correct reasoning from the Old Testament Scriptures, they were frustrated to the point of killing Him.

Religions that are developed with an emphasis on outward appearances and ceremonial worship are often hypocritical in the sense that people can be members of such religions without changed hearts.

The religious leaders in this context manifested the hypocrisy of such religions by planning evil when professing a form of righteousness, **Mark 3:6 / Luke 6:11 / Matthew 12:14 / John 5:18 / John 10:39 / John 11:53**.

SAD FACT

We can only imagine the joy in the heart of the man whose hand was healed. We can only imagine how Jesus changed this man's life forever. We can only imagine the awe that everyone must have felt when Jesus healed him.

It's a sad fact that the miracle which just took place often gets overlooked because of the attitude of these religious leaders who couldn't and didn't deny the miracle but chose to focus on their traditions, rather than celebrating with the man who was now healed.

CROWDS FOLLOW JESUS

'Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd, he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God.' But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.' Mark 3:7-12

The spreading fame of Jesus is clearly seen in these verses. What was Jesus preaching? 'The Gospel of God'. This wasn't a Gospel about God; it was God's own Gospel. God's 'good spel' 'good speech', which means 'good news'.

The word gospel comes to us from the Anglo-Saxon. The popular notion of what constituted God's good news was very different from the Good News that Jesus came to preach.

Notice Paul's statement in **Acts 28:20**, concerning his own preaching of the 'Hope of Israel'. If he had been preaching what the Jewish leaders were teaching concerning the 'Hope', they would not have delivered him to the Romans. The traditional Jewish Hope and Expectation concerned a Messiah who would drive out the occupying army of Rome, re-establish the Kingdom of David and reign from David's throne, which would again be set up in Jerusalem. In other words, they looked for a Military and Political deliverer.

For four-hundred years, since the time of Malachi, heaven had been silent. As a people who proudly called themselves 'God's people', they had been accustomed to the ministries of a long line of prophets that stretched back as far as Moses, with whom the true prophetic ministry had begun centuries earlier, and they had taken the prophets for granted, even though they ignored their messages.

Still, the daily prayer of every devout Jewish husband contained the request that he might have a son who would become the long-awaited Messiah, whilst the daily prayer of a Jewish wife was that she might become the mother of the Messiah.

Consequently, when John the Baptist emerged with startling suddenness, out of the wilderness looking like a reborn Elijah, and preaching the message of the Messiah's coming, the news spread like wildfire.

And then, when Jesus took up the message after John's imprisonment in Galilee, as Mark reports, and as **Mark 1:45** records, 'they came to Him from every quarter'.

There is no doubt that striking as the ministry of John must have been, the ministry of Jesus immediately had an even greater impact on those who came to hear Him, because, whilst both John and Jesus presented the same message, calling the people to repentance, the word of Jesus was endorsed by miracles, a fact on which the people remarked, 'John did no miracles,' **John 10:41**.

What was the Message? We have mentioned that it was 'God's Gospel'. Not a message about God but a message from God. It declared that 'the time was fulfilled'.

The divine plan that was first announced in **Genesis 3:15**, and gradually revealed through succeeding centuries, was about to be brought to reality. Though Jesus frequently tried to withdraw, people followed Him from everywhere, **Mark 3:7-8**. He continued teaching, healing and casting out demons.

While neither the crowd nor the religious leaders seemed to have recognised His true identity, the demons confessed Jesus as the Son of God. He declined their testimony, however, since He did not want the recommendation of the Devil.

After His confrontations with the Pharisees, Jesus withdrew from the multitudes who were yearning to be healed. They realised that Jesus had the power to heal, **Mark 3:7-10 / Matthew 9:21 / Matthew 14:36**.

Demons caused those in whom they dwelt to fall before Jesus and confess that He was the Son of God, **Matthew 8:29 / Matthew 14:33**. However, Jesus wouldn't allow the demons to make Him known at this time in His ministry, **Mark 3:11-12**, because it wasn't yet time for a direct confrontation with the religious leaders concerning His Sonship.

Consider also that Jesus didn't want one who was considered possessed in the community to give testimony to His deity. The demons' proclamation at this time would surely have added power to the Pharisees' blasphemous accusations that Jesus was from Beelzebub.

JESUS APPOINTS THE TWELVE

'Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means 'sons of thunder'), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.' **Mark 3:13-19**

Mark 3:13 says that Jesus 'went up to a mountain,' but doesn't mention that His purpose, which Luke reveals was 'to pray', **Luke 6:12**. Before Jesus chose these twelve men, He spent the night alone on the mountain in prayer to God. Please note, he wasn't talking all night long! Effective prayer is a two-way street; it involves both speaking and listening.

The next day, He called His disciples to Him, and He revealed the names of the twelve men who were later to be called 'Apostles', **Mark 3:13**, and we cannot avoid thinking that the night spent in prayer had something to do with His choice. Jesus needed to train apprentices to represent Him and preach the Gospel after His departure.

He chose twelve of His followers for that job. The twelve He chose were an unlikely bunch, including four fishermen, a tax collector, a revolutionary, Simon the 'Zealot', a sceptic, Thomas, and a traitor, Judas Iscariot, **Mark 3:14-16**. Jesus proved that He could work with and make something out of even the most unpromising material.

The apostle John records who the first five people were called to follow Jesus. John and Andrew were the initial two people called to be disciples by Christ, **John 1:35-39**. Then came Peter, also called Simon or Simon Peter, **John 1:40-42**, followed by Philip, **John 1:43-44**, and then Nathanael, Bartholomew, **John 1:45**.

The book of Matthew then records that James, a son of Zebedee and brother of John, was called, **Matthew 4:21-22**, followed by Matthew's own calling, **Matthew 9:9**.

For a fuller account of the event recorded in this section of the chapter, we need to turn to **Luke 6:12-16**, where we find the addition of very important facts. The major event recorded by Mark is 'the choosing of the twelve,' and the listing of their names, and we may be excused for thinking that the brevity of Mark's account is rather surprising, considering the importance of the occasion.

THE RABBI DISCIPLE SYSTEM

Every young Jewish boy grew up wanting to be a rabbi, and every young Jewish boy and girl would at least go to an elementary school called Bet Sefer, that is, ‘House of the Book’.

Their job was to memorise the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

And the best of the best would be able to graduate and go on to the next school of learning, a type of secondary school called Bet Talmud, or ‘House of Learning’, and their job was to memorise the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

From there, the best of the best of that group would be allowed to apply to Bet Midrash, or ‘House of Seeking’, which was a type of school for would-be rabbis. A student would find a rabbi that he respected, someone that he wanted to be like, and he would say to that rabbi, ‘Rabbi, I want to follow you.’

Now the rabbi’s job was to question the would-be disciple to seek to determine, not whether or not he knew the Scriptures, but whether or not he could imitate his teachings, become like him, and pass on his way of life.

And if the student could answer the rabbi’s questions to his liking, then he would say to his student, ‘Come follow me.’ And these are the words that every student longed to hear. And he would leave behind his family, his job, his vocation, and he would go and become a disciple of that rabbi.

Now, if the student didn’t quite make the cut, the rabbi would say, ‘Ah, my son, you know the Torah, you know the teaching well, but I’m afraid that you cannot be my disciple, go home, make babies, and pray that they become rabbis.’

The very fact that these men were fishermen shows that they were not the best of the best, and they did not make the cut, and so when Jesus, a respected teacher of the law, a teacher of God’s Word, comes along and says, ‘Come follow me’, they could hardly believe it, and so they leave everything behind. Jesus was inviting them to become like Him. Another thought-provoking thought is that to some of them, He gave new names.

SIMON PETER

Peter was a Galilean fisherman who lived on the shores of the Sea of Galilee with his wife, his brother Andrew and his mother-in-law. People at the time worked as a family unit, so the men and women of Peter’s family worked together to catch and preserve, dry fish for export to the surrounding towns.

This particular family was probably in partnership with Zebedee and his sons, James and John, **Matthew 4:21**. Like his father and brother Andrew, Simon Peter was a fisherman by trade, working on the Lake of Galilee. His family seems to have been caught up in the revival movement led by John the Baptist.

Peter met Jesus at Bethany through his brother Andrew and was immediately impressed. Jesus called him ‘Peter’, the rock, an odd choice of name since Peter seems to have been passionate and impulsive rather than rock-like. Jesus actually called Peter ‘Cephas’, which is the Aramaic equivalent of ‘Petros’, a rock, **John 1:40-42**.

He named Peter in Greek ‘Petros’, which is masculine. It’s important to notice this, because Jesus later said, ‘Upon this ‘petra’, feminine, I will build My church’, **Matthew 16:18**.

JAMES, SON OF ZEBEDEE

The apostle James was honoured with a favoured position by Jesus Christ, as one of three men in his inner circle. The others were James' brother John and Simon Peter. When Jesus called the brothers, James and John were fishermen with their father Zebedee on the Sea of Galilee.

They immediately left their father and their business to follow the young rabbi. James was probably the older of the two brothers because he was always mentioned first.

Three times, James, John, and Peter were invited by Jesus to witness events no one else saw: the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead, **Mark 5:37-47**, the transfiguration, **Matthew 17:1-3**, and Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, **Matthew 26:36-37**.

But James wasn't above making mistakes. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, he and John wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the place; this earned them the nickname 'Boanerges,' or 'sons of thunder,' **Mark 3:17**.

The mother of James and John also overstepped her bounds, asking Jesus to grant her sons special positions in his kingdom, **Matthew 20:20**. James' zeal for Jesus resulted in his being the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred. He was killed with the sword on the order of King Herod Agrippa I of Judea, about 44 A.D., in a general persecution of the early church, **Acts 12:1-2**.

JOHN, SON OF ZEBEDEE

John was the brother of the apostle James, and he was also the son of Zebedee, a fisherman of Galilee. His mother's name was Salome, who is believed to be the sister of Jesus' mother, Mary.

John, his brother James and the apostles Peter and Andrew were all partners in a fishing business prior to their calls by Jesus to follow Him; Zebedee was also a partner.

It is said that John owned a home in Jerusalem and that it's possible that the interview Nicodemus had with Jesus was held there. John, with his brother James, wanted to call down fire from heaven upon the place; this earned them the nickname 'Boanerges,' or 'sons of thunder,' **Mark 3:17**.

The apostle John rose to a position of influence within worldwide Christianity, and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., he moved to Ephesus.

He became the elder of the church in Ephesus and had a special relationship with other churches in the area, as we know from the letters to the Seven Churches in Asia, in the Book of Revelation.

John's brother, James, was the first of the apostles to die; on the other hand, John was the last. All of the apostles met a violent death; however, John died peacefully in Ephesus, at an advanced age, around the year 100 AD.

There is a church tradition which says, that while John was living in Ephesus, he had with him Mary, the mother of Jesus, for a few years. While in Ephesus, by order of the Roman emperor Domitian, John was exiled to an island called Patmos.

In what is known as the cave of the Apocalypse, located on this island, the sacred text of the book of Revelation was given to the apostle John by Jesus. It is here that John recorded what is written in the New Testament Book of Revelation.

Other New Testament books accredited to John are the Gospel of John, along with 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. When he was released from exile, he returned to Ephesus and lived till the time of the Roman emperor Trajan.

It's said that John, who founded and built churches throughout all of Asia and was worn out by old age, died at the age of sixty-eight years after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city, Ephesus.

Peter and Andrew dropped their nets and followed Jesus. James and John left their nets and their father and followed Jesus too. Think about this, they left their jobs, their family, and their comforts immediately to follow Jesus, **Matthew 10:37-39 / Mark 10:28 / Luke 9:23**.

These three men, Peter, James and John, were the three who were closest to Jesus, whom Jesus took with Him on very special occasions.

- a. The house of Jairus, whose daughter He brought back to life, **Luke 8:49-56**.
- b. His transfiguration, **Mark 9:1-8**.
- c. The garden of Gethsemane, **Matthew 26:36-46**.

ANDREW

The name Andrew is a Greek name which means 'manly' or 'of valour.' Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter and the son of Jonah. He was born in Bethsaida in the province of Galilee and was a fisherman like his brother Peter.

Before he met Jesus, Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. However, when John pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, he realised that Jesus was greater and immediately left John, found his brother Peter and became a disciple of Jesus, **John 1:25-42**.

After this, Andrew and Peter continued to be fishermen and lived at home until being called permanently by Jesus to be 'fishers of men,' **Matthew 4:18-20**. Later, Jesus is teaching the multitudes on the mountainside, and he asks Philip where they could find food to feed the crowd, and Philip says, 'eight months' wages could not buy enough bread to feed them.

It was Andrew who brought the boy with five barley loaves and two fish to Jesus, who miraculously multiplied them into enough food to feed everyone, **John 6:8-9**.

And it was Andrew who, during the Passover Feast, brought a group of Greeks and Gentiles to meet Jesus, which prompts Jesus to remark, 'when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to myself,' **John 12:20-32**.

Andrew knew that Jesus came not only to save Israel but also everyone on the earth. The last time Andrew is mentioned in the Bible is in Acts chapter one, where he is listed as one of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and His ascension into Heaven, **Acts 1:13**.

Because they were fishermen, who were used to fishing for fish, Jesus tells them He will make them fishers of men, they will preach the Good News and share it with others, in order that those they teach will become followers of Christ, **Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15-16**.

What does Jesus' choosing of Peter, Andrew, James and John tell us about the character of a person who can take Jesus to the world? They all had their strengths and weaknesses; they were ordinary people who weren't highly educated.

The re-naming of these men reveals the fact that the Lord knows what we are and what we can become. I wonder if He has another name for each one of us and what that name might be?

PHILIP

Philip, the apostle, is not to be confused with the evangelist Philip in Acts. Like Peter and Andrew, Philip was from Bethsaida **John 1:44**. Philip, whose name means ‘lover of horses’, is named in all three lists of apostles, **Mark 3:16 / Matthew 10:4 / Luke 6:14-16**, and in each he is the 5th apostle listed. He isn’t mentioned again in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Everything else we know of him comes from the Gospel of John.

Philip told Nathanael that they had found the Messiah and that he was from Nazareth. When Nathanael replied, ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’ Philip simply said, ‘Come and see,’ **John 1:43-46**. Shortly after, Nathanael became one of Jesus’ disciples.

Later, before the miraculous feeding of the multitude, Jesus tested Philip by asking, ‘Where will we buy bread for these people to eat?’ Philip failed the test by replying, ‘Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!’ **John 6:5-7**.

Later, shortly before Jesus is arrested, He tells His disciples that ‘If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him,’ **John 14:7**.

But Philip’s response again shows a lack of faith when he asks, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus sternly rebukes him and says, ‘Philip, don’t you know me, even after I have been with you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,’ **John 14:8-9**. Philip isn’t mentioned again in the New Testament except in the list of apostles waiting in the upper room shortly after Christ’s ascension, **Acts 1:13**.

What lesson can we learn from Philip when it comes to sharing the good news with others? Philip was convinced about who Jesus was, as we must be. He was convinced enough to tell someone else about Jesus.

NATHANAEL, ALSO NAMED BARTHOLOMEW

His name means ‘given’ or ‘gift of God’; he was one of our Lord’s disciples, ‘of Cana in Galilee’, **John 21:2**. Jesus says he was ‘truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit,’ **John 1:47-48**.

His name occurs only in the Gospel of John, which, in his list of the disciples, never mentions Bartholomew, with whom he has consequently been identified. He was one of those to whom the Lord showed Himself alive after His resurrection, at the Sea of Tiberias, **John 21:1-2**.

Bartholomew’s name appears with every list of the disciples, **Mark 3:18 / Matthew 10:3 / Luke 6:14 / Acts 1:13**. This wasn’t the first name, however. It was his second name. His first name was probably Nathanael, whom Jesus called ‘an Israelite in whom there is no deceit,’ **John 1:47**.

The New Testament gives us very little information about him; tradition indicates he was a great searcher of the Scripture and a scholar in the law and the prophets.

He developed into a man of complete surrender to the Carpenter of Nazareth, and one of the church’s most adventurous missionaries. He is said to have preached with Philip in Phrygia and Hierapolis, also in Armenia.

The Armenian Church claims him as its founder and martyr. However, tradition says that he preached in India, and his death seems to have taken place there; he died as a martyr for his Lord. He was lashed alive with knives.

If we’re taking the good news to people, how important is it to be truthful with them? No deceit means don’t do what Jacob did with his brother Esau. No alternative motives, **Genesis 27:1-46**.

MATTHEW, ALSO NAMED LEVI

Matthew was named Levi before his call by Jesus, **Mark 2:14**. We don't know whether Jesus gave him the name Matthew or whether he changed it himself, but it is a shortening of the name Mattathias, which means 'gift of Yahweh,' or simply 'the gift of God.'

On the same day, Jesus invited Matthew to follow him. Matthew threw a great farewell feast in his home in Capernaum, inviting his friends so they could meet Jesus too, **Matthew 9:10-13**. From that time on, instead of collecting tax money, Matthew collected souls for Christ.

Despite his sinful past, Matthew was uniquely qualified to be a disciple; he was an accurate record keeper and keen observer of people, and he captured the smallest details. Those traits served him well when he wrote the Gospel of Matthew some twenty years later.

By surface appearances, it was scandalous and offensive for Jesus to pick a tax collector as one of his closest followers since they were widely hated by the Jews. Yet of the four Gospel writers, Matthew presented Jesus to the Jews as their hoped-for Messiah, tailoring his account to answer their questions.

Matthew displayed one of the most radically changed lives in the Bible in response to an invitation from Jesus. He didn't hesitate, he didn't look back. He left behind a life of wealth and security for poverty and uncertainty. He abandoned the pleasures of this world for the promise of eternal life.

The remainder of Matthew's life is uncertain. Tradition says he preached for fifteen years in Jerusalem following the death and resurrection of Jesus, then went out on the mission field to other countries.

Why would Matthew be a good example of evangelism today? He's been there and done that; he knows people and how they think. He never forgot where he came from; he was a sinner, and since following Jesus, he knew where he was going.

We need people who can relate and sympathise with other people. He basically threw a party and invited his old friends and his new Christ-following friends and let them mix, **Mark 2:15**.

THOMAS

Thomas Didymus lived in Galilee. Tradition says he laboured in Parthia, Persia, and India, suffering martyrdom in India. Thomas was his Hebrew name, and Didymus was his Greek name.

Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us nothing about Thomas except his name. However, John defines him more clearly in his Gospel. Thomas appeared in the raising of Lazarus, **John 11:2-16**, in the Upper Room, **John 14:1-6**, where he wanted to know how to know the way where Jesus was going.

In **John 20:25**, we see him saying unless he sees the nail prints in Jesus' hand and the gash of the spear on His side, he will not believe. That's why Thomas became known as Doubting Thomas.

By nature, Thomas was a pessimist; he was a bewildered man. Yet, he was a man of courage; he was a man who couldn't believe until he had seen. He was a man of devotion and faith.

When Jesus rose, he came back and invited Thomas to put his finger in the nail prints on his hands and his side. Here, we see Thomas making the greatest confession of faith, 'My Lord and my God,' **John 20:28**.

Thomas' doubts were transformed into faith. By this very fact, Thomas' faith became great, intense and convincing. Remember, Thomas, although he may not have fully understood, was the only one who wanted to go with Jesus to Bethany in order for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead. 'Let us also go, that we may die with him,' **John 11:16**.

Do we ever have doubts about our ability to share God's Word with others? We have to remember that the power is in the Word, not the speaker, **Romans 1:16**.

JAMES, SON OF ALPHAEUS

The title 'James the Lesser' or 'the Little,' helps to distinguish him from the apostle James, son of Zebedee, who was part of Jesus' inner circle of three and the first disciple to be martyred. James the Lesser may have been younger or smaller in stature than Zebedee's son, as the Greek word for 'the less', 'mikros', conveys both meanings.

Although it's argued by scholars, some believe James the Lesser was the disciple who first witnessed the risen Christ in **1 Corinthians 15:7**, 'Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.' Beyond this, Scripture reveals nothing more about James the Lesser.

THADDAEUS OR POSSIBLY NAMED JUDE

Little is known about Thaddeus, but Bible scholars generally agree that the four names used for him all refer to the same person. In lists of the twelve, he is called 'Thaddeus' or 'Thaddaeus', a surname for the name 'Lebbaeus,' **Matthew 10:3**, which means 'heart' or 'courageous.' The picture is further confused when he is called 'Judas' but is distinguished from Judas Iscariot.

Church tradition holds that Thaddeus founded a church at Edessa and was crucified there as a martyr. Thaddeus preached the Gospel as a missionary following Jesus' resurrection.

Thaddeus learned the Gospel directly from Jesus and loyally served Christ despite hardship and persecution. Like most of the other apostles, Thaddeus abandoned Jesus during His trial and crucifixion, **Mark 14:43-52**. How can we encourage someone to study the Bible if they already claim they are Christians? **Acts 18:24-26**.

SIMON THE ZEALOT

Simon, the Zealot, one of the little-known followers called the Canaanites or Zelotes, lived in Galilee. Tradition says he was crucified. In two places in the King James Version, he is called a Canaanite, **Mark 3:18 / Matthew 10:4**.

However, in the other two places, he is called Simon Zelotes, **Luke 6:15 / Acts 1:13**.

The New Testament gives us practically nothing on him personally except that it says he was a Zealot. The Zealots were fanatical Jewish Nationalists who had a heroic disregard for the suffering involved and the struggle for what they regarded as the purity of their faith.

The Zealots were crazed with hatred for the Romans. It was this hate for Rome that destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Josephus says the Zealots were reckless persons, zealous in good practices and extravagant and reckless in the worst kind of actions.

From this background, we see that Simon was a fanatical Nationalist, a man devoted to the Law, a man with bitter hatred for anyone who dared to compromise with Rome. Yet, Simon clearly emerged as a man of faith.

He abandoned all his hatred for the faith that he showed toward his Master and the love that he was willing to share with the rest of the disciples, especially Matthew, the Roman tax collector.

Simon, the Zealot, the man who once would have killed in loyalty to Israel, became the man who saw that God would have no forced service. Tradition says he died as a martyr.

His apostolic symbol is a fish lying on a Bible, which indicates he was a former fisherman who became a fisher of men through preaching. Simon left everything in his previous life to follow Jesus.

Are we zealous to take Jesus to the world? **Galatians 6:9**. If someone desires to become a Christian, how do we teach them that there is a cost involved? **Luke 14:25-33**.

JUDA ISCARIOT

Judas Iscariot is remembered for one thing: his betrayal of Jesus Christ, **Matthew 26:13-15**. Even though Judas showed remorse later, his name became a symbol for traitors and turncoats throughout history, **Matthew 27:3-5**. His motive seemed to be greed, but some scholars speculate that political desires lurked beneath his treachery.

Judas Iscariot travelled with Jesus and studied under him for three years. He apparently went with the other eleven when Jesus sent them to preach the Gospel, cast out demons, and heal the sick. Judas was a thief; he was in charge of the group's money bag and sometimes stole from it, **John 12:4-6**.

He was disloyal. Even though the other apostles deserted Jesus and Peter denied him, Judas went so far as to lead the temple guard to Jesus at Gethsemane, and then identified Jesus by kissing him, **Luke 22:47-48**.

Some would say Judas Iscariot made the greatest error in history, **Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18**. If Jesus chose Judas despite Him knowing what Judas would eventually do, what can we learn about anyone who comes to Christ? **John 13:34-35**.

When we reflect upon the apostles, what kind of people do we need to remember that Jesus can use? The very fact that Jesus chose them suggests that, although He was the Son of God, in His humanity, He felt the need for companionship and support.

Indeed, the Scriptures tell us that there were several reasons why in **Mark 3:14-15**. He chose these twelve for the following reasons.

1. To be with Him.
2. That He might send them out to preach.
3. To have the power to perform miracles of healing.

He 'ordained' them and gave them power and authority, **Mark 6:13**. There are several Greek words for 'ordain' so that it has several shades of meaning, 'to appoint; to set in place; to point out; to indicate by pointing the finger.' Note the difference between power and authority. It's possible for a person to have 'power', but lack the 'authority' to use it. Jesus gave the men whom He chose power and the authority to exercise it.

JESUS ACCUSED BY HIS FAMILY AND BY TEACHERS OF THE LAW

‘Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered so 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.’ And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’ So, Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: ‘How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.’ He said this because they were saying, ‘He has an impure spirit.’

Mark 3:20-30

In **Matthew 12:22-24**, we find the religious leaders accusing Jesus of working for the devil for the second time, **Matthew 9:32-34**, being the first. Please note in **Matthew 12:22-24**, we have a man who is ‘demon-possessed, blind and mute’, but in the previous account, we have a man who is ‘demon-possessed and mute’, **Matthew 9:32-34**. Luke mentions that the man was ‘mute’, **Luke 14:14**, but Matthew mentions that the man was ‘blind and mute’, **Matthew 12:22**. Mark doesn’t mention any man at all. It’s certainly possible that we have two accounts from two different occasions. **Matthew 9:32-34** appears to go parallel with **Luke 11:14**.

While Jesus’ family thought He had gone crazy, **Mark 3:20-21**, the Pharisees charged that He accomplished His work through the power of the devil, **Mark 3:22**. They were desperately seeking to discredit Him and diminish His influence. Jesus’ devastating reply silenced them.

1. He said that it would be unreasonable and even disastrous for the devil to begin attacking himself, **Mark 3:23-26**. Civil wars don’t produce strong kingdoms.

2. Christ explained that He had come to rob the strong man, the devil, taking from him the souls that had been under his control, **Mark 3:27**.

Logically, He would need to disarm Satan to accomplish this goal, so expelling demons was a predictable facet of His strategy.

3. He warned of the serious consequences of hardening one’s heart to the point of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, **Mark 3:28-29**.

These scribes were demonstrating a malicious and possibly fatal attitude toward the work of God, **Mark 3:30**.

BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

Mark 3:20 tells us that Jesus and His followers returned to the town, and when this was known, the crowds came together again, and the situation was as bad as ever. Furthermore, the Scribes had arrived from Jerusalem, bent on discrediting Him, because He was becoming far too popular and influential for their liking!

They had come, no doubt, because the local Pharisees had reported the growing popularity and influence of Jesus and urged that something should be done about it. In fact, the Pharisees in Capernaum had formed an alliance with the Herodians and were planning to kill Jesus, **Mark 3:6**.

That in itself shows how much they hated him. An alliance of Pharisees and Herodians was as unlikely and incredible as an alliance of Conservatives and Socialists today, considering the depth of the hatred the Pharisees and Herodians had for each other.

The very fact that these two parties had even spoken to each other was amazing because the Pharisees were the ones who kept strictly to the Law of Moses, whilst the Herodians were supporters of the Romans.

They had to be, considering the fact that the Romans had made Herod, their family head, King of the Jews and given him authority over Galilee. The line of attack adopted by the Jerusalem scribes is stated in **Mark 3:22**.

He is under the control of Beelzebub, and he casts out demons because He is in league with the Devil. The name, ‘Beelzebub’, **Mark 3:22**, is one of the many names given to Satan, and it is the Greek form of the name ‘Baal-Zebub,’ meaning ‘The Lord of Flies’.

Although Mark does not record the account in detail, both Matthew and Luke do! They tell us in **Matthew 12**, and, **Luke 11**, of their Gospels, that Jesus had healed a man who was blind and dumb, but, instead of accepting the miracle for what it was and intended to be, namely, proof of identity, proof that He was their long-awaited Messiah, they deliberately tried to discredit Him by accusing Him of being in league with the Devil.

First of all, Jesus reasons with them, **Mark 3:23-26**. He is aware of the fact that the Scribes have been moving among the people, trying to turn them against Him, seeking to discredit Him and undermine His influence.

Jesus basically says, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? You accept that the man was under the influence of Satan, so why would Satan want to heal him? Wouldn’t that mean that Satan is working against himself? Is it not true that a house divided against itself cannot stand?’

He says, ‘It is not possible to take anything out of the house of a strong man unless you first disable the strong man! You must first bind the strong men, and then you can take his possessions!’ **Mark 3:27**.

He basically says, ‘You know very well that your argument is false!’ Furthermore, ‘if I cast out demons with the help of Satan, by whose help do your sons claim to cast them out?’ But then, Jesus changes His tone, He issues a warning, **Mark 3:28-29**.

Taking note of what Matthew and Luke also say about this incident, Jesus says to the Scribes, ‘You may blaspheme, say what you like, speak injuriously, or critically about Me. You may misrepresent Me, and you can be forgiven, but you are in danger of eternal condemnation when you blaspheme the Holy Spirit by Whom this man has been made well!’

These religious leaders were sinning against the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, by whose power the man had been healed, when they deliberately refused to recognise that by means of this and all the other miracles performed by Jesus, the Holy Spirit testified that Jesus is the Son of God, **1 John 5:7**.

In effect, these men were committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit by declaring that the Spirit of Truth is a liar. He had not performed the miracle, but Satan had! And the miracle did not prove that Jesus is the Christ. The Holy Spirit was lying about that also, **Matthew 12:31-32**.

I don’t need to tell you that these are some of the most serious words that ever came from the lips of Jesus Christ. In fact, the more you study this passage, the more terrible it reveals itself to be. It seems that Jesus is indicating a position into which, if a man enters, his case has become hopeless.

He says, ‘It is possible for us to adopt an attitude that makes it impossible for even God to forgive us,’ **Mark 3:29**. And for that very reason, whenever we read this passage, either in the Gospel of Matthew or in the other Gospels, we ought to be very careful how we treat it. There are two possibilities with this passage. There are two ways of dealing with it.

1. There is the possibility of reading into the words, something that isn’t really there, and making it say something that even Jesus never meant them to say.
2. It is possible to water it down so much that you deprive them entirely of its meaning and its terribleness.

I think this subject is an interesting one. And I think it is interesting because some people may think that they have committed the ‘unforgivable sin’. And even if you don’t think that, at least it’s a curious subject. It’s mysterious, and it’s strange and terrible, and it’s fascinating. It’s also a subject which has caused a great deal of confusion.

Consequently, a great many speculative theories have been put forward about it. Some of the theories have been so confused and so involved that they haven't helped anybody; they have only created further uncertainty and difficulty.

Surely it has to be possible to know what Jesus meant. I can't believe God has allowed this passage to be put into His Word by the inspiration of the Spirit, and He wants to keep us in the dark about it. Especially with such a serious matter as 'the unforgivable sin' is involved.

To understand the meaning of Jesus, we've got to go back to the original setting. Here is a demon-possessed man, and consequently, because of that, he is blind and dumb, **Matthew 12:22**.

And he is brought to Jesus and the man is miraculously cured by Jesus. Now the people standing around are amazed at this demonstration of divine power, and they say, 'Could this be the Son of David?' **Matthew 12:23**. They believe, like Nicodemus, that no man could do these miracles except if God is with him, **John 3:2**. But the Pharisees, as usual, tried to discredit Him.

They say something that even before the words left their lips, they must have known was not true. They say, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons,' **Matthew 12:24**.

In other words, they deliberately turned their back on the miracle, a miracle that ought to have convinced them that Jesus was the Son of God. Remember that is what the miracles were designed to do, **John 20:30-31**.

And they say, 'Now this man's not the Son of God, and the power that He manifests isn't God's power either, He works miracles only because He is in league with the devil, the one who really performed that miracle was the devil himself,' **Matthew 12:24**.

This means they not only spoke against Jesus, but they spoke against the Holy Spirit by whose power the miracle was performed. Remember that Jesus said in **Matthew 12:28**, 'If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God.'

So, Jesus claims that this was a demonstration of the Spirit's power through Him. But they blind themselves to that, and they not only insult Jesus, **Mark 3:22**, but by doing that, they speak wicked and insulting words against the Holy Spirit Himself.

We can now see the sin by which these men were guilty. Jesus describes in **Matthew 12:31-32** in two different ways. He calls it, first of all, 'Blasphemy against the Spirit' in **Matthew 12:31**. Then, in **Matthew 12:32**, He calls it, 'Speaking against the Spirit,' **Mark 3:29**.

Notice that Jesus didn't regard this as an attack against Himself. Of course, they were making an attack on Jesus; obviously, that was the whole idea in their minds. They spoke against Him when they made this wicked charge.

Jesus interprets what they say as directly against the Holy Spirit, and for once in His life, Jesus regarded the attitude of these men to be so terrible that He lowered Himself to reply to them.

Very often when Jesus was attacked by these people, He just ignored the attack and didn't retaliate, **1 Peter 2:23**.

Jesus wasn't concerned about defending Himself against an attack. But on this occasion, when the Holy Spirit was under attack, He certainly did, **Matthew 12:32**.

Notice it is 'A sin' against the Holy Spirit, **Matthew 12:32**. Notice I said, 'A sin' against the Holy Spirit, not 'THE sin' against the Holy Spirit. Because it is one sin, of many possible sins against the Spirit. And there is something else to notice, too. **Matthew 12:32** doesn't say that 'any sin or all sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable.'

And it doesn't teach us that there is only one sin against the Spirit. After all, the New Testament tells us that there are several sins against the Holy Spirit; there are several ways in which we may sin against the Spirit of God.

In **Hebrews 10:29**, we read of the sin of 'despising the Spirit of grace'. That's the sin that the Hebrew Christians were in danger of committing. Remember that the Hebrew letter was written to Jews who had been converted to Christianity but seemed to want to go back to the old Law. They seemed to have the idea that in becoming Christians, they had perhaps sacrificed more than they had accepted.

They had a longing for some of the outdated, superseded ceremonies of the Law of Moses, which really meant that they were looking back when the author had been looking forward.

And the writer tells them, if you keep on looking back, there is only one end to that, you're going to end up going back. And if that happens, if you go back after confessing Jesus, you are committing sin because you're treating the Holy Spirit with disgrace, you're affronting the Holy Spirit.

After all, He is the Spirit of grace. He brought you to the light. He led you to the blessings of Christ, and to go back now will be to insult Him. And every time a Christian turns their back on Jesus Christ and goes back into the world, that person is committing the sin of 'despising the Spirit of grace.'

Again, in **Acts 5**, you have the sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira. In **Acts 5:3 / Acts 5:9**, the sin is described in two ways. It's described as 'lying to the Spirit and testing the Spirit'.

1. All these people did was try to deceive the apostles, particularly Peter, by pretending that a part of the price they received from the sale of a piece of land was all of the price.

And Peter points out to them that their sin has really not been a sin against man at all. They have tested, tempted or tried the Holy Spirit by lying to Him. This sin of lying at this particular moment was certainly for these people, 'a sin that leads to death', to use the expression John uses in **1 John 5:16**. But that's not necessarily the unforgivable sin. It's not even described as the unforgivable sin.

Again, in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**, we discover that certain sins of impurity, certain sins of immorality in Christians are sins against the Holy Spirit. He says, 'Do you not know that your body'. He's not talking about the church, the body of Christ. He's talking about your physical body. And as a Christian, therefore, he says, 'The Holy Spirit dwells in you'.

You receive the indwelling presence of the Spirit at your baptism. God's given the Spirit to all them that obey Him, **Acts 5:32**. His presence in your body marks you out as holy, sanctified, set apart for God. And therefore, as Christians, we should be on our guard against any kind of conduct.

Any habit of personal life that is unclean or harmful or unhealthy to our moral, our mental, or our physical health is what he's talking about. The particular sin that is described in the passage, of course, is the sin of immorality. And such a sin, says Paul, is a sin against the Holy Spirit who lives within you and makes your body the temple of God because He detests impurity.

Again, in **Ephesians 4:30**, there is another sin against the Holy Spirit mentioned. 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.' Now, in this passage, when you read the context, you will discover that Paul is talking about the things that people say.

The things that Christians can say are the way we use our tongue. He is saying, 'Look, you have received the Holy Spirit as a token that God intends to redeem you outright one day, therefore watch your tongue, watch your language, watch the things you say, do not cause pain or sorrow, but let your words give grace and not offence.' And again, it relates to purity. Purity of speech and thought.

And then finally, there are others, but I am trying to demonstrate the various sins against the Holy Spirit that can be committed. In **1 Thessalonians 5:19**, Paul says, 'Do not put out the Spirit's fire.' Or 'Do not quench the Spirit.'

The Holy Spirit is in your life as a Christian. He's there to prompt you to zeal and enthusiasm. He's there to show you how best to serve God. But when you refuse to act on the promptings of the Holy Spirit in your life. When you refuse to be led to greater service for Him.

When you know what to do and you don't do it. When you know how to be a greater use to God, and you refuse to act, then you suffocate the voice of the Holy Spirit in your life. To an extent that He loses His influence on you.

And just as a fire can be put out by water, so you can restrain and dampen down and quench the Spirit of God. And ultimately, if you treat the Holy Spirit like this, He will leave your life.

He won't constantly try to struggle in your life at all, but He will leave you to yourself. And so the latter end of you is worse than the beginning, **Matthew 12:45 / 2 Peter 2:20**.

All of these are sins that can be committed against the Holy Spirit. And something else to notice, they are all sins that are committed by Christians. There's not one of these that applies to the Non-Christian. They all relate to the believer's attitude and relationship to the Spirit of God. But you're not told that any one of these is the 'unforgivable sin'.

Let's be honest, if any one of these sins was an unforgivable sin, how many of us would be saved? How many of us as Christians have not at one time or another committed one of the offences that I have just talked about? So, these aren't the unforgivable sins.

Let's look at the way that Jesus describes this particular sin. He calls it in **Mark 3:29 / Matthew 12:31-32**, 'Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit'. Now, blasphemy is 'evil speaking'.

In that sense, you can blaspheme anyone with evil words against them. But in the Biblical sense, blasphemy means, 'evil speaking against deity'. It's a very old sin, and in **Leviticus 24**, we find possibly the earliest mention of 'blasphemy' in the Bible.

And that's the time when Moses received the Law from God, and there was a man there. The son of an Israelite woman who has married an Egyptian, who is said to have blasphemed the name with a curse, **Leviticus 24:10-11**. Blaspheming the name is the name of God. And even it seems at that moment that this was such a terrible thing that even Moses was at a loss to know what to do.

Nobody had ever behaved like this before, certainly not among the people of God. And so, Moses goes to God and lays the matter before God, and he asks God what to do, **Leviticus 24:12**.

There is no misunderstanding of the penalty for the sin. And throughout the Old Testament, whenever this particular sin of blasphemy against God was committed either by word of mouth or by attitude, this particular sentence was carried out; people were stoned to death for blasphemy, **Leviticus 24:16**.

They even did it during the time of Jesus. Jesus heals a paralysed man, and He said, 'Son, your sins have been forgiven,' **Luke 5:20**. And His enemies said in **Luke 5:21**, 'This man speaks blasphemy.'

Another time, Jesus said, 'I and my father are one,' **John 10:30**. And they picked up stones to stone Him. And they said, 'For blasphemy, because you, being a man, are making yourself equal with God,' **John 10:33**.

And they were perfectly logical because there are many people today who don't believe that Jesus Christ is God or that He is equal with God. They are much more stupid than the Jews at the time of Jesus because of all the hatred and opposition they raised against Him; they certainly understood the significance of His words.

They recognised that Jesus was indeed claiming to be God. And in their eyes, that was blasphemy, and they were ready to carry out the sentence of the Law. We must remember that not all blasphemy is unforgivable.

Jesus said it, He said in **Mark 3:28 / Matthew 12:31**, 'Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, men.' And again, He says in **Mark 9:29 / Matthew 12:32**, 'Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven.' And he's talking about blasphemy.

We have an example of that, haven't we? The apostle Paul himself was once a blasphemer, **1 Timothy 1:13**. Why? Because his blasphemy was against the name of Christ and not against the Holy Spirit. It is true that when he attacked the Lord Jesus, he attacked the Holy Spirit too, but in his heart.

Even when his heart was full of hatred for the Christians, even when he opposed the name of Christ, Paul, in a misguided way, thought he was serving God. He loved God, and he respected the Spirit of God, so he was not in his heart blaspheming the Holy Spirit but the name of Jesus, and he received forgiveness.

Now there is a theory that says that the unforgivable sin is the sin of ‘refusing to believe the Gospel and dying in sin’. And that’s the explanation that is often given as ‘the unforgivable sin’.

They say that through the Gospel, the Holy Spirit is pleading with people to accept Jesus as their Saviour, and when they refuse to accept that testimony, they are just like the Pharisees committing the sin of blasphemy, the unforgivable sin.

If that were the case, if the unforgivable sin were the sin of refusing the Gospel of Christ and dying in sin, it couldn’t be committed before the Day of Pentecost, when the Gospel was first preached. And yet Jesus says to these Pharisees in **Mark 3:29 / Matthew 12:32**, ‘Anyone who commits this sin will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.’

Jesus isn’t saying that ‘This sin has no forgiveness in this life and the life that is yet to come.’ Everyone knows that when we get to the Day of Judgment, forgiveness for any sin is passed. So Jesus isn’t talking foolishness.

He’s saying to the Pharisees, ‘Look, anybody that commits this particular sin has no forgiveness, here and now, in the age in which you and I live, or in the age which is to come, when the Gospel will be preached.’

And again, when you think about it, if the unforgivable sin is the sin of refusing the Gospel invitation, rejecting the Gospel. You only have to do that once to commit that unforgivable sin.

And if we say that to commit this sin, a person must refuse the Gospel and go on refusing it until the day that they die, what’s so startlingly new about that idea? And didn’t Jesus say much more plainly in **John 8:24**, ‘If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.’

Everyone knows that if people persistently refuse the Gospel time and time again and go on refusing it until they die, their sins won’t be forgiven. But this isn’t ‘the unforgivable sin,’ in the sense in which Jesus is talking about it here.

Remember that we are dealing with a sin against the Holy Spirit and not against Jesus. But the failure to obey the Gospel would be no more blasphemy against the Holy Spirit than it would be blasphemy against God or Christ.

Because **Romans 1:1**, says, ‘The gospel is the gospel of God.’ **Galatians 1:7** says, ‘It is the gospel of Christ.’ So, to refuse the Gospel is as much a sin against God and Christ as it is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

In **Mark 3:23-29**, and again in **Matthew 12:27-32**, the sin that Jesus is talking about is shown to be something directly and particularly against the Holy Spirit. It was by the Holy Spirit that that particular miracle was performed.

And the Pharisees had said, ‘He has an unclean Spirit,’ **Mark 3:22 / Matthew 12:24**. That’s how they thought about the Holy Spirit, ‘The Spirit of God was an evil Spirit’.

You must have noticed that they didn’t deny that the miracle had been performed. If they could have disproved the miracle by showing that Jesus had some kind of trick and that He was a conjurer or a magician.

They would have discredited Jesus, but they didn’t try to do that; they didn’t even suggest it. If they had accused Jesus of fraud, they would have been speaking against Him, which wouldn’t have been the unforgivable sin as Jesus says.

These men went beyond Jesus, and they made a direct attack on the Holy Spirit, and what they actually did was to call the Holy Spirit a wicked spirit, an unclean spirit, the spirit of the devil. In other words, it was a deliberate attack on the Spirit of Holiness, **Romans 1:4**.

Indeed, the very way that Jesus puts it shows that we're not dealing with an indifferent rejection of the message of the Spirit as we get in the world today, when people refuse to become Christians.

But with something aggressive, something deliberate, something active. And that's what He means when He uses that expression, 'speaking against the Holy Spirit.'

Remember that Stephen was accused of attacking God, Moses and the temple. 'Attacking,' they said in **Acts 6:11**, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.'

In other words, they accused Stephen of launching an attack on God. And that's exactly what these men were doing. They were launching an attack on the Holy Spirit.

In fact, Stephen implies that the Jews were always doing that in **Acts 7:51**. In other words, 'they always fight against the Holy Spirit, they are always in opposition to the Holy Spirit'.

So why is this particular sin unforgivable? And why should a sin be unforgivable? Is it because God will not forgive it? Surely that can't be the answer.

Surely God hasn't marked out one particular sin as being so hideous and wicked, so terrible and grievous that He says, 'No'. 'Murder, I'll forgive that, lying, I'll forgive that, immorality, I'll even forgive that, blasphemy against Jesus, yes, I'll forgive that, I forgave Paul for doing that, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, No, I draw the line there.'

Does God behave like that? Of course, not. That's an impossible theory, to suggest that there is one sin that God will not forgive is utterly out of keeping with all that you know about the character of God.

Because time and time again God has shown us, pleading with men, 'Repent then, why will you die,' **Luke 13:3-5**. We are shown a God whose deepest longing is for men to turn to God and be forgiven, **Isaiah 1:18 / 2 Peter 3:9**. And we could go on.

The next question usually asked concerning this sin is whether or not it is still possible to commit it today. Opinions on this question certainly vary, and scholars seem to be divided in their positions. The evidence, however, seems to point toward the idea that this sin cannot be committed today.

1. The circumstances under which the sin is described cannot prevail today, due to the fact that the age of miracles has ceased, **1 Corinthians 13:8-12**.

No one today will have the opportunity to witness Jesus performing miracles in person, **2 Corinthians 5:16**.

2. There is no other mention of the sin in any Biblical passage written after the resurrection of Christ.

None of the inspired New Testament writers refers to the sin in any epistle or the Book of Acts, and none offers warnings to new converts about avoiding the sin post-Pentecost.

In conclusion, 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' is the only 'unforgivable sin' mentioned in the Bible, and it is mentioned in the context of the Pharisees accusing Jesus of being possessed by the devil.

The context indicates that it was a specific sin, and not a series of forgivable sins, or an attitude of persistent unbelief. As I wrote a moment ago, after the resurrection, no inspired writer mentions the sin, and no warnings against it were recorded.

There is no concrete evidence that it can be committed today. The fact that it's not mentioned after the resurrection lends itself to the idea that it cannot still be committed.

In fact, the indication from passages such as **1 John 1:7 / 1 John 1:9** is that 'all unrighteousness' that a person could commit today can be forgiven by the blood of Jesus.

‘Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’ Mark 3:31-35

Jesus’ mother Mary, **Luke 2:6-7**, along with his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas, along with his sisters who are not named in the Bible, **Matthew 13:55 / Mark 6:2-3**, come along to speak to Jesus, **Mark 3:31**. It’s clear that Jesus’ physical family didn’t understand Him. They came to try to talk to Him, perhaps to persuade Him to take a break, **Mark 3:31**.

He refused to give them a private hearing, explaining that His family no longer had a special claim on His attention, **Mark 3:31-32**. Jesus’ true family consists of those who hear and do His will, **Mark 3:34-35**. This incident shows that Mary had no special influence or privilege; Jesus treats all of His obedient followers equally.

SUMMARY

Jesus was continually under attack. He was criticised because He forgave sins, ate with sinners, didn’t fast, didn’t observe the religious establishment’s Sabbath doctrines, and cast out demons. He never cracked under intense scrutiny and pressure. Much to the contrary, He continually affirmed principles that are extremely important even for our service to Him.

1. The priority of forgiveness of sins over physical healing.
2. The importance of recognising one’s spiritual sickness.
3. The fact that fasting is to be done only when it fits the circumstances.
4. The uselessness of religious traditions.
5. The critical danger of hardheartedly rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

‘Again, Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said’. Mark 4:1-2

Jesus’ ministry was breaking barriers on all fronts and came in two stages. 1. Preaching. 2. Teaching. The teaching was usually done in the synagogue, not outdoors by the seashore, and so here we see teaching happening in a different place and in a different way, with the use of parables. This was something that was never done in the synagogues.

He taught and spoke in parables in a way that people could understand. This is a lesson all preachers and teachers need to learn: keep them simple. Jesus uses illustrations and leaves those listening to discover the truth; if people were interested, they would come back to ask for more details.

Notice that Jesus got into a boat, [Mark 4:1](#), as He does often, [Mark 3:9](#). There would have been a small rowing boat that would take the disciples further out to the main fishing boat, which was larger. We see this happening later when he is asleep on the boat, [Mark 4:35-41](#).

The parable Jesus is about to speak, [Mark 4:2](#), is unusual in the fact that Jesus Himself explains the meaning of it. Can you imagine what a sight that must have been?

What a pulpit that must have been to use, the Master teacher sitting on a boat because His following was so large. Jesus says, “Listen”, and then goes on to share the parable with those listening.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

‘Listen, a farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times.’ Then Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear. When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside, everything is said in parables so that, “ ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’ Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.” Mark 4:3-

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Notice how Jesus starts the parable and how He ends the parable. He starts by saying, ‘Listen’, [Mark 4:1](#), and ends by saying, ‘He, who has ears to hear, let him hear,’ [Mark 4:9](#) / [Luke 8:8](#) / [Matthew 13:18](#).

It didn’t just mean listen to what I’ve just said, it means to think about it, and paying attention to what I’ve just said. Although this is called ‘the parable of the sower’, the key to understanding this parable is understanding that the seed is the Word of God, and so maybe it should be called ‘the parable of the soil’.

WHAT IS A PARABLE?

The word ‘Parable’ comes from the Greek word ‘Parabole’, which literally means a placing beside, a comparison, equivalent to or to compare. Some say that a parable is ‘an earthly story with a heavenly meaning’, but a parable is more than that.

The dictionary defines a parable as ‘a short figurative story, designed to convey some truth or moral lesson.’ Or ‘a brief story using events or facts of everyday life to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth.’

But parables come in many different styles and forms. In [Luke 4:22-23](#), we have an example of a parable in the form of a ‘Proverb’. Again, in [Luke 5:36-39](#), we find Jesus sharing a parable in the form of a ‘metaphor’ to the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law.

And there are many other forms of parables that Jesus used too. But the point is that Jesus used parables as a form of teaching. It wasn’t the only form of teaching He used, but it was certainly a form He liked to use a lot.

Throughout the Gospels, there are over thirty parables of Jesus recorded in some style or another. Most of them are well known to many people, but all of them are classics, and Jesus was the Master teacher when it came to parables.

In this parable, we find the following, which Jesus will explain later. We have a farmer who sows seed, [Mark 4:3](#) / [Luke 8:5](#) / [Matthew 13:3](#), and four different kinds of soil.

1. The first type is like hard-packed soil, [Mark 4:4](#) / [Luke 8:5](#) / [Matthew 13:4](#).

These hard-hearted people do not let the word penetrate their lives; they reject it immediately because they have closed their minds.

2. The second type is like seed sown in rocky places, [Mark 4:5-6](#) / [Luke 8:6](#) / [Matthew 13:5-6](#).

The idea here is of a thin layer of topsoil covering a large rock. When the seed is sown in such a place, it will germinate and grow in the shallow soil, but it will not develop deep roots. When the sun comes out, and it doesn’t rain for a few days, the plant will wither and die.

This represents a person who eagerly receives the word, but doesn’t develop roots through faith and Bible study. This person will not have the ability to withstand the temptations and persecutions that come along in life.

3. The thorny soil, [Mark 4:7](#) / [Luke 8:7](#) / [Matthew 13:7](#).

In this ground, the plant is overshadowed by taller weeds, which suffocate fruit production. This soil symbolises people who receive the word, and although they allow it to continue in their lives, permit competing interests to dwarf it. These other influences may not be bad things in themselves, but they dominate the person’s life so much that the seed can’t bear fruit.

4. The good soil, [Mark 4:8](#) / [Luke 8:8](#) / [Matthew 13:8](#).

This is the good soil in which plants bear abundant fruit. This soil represents Christians who are diligent in the service of God.

The seed fell on three different places, without any lasting success. 1. On the path. 2. On rocky ground. 3. On rocky places. 4. On the thorny ground. However, some of the seed fell on good ground. The seed fell onto different types of ground, and the harvest depended on the kind of soil where the seed fell.

It’s clear that His disciples and others didn’t understand the parable, [Mark 4:10](#) / [Mark 4:13](#) / [Mark 4:33-34](#) / [Luke 8:9](#) / [Matthew 13:10](#), and so, Jesus said He speaks in parables so that He can reveal secrets about the kingdom of heaven, [Mark 4:11](#) / [Luke 8:10](#).

Why did Jesus speak in parables? [Mark 4:10-13](#) / [Luke 8:4-7](#) / [Matthew 13:3-8](#). His parables were designed to test His hearers, not an intelligence test but rather a spiritual responsiveness test.

Jesus shares the parable with the people and says, ‘Do you want to know a secret?’ ‘I’ve shared a secret with you about the kingdom of heaven,’ [Mark 4:11](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 13:11](#).

And the parable He shared did exactly what the parable was designed to do. They were designed to get a response, [Mark 4:10-12](#) / [Luke 8:9-10](#) / [Matthew 13:13-15](#). It split the people into two groups: those who were interested in truth and those who weren’t, [Mark 4:12](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 13:13-15](#) / [Isaiah 6:9-10](#).

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Jesus didn’t use parables to blind people, but because they were blind. ‘Therefore Jesus used the parabolic method, not in order to blind them, but in order to make them look again; not in order to prevent them from coming to forgiveness, but in order to lure them toward a new attention.’

Jesus is saying, ‘My people can see and perceive, My people can hear and understand, but they just don’t want to,’ [Mark 4:12](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 13:13-15](#) / [Isaiah 6:9-10](#).

He’s saying they don’t want to turn to God and be forgiven because their hearts are so far away from Me. He says My people have always seen, they’ve always heard, but My people don’t want to listen and understand, because they are too stubborn, [Isaiah 29:13](#).

A couple of chapters later in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus says that the religious people were hypocrites who were more interested in the traditions of men rather than the commands of God, [Mark 7:6-8](#).

And it’s then that Jesus asks those who are listening, if they can’t understand this parable, how will they understand any other parable that He will share, [Mark 4:13](#).

Jesus is saying this secret about the kingdom of heaven is so easy to understand, [Mark 4:11](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 13:13-15](#). He says it’s so plain and obvious, and yet none of you can understand it!

He’s telling them that they need to be able to understand this parable so that they can go on and understand other parables that He will teach them. It’s much the same as what Paul says to the church in Corinth, [1 Corinthians 3:1-2](#). The great call of Scripture is for growth, for us to grow spiritually.

The minute we were born again in the waters of baptism, [John 3:3](#) / [Acts 2:38](#), we should be starting to grow spiritually. And the more we study the Word of God, the more we understand and grow, but we need to grow, [2 Peter 3:18](#).

A lot of kids in the world today are born with a disease that stops them from growing both physically and mentally. But sadly, the same goes for some Christians, not physically or mentally but spiritually, [Hebrews 5:11-14](#). Notice how the Hebrew writer describes how we become mature, “By constant use and training”.

Studying isn’t easy sometimes, but it’s something that all Christians need to do; they need to train themselves to do it. The desire for understanding the Bible will drive us forward to understand even more of the Bible. That’s what Jesus’ disciples did; they wanted to understand more, and so, Jesus gave them even more solid food, [Matthew 5:6](#) / [Luke 24:27](#).

So we find that these few people who were listening to Jesus didn’t understand what the parable of the Sower meant, but they had the desire to know, and so Jesus explained it to them.

He says, ‘Here’s a secret about the kingdom of God’, [Mark 4:11](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 13:13-15](#). Matthew records in [Matthew 13:16-17](#) that the disciples were blessed because they used their eyes to see and their ears to hear, that is, they were open to Jesus’ teaching and as a result were blessed, [Matthew 16:17](#) / [John 20:29](#).

Many of the Old Testament prophets and righteous people who lived by faith longed to see what the disciples were now seeing; they longed to hear the teachings Christ was teaching His disciples.

In other words, they longed to hear the wonderful things which Jesus was revealing to His disciples, [John 8:56](#) / [Galatians 4:4-5](#) / [Hebrews 11:13](#) / [Hebrews 11:25-26](#) / [Hebrews 11:39-40](#) / [1 Peter 1:10-12](#).

Jesus taught and explained the parable using an everyday life event. He uses the illustration of a farmer sowing his seed. Have you ever wondered why some people become Christians, and then a little later, they fall away? Have you ever wondered why some people aren’t Christians?

We have people who come into our assemblies, they hear the Gospel of Christ being preached, they know what they need to do to become obedient to the Gospel, and yet, nothing ever seems to happen.

How come we don't get people coming to Christ when the Gospel is preached as it was during Biblical times? Well, maybe the best way to answer that question is by letting Jesus ask the question He was asking.

How could the scribes and Pharisees misrepresent God the way they did? [Mark 4:12](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 13:13-15](#) / [Isaiah 6:9-10](#). How could the disciples and those listening not totally understand what Jesus was teaching? The way the Word is being sown or being preached isn't the problem; the problem is the way people receive it.

In other words, those people who are honestly searching for the truth are those people for whom the truth will become much clearer. We need to remember to whom the Word of God is being preached; it's being preached to sinners.

People whose hearts have been hardened with sin over the years. Jesus says that people are like the place where the seed lands, [Mark 4:3-8](#) / [Luke 8:5-8](#) / [Matthew 13:3-8](#). He's talking about four different soils, which represent four different reactions or responses when people hear the Word of God, [Mark 4:14](#) / [Luke 8:11](#) / [Matthew 4:19](#).

1. Jesus said that the birds mentioned in [Mark 4:4](#) / [Luke 8:5](#) / [Matthew 13:4](#) are a picture of the devil himself, who comes down and takes the seed away, [Mark 4:15](#) / [Luke 8:12](#) / [Matthew 13:19](#).

But the reason the devil can so easily take it away is that the Word of God has no impression on these people at all. They're so hardened in sin, they don't even understand the significance of the words being said.

In other words, the path is hard, [Mark 4:4](#) / [Luke 8:5](#) / [Matthew 13:4](#), the seed has nowhere to plant its roots, [Jeremiah 4:3](#) / [Hosea 10:12](#). They hear the Gospel but don't hang around long enough to find out what it means to them.

Because when people are hardened with sin, they always think that whatever's being said doesn't apply to them.

2. Jesus goes on to describe another reaction to the Gospel.

People who hear the Word of God, accept it with gladness and joy, [Mark 4:5](#) / [Luke 8:6](#) / [Matthew 13:5](#), but they have no root in themselves, [Mark 4:16-17](#) / [Luke 8:13](#) / [Matthew 13:20](#). Jesus says these people are OK for a while but as soon as any persecution or worry comes along from being a follower of God, they just give up.

So the Word that was planted in them at the start, just springs up very quickly but the soil was lacking, [Mark 4:5](#) / [Luke 8:6](#) / [Matthew 13:5](#). And so when the sun comes out, it's quickly burnt up because it has no root and lacks moisture, [Mark 4:5](#) / [Luke 8:6](#) / [Matthew 13:5](#).

Jesus is saying there are hearts out there that will receive the truth with great readiness and joy, [Mark 4:16](#) / [Luke 8:13](#) / [Matthew 13:20](#). And He says it's not until the heat gets turned up, that these people fall away.

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

'Then there are many more, whose religion must be sustained by enthusiastic surroundings. They seem to have been baptised in boiling water, and unless the temperature around them is kept up to that point, they wither away. The religion that is born of mere excitement will die when the excitement is over.'

It worries me when people become Christians without even studying the Word of God first. People need to know and understand who and what they are committing to, [Luke 14:26-35](#).

Jesus says whenever the heat of tribulation or persecution comes along because of the Word of God, their delight in the truth just withers away and dries up.

3. Jesus goes on to describe another type of response to the Gospel.

In the case of the seed that fell among the thorns, [Mark 4:4](#) / [Mark 4:18-19](#) / [Luke 8:7](#) / [Luke 8:14](#) / [Matthew 13:7](#) / [Matthew 13:22](#), we must note that there was nothing wrong with the soil. It's not too hard like the seed that fell along the path; there's enough soil for the seed to take root, unlike the seed that fell on a rocky place.

It's not the soil that's the problem; it's what is in the soil around it. It's the environment in which it's living is the problem. One of the ways that Satan likes to attack God's people is with worry; worry is the greatest joy stealer there is.

Jesus says there are three things that steal our joy as Christians. He says there are three things that can stop us from becoming fruitful followers of the Word.

1. The cares of this world, [Mark 4:19](#) / [Luke 8:14](#) / [Matthew 13:22](#).

People are so caught up in this life that they forget about the next. They worry about their jobs, they worry about their homes, and they worry about having enough money to get by.

Jesus says we shouldn't be getting distracted by anything. He'll take care of all your worries, [Matthew 6:25-34](#) / [Matthew 6:33](#). He says, listen, we're Christians, we don't need to worry about these things, [1 Peter 5:7](#), just leave the worrying to the unbelievers.

2. The deceitfulness of riches, [Mark 4:19](#) / [Luke 8:14](#) / [Matthew 13:22](#).

The world's biggest con these days is this: 'get rich fast and you'll be happy'. Whether that comes in the form of a new car or a new home, it doesn't matter. I don't know if you have noticed, but over the past few years, the 'National Lottery' has now got even more chances for you to win every day of the week. They now have a daily 'National Lottery' draw.

And that's because they realise that in a world that's so commercial, people are lusting after the quick-fix answer to their problems or a get-me-rich-fast answer to their problems.

But Jesus tells us that that's not the fruit of the Spirit, [Galatians 5:22-23](#). He says that those riches are the fruit of the world. He says people are being deceived into thinking that material goods are the answer to life.

The only answer to this life is Jesus Christ Himself, and if we want answers about this life, then we need to look to Jesus, [John 14:6](#), because He's the only one who has the answers for this life.

3. The pleasures of this life, [Mark 4:19](#) / [Luke 8:14](#) / [Matthew 13:22](#).

Everyone likes to have fun, and there's nothing wrong with that, but the problem comes when the fun becomes more important than godly living. There's nothing wrong with playing cards, but the problem comes when we start gambling, and our gambling habit takes over our lives.

There's nothing wrong with having a drink, but the problem comes when the drink becomes more important than God himself. God has given us the gift of pleasure, which in itself can be innocent. But we need to remember that the world's idea of enjoyment is totally opposite to God's idea of enjoyment.

These three things or these three thorns that we have just mentioned are constantly in the environment that we live in every day. And what they do is smother and choke the Word of God, [Mark 4:18-19](#) / [Luke 8:14](#) / [Matthew 13:22](#).

And Jesus says, the reason that these people don't bear any fruit is because of these thorns. He says, they look promising, they look like they're going to bear fruit, but they never do, and so they end up choking to death.

He says the thorns soak up all the moisture and riches that are in the soil, and so the world ends up with all their attention, and God just gets the dregs of whatever is left, [Matthew 22:37](#). They are starved of the truth, which is found in the word of God.

4. Jesus speaks about the good soil, [Mark 4:8](#) / [Mark 4:19-20](#) / [Luke 8:8](#) / [Luke 8:15](#) / [Matthew 13:8](#) / [Matthew 13:23](#).

Jesus says, 'This is the soil I'm looking for, this is the kind of response to My words that I'm looking for.' This soil is the total opposite of the three other soils mentioned. These are the people whose hearts are soft and tender; they received and cherished the seed when it was planted.

These people soak up the Word of God and gain strength from it and go on to produce a crop of 'thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown,' [Mark 4:20](#) / [Luke 8:15](#) / [Matthew 13:23](#).

These are the people who plant good seed in people's hearts and are rewarded with a good crop, that is a good number of people responding to the Gospel message, [1 Corinthians 3:6](#).

They can see the world's riches for what they really are; they guard themselves against worldly pleasures, Proverbs 21:17. And they cast all their anxieties onto Him because they know He cares for them, 1 Peter 5:7. They produce much fruit, and it's these people who are the long-distance faith runners, who are faithful to the end.

And it's to those people who Jesus says, 'Do you want to know a secret?' Mark 4:11 / Luke 8:10 / Matthew 13:11. Don't be surprised when people don't want to hear about Me.

Don't be surprised when people become Christians and only last a short time. Don't be surprised when people look like they're going to be great ambassadors for Christ, but they fall away.

Everyone has a place in the parable of the sower. Jesus wants us to evaluate which type of soil we are.

1. Hopefully, we won't be the hardened, wayside soil.

If we are, we will close our minds to the truth and refuse to allow the Gospel to penetrate our hearts and change our lives.

2. Perhaps we'll be the rocky soil.

On the surface, we appear to be growing and serving the Lord enthusiastically. But we aren't deepening our roots through faith, study and a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When times become tough, we will fall away, and others will marvel because on the surface, it looked like we were doing so well.

3. If we end up being the thorny soil, we will continue to 'be a Christian,' but our life will be dominated by other activities, and we will never have much time or attention to share with spiritual concerns.

This is probably the most subtle danger because the plant in the thorny soil never completely falls away. As a result, we can soothe our conscience and believe that we are still doing OK when, in fact, we aren't bearing fruit.

4. Ideally, we will be the good soil that bears the fruit of righteousness for the Lord.

God's Word doesn't vary, but man's heart does. The nature of the response is dictated by the nature of the heart that receives it. The secret is this: don't give up planting the seed, but persevere, Galatians 6:9. We never know what kind of response you're going to get.

Jesus explained that the seed represents the word of God, Luke 8:11. There are many lessons that can be learned from the analogy between the seed and the word. For example, a seed always produces after its kind. That is, rice seed always produces rice plants, corn seed produces corn plants, and pumpkin seed produces pumpkin plants. There are no exceptions.

By the plant results, one can determine what seed was planted. So it is in the spiritual realm. When the pure word of God is planted, the resulting plants are Christians.

It would be theoretically possible to eliminate pumpkin plants from the face of the earth. Yet if pumpkin seeds were preserved, someone many years later could plant them, and again produce pumpkins. So also in Christ. The seed is the word of God, 1 Peter 1:23-25.

Even if there had not been servants of Christ on the earth for a long time, when people returned to following the Bible only, they would become Christians. Our goal should be to reproduce pure disciples of Christ in the twentieth century, just like they were in the first.

The biggest mistake we can make as Christians after studying this is to look around us and say, 'Yes, I know people who fall into one of those categories. I know someone who didn't last long as a Christian,' but that's not the point of the parable. The point of the parable is to get you to look at yourself. Is your heartfelt response to the Gospel described in this parable?

And let me just say that it would be very foolish for anyone to stand and say, ‘Yes, when the seed fell on me, it fell on the good soil.’ Because you can’t answer that question until the day Jesus returns or the day you die, [1 Corinthians 10:12](#).

Let’s not judge each other with this parable. But let’s continue to encourage each other to remain faithful to the end and trust in God to help us produce the fruit He requires.

A LAMP ON A STAND

‘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? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.’ ‘Consider carefully what you hear,’ he continued. ‘With the measure, you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.’ Mark 4:21-25

Mark isn’t the only one who recorded this teaching of Christ; Mark does too, [Luke 4:16-18](#). Jesus had just emphasised the concealment of His teachings using parables, [Mark 4:11-12](#), but this reference to the lamp shows that the concealment will end.

Our Lord has just been speaking the Parable of the Sower and the disciples ask Him for an explanation, which He gives point by point. I’m pretty sure the disciples were feeling pretty good about themselves after hearing Him tell them that He was hiding His truth from the masses while privately helping them to understand it, [Mark 4:11](#) / [Luke 8:10](#) / [Matthew 11:16-17](#).

‘Inside information’ can be a powerful thing, but it can also be dangerous, [1 Corinthians 8:1](#). More importantly, knowledge brings with it responsibility, and this is what Jesus is dealing with in these verses.

Jesus is talking to His disciples, and it’s an everyday illustration He uses. Night is coming, and the small house is getting dark, and then the master of the house takes and trims the lamp and brings it in.

What do we do with the lamp? Should we put it under a bowl, which would hide the light? [Matthew 5:15](#). Do we hide it under the bed, which would dim the light? [Mark 4:21](#) / [Luke 8:16](#).

Or do we put it on the lampstand, which would display the light for all? [Mark 4:21](#) / [Luke 8:16](#) / [Matthew 5:15](#). We could do any of these, but the real purpose is to light the house.

It is very important that we understand what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is the light, [John 8:12](#), and His word of the kingdom is light. And because Jesus is the Word, [John 1:1](#) / [John 1:14](#), I think we can safely say that the lamp here is the Word of God, just like the seed in the previous parable, [Psalm 119:105](#).

Jesus is saying you don’t take a lamp and light it and put it under the bed or put it under a bowl. The whole purpose of having the lamp is to put it on the lampstand and let it shine. He’s saying that God hasn’t revealed to them these incredible truths about Himself in order for them to hide them, [Mark 4:22](#) / [Luke 8:17](#).

Just as natural light illuminates the darkness and enables us to see visually, so the light of Christ shines in the hearts of believers and enables us to see the heavenly reality of God’s kingdom.

In fact, our mission is to be light-bearers of Christ so that others may see the truth of the Gospel and be freed from the blindness of sin and deception. The whole purpose of a lamp is simply to produce light, and so obviously it’s always placed in a position which helps it accomplish its purpose.

In other words, placing a lamp under a bowl or under a bed defeats the purpose of the lamp in the first place. They exist simply to bring light, in this case, light to men.

Jesus taught and warned against hiding a lit lamp on many occasions but notice how many different places He mentions where a lit lamp shouldn't be put in a jar, under a bed, [Luke 8:16](#), under a bowl, [Mark 4:21](#) / [Matthew 5:15](#), in a cellar, [Luke 11:33](#).

It's clear that Jesus is making an application to the Parable of the Sower, [Mark 4:1-20](#) / [Luke 8:1-15](#) / [Matthew 13:1-22](#), and He's saying that the preaching of the Gospel will bring to light the true nature of the hearts of everyone who hears it, [Mark 4:23](#) / [Luke 8:18](#).

Some commentators believe there is a connection between the things which hide the light and the thorns which choke out the word. They believe that the clay jar stands for the worries of this world. The bowl stands for wealth, and the bed and a place, which is the cellar, stand for desires.

According to all those references, the lamp shouldn't be hidden but placed on a stand, but who or what is the stand? The lamp which is lit is the Christian, and their lamp should be displayed on the stand, which is in the church, [Revelation 1:20](#). But we're not just to be lights in our meeting place; we need to be lights of the world, [Matthew 5:14-16](#).

The purpose of light is to reveal everything which is present in the house. It's the light that both enlightens and brings to light, [John 3:17-18](#) / [John 5:34](#) / [John 6:40](#) / [John 12:48](#). Those who hear will be revealed to have open hearts and those who reject the word of God will be revealed to have hardened hearts.

The secrets of all people shall be made evident on judgement day. People must understand and respond to what they hear; they must be like the good soil that grew and produced a multiplying crop, [Mark 4:8](#) / [Mark 4:19-20](#) / [Luke 8:8](#) / [Luke 8:15](#) / [Matthew 13:8](#) / [Matthew 13:23](#).

Where does the moon get its light from? How does it shine? The moon doesn't give off any light in and of itself; it simply reflects the light from the sun. We know that Jesus is the light of the world, [John 8:12](#), and as Christians, our light is a reflection of His light, [Matthew 15:16](#) / [John 1:4-5](#).

Jesus Christ is the light, and He revealed God and made Him known. He brought the character and the truth of God to all who believed in Him, [John 1:9](#). It's through Jesus Christ that the true knowledge of God is made known. He brought the light and revealed the character and person of God. Jesus Himself is the light of the world, [John 8:12](#). Christians don't produce the light, but like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, we too reflect the light of His indwelling life, [Revelation 21:23](#). Christians are supposed to display the character of God; that's why we were called in the first place, [1 Peter 2:9](#) / [Ephesians 5:8](#).

While Christians are light, the world is in darkness. This is the term used to describe the lost condition. John tells us that there is no darkness in God, [1 John 1:5](#), which means that there is no sin, no moral question marks, and no blame in even the slightest degree.

He uses the word 'darkness' as an alternative word for the world and the unregenerate condition, [1 John 2:8-9](#). Our Lord uses the same word to describe the whole world in rebellion against God, [John 3:19](#). His saving work is the only way to be delivered from this darkness. [John 12:46](#).

What does darkness do? Darkness impairs vision; we can't see clearly. In a spiritual sense, the kind of darkness that the Bible speaks of impairs a person morally. They cannot see, they don't understand the effects of sin or even the root of it in the corruption of the human heart.

Their entire way of thinking is warped by the darkness. Their understanding has been switched off when it comes to grasping moral issues related to their own life.

But Christians are the light, and our purpose is to make God known. If an unbeliever comes in contact with us, they ought to see in our lives the reflection of the character of God. They ought to hear from our lips truth and that which is good. We are to be proclaiming the truth of His salvation, [Mark 4:24-25](#) / [Luke 8:18](#).

Inherent in the purpose of a lamp is that it produces light. It's therefore placed in a position to accomplish its purpose. Lamps exist for the very purpose of bringing light to men, Matthew 5:15-16.

The function of light is to reveal that which is present in the house. There is nothing hidden that will not be manifested. In reference to the preceding parable of the sower, the preaching of the Gospel will bring to light the true nature of the hearts of everyone who hears it.

It's the light that both enlightens and brings to light, John 3:17-18 / John 5:34 / John 6:40 / John 12:48. Those who hear will be revealed to have open hearts. Those who reject the word of God will be revealed to have hardened hearts. They must understand and respond to what they hear. They must be like the good soil, Mark 4:8, that brought forth abundantly.

Jesus has just finished saying, 'if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,' Mark 4:23, then He goes on and warns His disciples to take great care with how they listen, Mark 4:24 / Luke 8:18.

We have to remember that the Gospel is so precious, because the Gospel contains the message of eternal life and the message of eternal death, depending on how a person responds to it.

The words, 'it will be measured to you,' Mark 4:24, mean that those who are of a humble nature are receptive to the teachings of Jesus. They hear with the intention of producing.

As a result of their willingness to hear, they will grow. To the ones who grow, therefore, more will be given, Mark 4:24-25 / Luke 8:18, in the sense that the righteous will receive far more in eternal glory than they expect, Romans 8:18.

The words, 'whoever does not have,' Mark 4:25 / Luke 8:18, mean those who aren't of the nature of the good soil will not produce. They will thus not receive the bounty of more.

That which unrighteous hearts possess will be lost in the final reckoning of all things. Their good works will be in vain because they aren't in Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:58.

The unrighteous will lose whatever they had. These measures are the kind of judgments people give of others, resulting always in their being judged in the same fashion, Matthew 7:1-2 / Luke 6:37-38.

If people listen to the Gospel carelessly, then they will find that they don't have what it takes to remain faithful unto death, Revelation 2:10. If we take the Gospel lightly, even what little we have gained will be taken from us. But if we receive the whole Gospel and obey it, then we will gain more than we can imagine.

And so, Jesus is saying, the more the Christian studies God's Word, the more they will learn as it's revealed to them through His Word, but those Christians who don't study God's Word will not learn anything new, and what they do already know will be taken away from them.

We see this in action when Jesus shares the Parable of the Talents, where the one-talent man buried his talent, instead of putting it to good use, then it was taken from him and given to the man who had ten talents, Matthew 25:19-28.

The Christian needs to shine whenever they find themselves; they need to continually grow through studying God's Word, 2 Peter 3:18. The Bible is a light, but it's useless if it remains closed on the bookshelf.

In order to receive profit, we must open it up and read it. Although studying the Scriptures is essential, many read the Bible in vain because they don't read it correctly.

It's significant that in the middle of a text stressing the importance of hearing the word, Jesus emphasised the need to be careful how we hear, Mark 4:24 / Luke 8:16.

The fact that people who read the Bible come to markedly different conclusions about what it means demonstrates that many are not understanding it properly.

Some are careless and simply don't put much effort into their study. Others twist the Scriptures intentionally, misinterpreting them to try to confirm the beliefs and practices they have already determined to follow.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE?

Some common-sense principles can help us understand the Scriptures as we study. First, learn to study in context. The Bible has two main divisions. The Old Testament, the first thirty-nine books, and the New Testament, the last twenty-seven books.

The New Testament is the part that directly relates to us today since it contains the teachings of Christ and the apostles. The Old Testament gives the background of God's preparation of the Jewish nation for the coming of Christ.

These Testaments are subdivided into books, sixty-six in all. It is probably best to study book by book. This study was designed to take a person through the gospel of Mark step-by-step. We need to concentrate on what we read in the Bible to be able to understand it.

Since each book is divided into chapters, it is helpful to approach our Bible study by working with a chapter at a time. Read through the chapter two or three times.

On the first reading, work to simply discover what the chapter contains, but on the second reading, we can begin to try to analyse the main points. Keep a notebook handy.

Jot down a note or two about the main ideas or events of the chapter. A notebook is a good place to write down questions that arise as we study. Writing them down so that we won't forget them allows us to progress in our study without getting sidetracked. Later, we can search for the answers to these questions ourselves, or we can ask someone else to help us.

THE PARABLE OF THE GROWING SEED

‘He also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself, the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.’ Mark 4:26-29

This parable is only found in Mark's Gospel, and it's a parable that's closely related to ‘The parable of the Sower’ which is found in Mark 4:1-20. The word ‘kingdom’, Mark 4:26, literally means ‘reign or rule’, and the idea of the kingdom has its roots way back in the Old Testament.

From the beginning, the people of Israel are described as being unique and a chosen people of God, Exodus 19:6. They are the recipients of His special favour, and God Himself is their King.

The people wanted Gideon to rule over them and be their king, but he told them that God Himself would be their leader and would rule over them, Judges 8:22-23.

If you have a kingdom, you need a king to rule over that kingdom. And in 1 Samuel 8, we find that God's people are looking for a physical king, 1 Samuel 8:5, but Samuel wasn't very impressed with this, so he prayed to God.

In other words, they already had a King, God was their King, so the Israelites weren't rejecting Samuel, they were rejecting God Himself, 1 Samuel 8:7. But even though they rejected God, God gave them a king, King Saul, 1 Samuel 9, but as time went on, those who were wise, recognised that there was no other authority except God's authority, Psalms 103:19.

And it was during the days of David and Solomon that the Israelite's kingdom reached its peak, but as we know, even this was short-lived. And so they lost their kingdom because they rejected their true King and His commands, and they ended up in captivity.

It's during this time in captivity that the prophet Jeremiah gets a word from the Lord, [Jeremiah 30:8-9](#), as does Daniel, [Daniel 2:44](#). In other words, God was saying that there was a time coming when He would reaffirm His Kingly reign and restore to His honour the people called by His name.

After John the baptiser was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God, [Mark 1:15](#). Jesus said a little later, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power,' [Mark 9:1](#).

Did that time come? I believe it did. In the Book of Acts, we find people being added to that kingdom, [Acts 2:47](#). And remember, we're dealing with a spiritual kingdom here, not a physical one.

The first thing we need to notice is that the kingdom isn't something that sprang up in a moment, [Mark 4:26-29](#). It was planned, it was prepared for and brought into being in the past and even now awaits its final consummation. In other words, it started its life in the mind of God; it was spoken of by the Old Testament prophets as we looked at a moment ago.

Jesus said it was near, [Matthew 4:17](#) / [Mark 9:1](#), and in [Acts 2](#), the spiritual kingdom was established. And if you're a Christian today, then you can be sure that you're part of that kingdom today, [Colossians 1:13-14](#) / [Hebrews 12:28-29](#). In other words, we're in that kingdom now, [2 Peter 1:10-11](#). Just as a side note, whenever the Bible talks about the kingdom in the future tense, it's talking about heaven itself.

This is the central truth taught in this parable. The kingdom spreads all over the world. And that's what we're going to look at, the growth of this spiritual kingdom.

Jesus said that the kingdom of God was like a farmer who then planted a seed, [Mark 4:26](#). That night he went to bed, the next morning, he got up and tended to other responsibilities, [Mark 4:27](#). Meanwhile, the seed germinated, began to grow and finally bore fruit, [Mark 4:28-29](#).

We're not mistakes of God, we're not fellow mistakes with Christ, and we're certainly not mistakes of God's kingdom. In fact, we're a part of the kingdom which God spoke about way back in Old Testament times. So, before we get into the meaning of the parable, I would like to say a few words about this kingdom.

I want to share with you four points about kingdom growth.

1. The kingdom's growth is gradual.

In the production of grain, nature works step by step; in other words, there's a step-by-step process by which it grows. And nearly all of its marvels are formed gradually.

And those of you who are gardeners will plant a seed in the ground, and after a while, you will see the results of that growth. But the actual process of growth is barely visible, and it's the same with the kingdom of God, [Mark 4:28](#). And if we were to apply this parable to an individual person, we would get a lesson in patience.

Christian growth is gradual. When a baby is born, they don't walk and talk straight away; they have to be encouraged to walk and talk. And the more they try, the more confident they get at it; it's the same with baby Christians. We shouldn't expect them to be able to preach a sermon or teach a lesson in a lady's class straight after their baptism.

They need time to learn the simple things about Christianity. Things like learning how to pray and learning how to read and study God's Word by themselves. And when we think about it, if it's possible to expect too little of ourselves, it also must be possible that we expect too much of ourselves. And so in our moral and spiritual development, we want to take giant steps.

And if we fail, we end up being so disappointed in ourselves that we need to learn to walk before we can run. The mature Christians among us should never forget nature's lesson, and that's the necessity of gradual growth.

People have come up with hundreds of ways to get people into their congregations. They have plans on how to get people to become Christians. Some use musical instruments to attract people into becoming Christians, some say, 'look how spiritual I am, I speak in so-called tongues'.

But we need to remember that a person doesn't go to bed as a sinner and wakes up the next morning as a Christian. It doesn't happen like that; we need to be patient, and we need to trust God. We need to let young Christians develop gradually, and we need to trust God to add people to His kingdom, Acts 5:14.

2. The kingdom's growth is orderly.

When the seed is sown and buried in the soil, its very existence seems to be threatened, but the seed's growth is marked by an orderly development, Mark 4:26-27. In other words, just as we go through different stages in our physical growth, it's the same with kingdom growth.

When kids are born, they go through the teething process, then they grow a little more and go through the terrible twos, threes, fours and fives. And then they start to go through the rebellious stage, which starts at age six and goes on until they are eighteen years old.

And in between all of that, they go through what we call puberty, which is another fun part of growing up. But most people grow in the same order, infancy, childhood, youth and manhood.

And it's almost impossible to tell when one period ends and another period begins. But at the same time, the different stages of development can be clearly recognised.

It is the same with the Christian development, Peter says that recent converts to Christianity are like newborn babies, 1 Peter 2:1-3. But sadly, we also get Christians who aren't young but haven't grown out of the baby stage yet, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.

And then we get other Christians who are growing up and maturing, Matthew 5:48 / 1 Corinthians 14:20. In other words, there are different stages of Christian growth that we all need to be aware of.

A young Christian may do and say things that aren't very mature because of a lack of knowledge and understanding. But those who are mature should recognise this and give them a helping hand in their understanding.

Have you ever wondered why some Christians do nothing but complain and grumble all the time? I believe that one of the reasons they complain and grumble all the time is that they haven't grown up in Christ; they're still babies.

Every Christian should be growing spiritually. We've all got a duty to grow up, but we've also got a duty to understand the different development stages of the Christian growth, Ephesians 4:15. In other words, we need to be patient with those who are slow to develop.

3. The kingdom's growth is from God.

Can anyone really explain how things grow? A seed can be taken into the laboratory and analysed, but the scientist can't tell you what makes a seed turn into a flower; the best scientists in the world can't explain it, Job 36:26-29.

It's the same with a farmer. A farmer can do many things to the soil, things such as ploughing the soil, fertilising the soil, and weeding the soil, but he can't make the seed grow, Mark 4:26-28.

In other words, the lesson here is that there are some things that God alone can do. It's the same in the spiritual kingdom of God; whatever growth takes place in His kingdom is due to the operation of God.

We can select the seed and prepare the soil, we may sow the seed, but we can't make it germinate in the human heart. And how do we prepare the soil? We prepare the soil with prayer, [Colossians 4:3-4](#), but we can't make the seed grow. Paul says it's only God who causes it to grow, [1 Corinthians 3:6](#).

How does God do that? We don't understand how God makes the seed grow, but we know He does, or we wouldn't be Christians today. But just because we allow God to make the seed grow, that doesn't let us off the hook. We've still got a responsibility to carry out because we've still got a vital part in the growing process and our part is an active one, [Philemon 6](#).

In other words, we accept that we can't make the seed grow, but we still need to make sure that the conditions are right so that the seed will have a chance to grow. And the right condition is remembering that God is spirit, [John 4:24](#). At the end of the day, the kingdom belongs to God, and the growth of the kingdom will be from God. The sower must sow God's seed and wait patiently for God to do His part. We must sow the seed, but it's God who causes the growth; it's God who gives fruit.

4. It's God who harvests that fruit.

Jesus says that it's God who produces growth, hence the fruit, then when this fruit is ripe, it's God who will bring the matter to a conclusion, not man, [Mark 4:29](#). He's saying that judgement is certain, [James 5:7-8](#).

For people who have been born again, [John 3:3-5](#) / [Acts 2:38](#), this is our hope. For those who haven't been born again, this will be the Day when they will wish they had never been born at all, [Revelation 14:14-16](#).

Judgement is certain, and so when we think about it, this whole parable puts us in our right place. And that's why we're all helpless without God, [Romans 5:6-8](#), and we have to wait patiently for His return, [Lamentations 3:25-26](#). It's not enough just to work; we must work and pray, [Luke 21:36](#). We can do a lot as Christians, but there are some things we can never do.

And if you're not a Christian today, then you can be sure that whenever you hear His word being preached, His seed has been truly planted in your heart. The question is this: Are you going to humbly accept His Word in your life, or are you going to stubbornly resist His Word in your life? I pray you choose wisely.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

'Again, he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.' [Mark 4:30-32](#)

In The Parable Of The Growing Seed', [Mark 4:26-29](#), we see how Jesus explained how the spiritual kingdom of God grows. We see that this kingdom's growth was orderly. Just like our physical growth, we grow through infancy, childhood, youth and manhood. In other words, it takes time, and we need to be patient.

We also see how the kingdom's growth is from God Himself. We plant the seed and water it when we get the chance, but it's God who causes the seed to grow. And we don't know how God does this, but we know He does because we're Christians today.

Jesus is going to teach us another aspect of this kingdom's growth, but from a different point of view, from the viewpoint of a garden or the field, [Mark 4:30-32](#) / [Luke 13:18-19](#) / [Matthew 13:31-32](#).

Everything God created has a purpose, and we can learn many lessons from nature, and that includes the mustard seed. During Biblical times, it was a very common practice to talk about the mustard seed as one of the smallest seeds, [Mark 4:31](#) / [Matthew 13:32](#).

Strictly speaking, it wasn't the smallest seed around at this time, but the tiny mustard seed was used to speak of anything minute. For example, Jesus spoke of faith as a grain of mustard seed, [Matthew 17:20](#) / [Luke 17:6](#). Let me say a few words about the mustard plant before we go on, because this will help us in our understanding of the parable. The Palestinian mustard plant, because of its size, wasn't usually found in the garden; it was usually found in an open field, and these plants grow to between ten and twelve feet in height.

When it comes to shrubs, this was the giant; its branches were so large they would spread out like a tree. And so, because of its size, it would very often attract many birds, [Mark 4:32](#) / [Luke 13:19](#) / [Matthew 31:32](#). During the time of Jesus, birds would often be seen in the branches of the mustard plant as they fed on the small black seeds of the mustard pods. And like we know about all of Jesus' parables, He reveals a secret about how the kingdom of God grows from an everyday event. I'm going to share with you three points on this parable.

1. Just because something is little, doesn't mean it's not important.

When we look at the small mustard seed, and we see how microscopic it is, we might be forgiven for thinking it's not worth much. But when we talk to someone who grows these plants, we will find exactly how valuable it really is.

As a spice, mustard is sold in seed or powder form, and even today, we can buy it in paste form. In other words, the little mustard seed by itself doesn't look so important, but our experience teaches us not to minimise it.

I guess what I'm saying is that the little things in life should never be discounted. When we look at the world today, it's obsessed with bigness. The Great Wall of China is seventeen hundred miles long. The Alaska Pipeline runs for eight hundred miles.

The Empire State Building, which was built in New York in 1931, is one hundred and two stories high. So many of our modern-day skyscrapers dwarf the Tower of Babel. When we think about our farmers, they're termed as successful according to the bigness of their operations.

So to a world obsessed with magnitude, Jesus says, 'Pay attention to the little things.' A cup of cold water, [Mark 9:41](#), a visit to the sick, a welcome to a stranger, a lost sheep, Jesus says, 'these are the little things'.

In [Matthew 25:35-36](#), when Jesus is talking about the great division which will happen on judgement day, notice He doesn't want us to feed the world, He doesn't want us to solve world poverty.

It's not big things He wants from us, it's little things. Give a hungry person someone to eat, give a thirsty person something to drink. Give someone who needs clothes, some clothes, look after and visit the lonely and sick.

These aren't big tasks; they're little mission fields that we all can do. Just because someone has a small task within God's kingdom doesn't mean that it isn't important.

Doing a good deed for someone spreads the Gospel faster than one hundred sermons. That's because just like a grain of mustard seed, they increase in size beyond imaginable proportion.

2. However important little things may be, the parable focuses on the consequences of little beginnings.

The Egyptians were famous and still are famous for their pyramid buildings, and one of the greatest pyramids was built at Giza. It contained an inner chamber where the Pharaohs were buried.

His followers were usually buried in there too, along with some of his personal artefacts. The rest of the pyramid complex consisted of a large enclosure, an adjacent mortuary temple, and a walkway leading down to a pavilion. And when we look at these magnificent structures, we can't help but stand in awe. But when we think about it, these structures started with one brick.

Vincent Van Gogh has many famous paintings, but each one started with a single stroke of the brush. The German composer Ludwig Van Beethoven started his great symphonies and concertos with a single note.

In literature, every book ever written, every essay, and every poem all come from the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. In fact, the world's biggest things have generally had small beginnings. Momentous deeds and earth-circling revolutions can be traced back to a speck, like a germ of mustard seed.

When we think about Christianity, the world's greatest movement had its beginnings in a manger in Bethlehem, [Luke 2:10-12](#). The proud and busy Roman world didn't take any notice of the day when Jesus was born.

And it casually took notice of His life, and even when Jesus died, the Roman world didn't care much. Why? Because Jesus was born in a manger, He was a carpenter from Nazareth, and when He died, He was now gone, so much for a great leader!

Certainly, in outward appearances, Jesus looked less than the least of all seeds; His followers were counted by the dozen, not by the thousands. And yet, from only a handful of disciples, and in spite of their leader's death on a cross. There sprang into existence the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ, which you and I are members of today.

Twenty-one centuries have come and gone, and today, He still remains the central figure for much of the human race. We should learn the lesson from the mustard seed.

A thing may be small, almost without hope, but that doesn't mean it's not going to succeed. Jesus is saying that small beginnings can succeed because it's God who is behind it. Do we honestly think that the first-century disciples ever thought that their small faith would have had such an impact on the world today?

Their faith began unnoticed, just like the tiny mustard seed but look at it now, it has gone all around the world, [Colossians 1:5](#). Jesus said with faith like that, 'we can move mountains, we can tell a tree to go and plant itself in the sea,' [Mark 11:23](#). That's faith, that's leaving things in God's hands because we know that God is in control.

3. Don't miss the point of this parable.

Some people like to believe that the branches, which Jesus talks about here, [Mark 4:32](#) / [Luke 13:19](#) / [Matthew 13:32](#), are symbolic of modern-day denominations.

In other words, just as the birds come and sit in the branches of the trees, it's said that people can come and enter the different branches or denominations of the church.

But there are a few problems with this interpretation. They fail to ask the questions we have been asking with every parable we've looked at. Who was Jesus speaking to, and what did it mean to them?

Jesus was speaking to His disciples, [Mark 4:10](#) / [Matthew 13:10](#). Was denominationalism around in Jesus' day? No! Some people try to understand the parable by looking at Christianity today. What they need to do is look at Christianity as we find it in the first century.

It's all too easy to make something mean something, which Jesus never meant it to mean. It's too easy to speak of branches of the church, but in the days of Christ and His apostles, these different so-called branches or divisions of Christianity were unknown.

The Bible nowhere teaches that there are many churches; the Bible always talks about the unity of the church as a singular, [Ephesians 4:4-6](#). Jesus didn't say, 'on this rock, I will build my churches.' He said, 'I will build my church,' singular, [Matthew 16:18](#).

There are other people who like to say that this parable was a prophecy of Jesus. In other words, this parable remained unfulfilled until the recent rise of denominationalism, rubbish!

This takes their interpretation too far; there's no need to make everything in the parable mean something. The branches of the mustard tree aren't the main focus of Jesus' attention any more than the man who sowed the mustard seed or the nests that were made in the tree's branches.

THE POINT

The point of the parable is simply that the microscopic mustard seed grows into a tree large enough for the birds to come and nest in it. The man who sowed the seed, the field or garden, the nests, and the birds themselves are all incidental to the one central truth of the parable.

And that's this, the kingdom of God, [Mark 4:30](#) / [Luke 13:18](#) / [Matthew 13:31](#), even with a small beginning would prosper and prevail over all other kingdoms. That's what Jesus is getting at; that's what He is teaching His disciples. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, [Daniel 2:31-45](#), is important because it helps us in our understanding of this parable. Let me give you a quick rundown of what this dream means.

[Daniel 2:32](#) talks about 'the head' as being made of pure gold; this is talking about the Babylonian Empire. [Daniel 2:32](#) also talks about 'the chest and arms' as being made of silver, this is talking about the Medo-Persian Empire. [Daniel 2:32-33](#) also mentions 'the belly and thighs, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.' as being made of bronze. This is talking about the Roman Empire. And in [Daniel 2:34](#), he talks about 'this rock', which is not made by human hands.

The stone cut not by human hands, struck the image down and became 'a great mountain and filled the whole earth,' [Daniel 2:35](#). In other words, Daniel prophesied that God's kingdom was destined to conquer all other kingdoms.

Did Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream come true, and was it accurate? Yes, it did. All we have to do is read our history books, and we will see how accurate they were. And we will read about how one kingdom fell after another, all the great historical writers tell us all about it.

What can we learn from this parable? Let me give you a couple of things to think about. Do you realise that you are a part of a kingdom that will never be destroyed and will last forever? But don't take my word for it, take God's word, [Daniel 2:44](#). If you're a Christian today, then you're a part of God's spiritual kingdom right now.

Notice that Paul doesn't say, concerning our citizenship, 'will be in heaven' but 'is in heaven', that's present tense, [Philippians 3:17-20](#). Now you may be thinking to yourself that you would like to become a part of this kingdom but you haven't got much to offer. Well, just remember what we've learned today.

Jesus says that it's the little things we have got to offer that can make all the difference. We might not be able to preach or teach, but we can certainly write a letter of encouragement to other Christians in Jesus' name. We might not be able to song lead, but we can come to worship and encourage everyone with our friendly smile in Jesus' name.

In a world where people say that size matters, Jesus says, 'give me what you can, and I will do wonders with it.' Look at what He did with a couple of fish and five loaves of bread, [Matthew 14:13-21](#) / [Matthew 15:32-39](#).

Look at what He did with six stone water jugs after they had been filled with water, [John 2:1-11](#). Imagine what He can do with you if you would only give yourself to Him first.

'With many similar parables, Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.'

Mark 4:33-34

Jesus used parables as a way of teaching the Word of God, and He taught just enough for them to understand, [Mark 4:33](#). The disciples were given the privilege of having all of His parables explained to them when they were alone with Jesus, [Mark 4:34](#).

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

‘That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go over to the other side.’ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, ‘Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?’ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ Then the wind died down, and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’ [Mark 4:35-41](#)

This event is also recorded by Luke in [Luke 8:22-25](#) and Matthew in [Matthew 8:23-27](#). In the evening, Jesus suggests that He and his disciples go to the other side, that is, the other side of the Sea of Galilee, [Mark 4:35](#) / [Luke 8:22](#).

One of the reasons Jesus chose fishermen was because of their easy access to boats; they may even have used a specific boat for Jesus’ ministry, [Mark 4:36](#) / [Matthew 8:23](#).

A great storm arose, [Mark 4:37](#) / [Luke 8:23](#) / [Matthew 8:24](#), and the disciples panicked. These fishermen were scared; this must have been some storm! Remember that most of the disciples were hardened fishermen, and they would be used to being in storms.

THE STORM

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In one sense, this was a very ordinary scene on the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is small; it is only thirteen miles from north to south and eight miles from east to west at its widest. The Jordan Valley makes a deep cleft in the surface of the earth, and the Sea of Galilee is part of that cleft. It is 680 feet below sea level. That gives it a climate which is warm and gracious, but it also creates dangers. On the west side, there are hills with valleys and gullies, and, when a cold wind comes from the west, these valleys and gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind, as it were, becomes compressed in them, and rushes down upon the lake with savage violence and with startling suddenness so that the calm of one moment can become the raging storm of the next. The storms on the Sea of Galilee combine suddenness and violence in a unique way.’

Bruce, in his commentary, says the following about the boat.

‘It was covered, hidden, the waves rising high above the boat, breaking on it, and gradually filling with water.’

Jesus consistently demonstrated His authority by doing things that were totally beyond human capacity. In this case, while the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee by boat, Jesus fell asleep on a cushion, [Mark 4:38](#) / [Luke 8:23](#) / [Matthew 8:24](#).

In desperation, they awoke Jesus, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’ [Luke 8:24](#) / [Matthew 8:25](#). Mark says ‘teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’ [Mark 4:38](#).

Of course, He cares. Jesus then turned to the disciples and reproved them for their lack of faith, [Mark 4:40](#) / [Luke 8:24](#) / [Matthew 8:26](#). Though they had seen Jesus perform many miracles, they were always amazed by each new one.

Jesus got up and calmly rebuked the wind and the sea, [Mark 4:39](#) / [Luke 8:24](#) / [Matthew 8:26](#), and the storm ceased. The word ‘quiet’ means to muzzle. Notice that Christ calmed the storm with one word.

What a difference one word can make. When our lives are filled with turmoil, one word from Christ can change everything. Matthew also records that Jesus uses similar words to calm the storm, [Matthew 8:26](#).

This is the point that Jesus wanted the disciples to understand. At this time, all things were under the care and control of Jesus because He was head over all things, [John 13:3](#) / [John 17:2](#). They said, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’ [Mark 4:41](#) / [Luke 8:25](#) / [Matthew 8:27](#) / [Psalms 89:8-9](#) / [Psalms 93:4](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It was then plain that every area of existence was totally under our Lord’s authority. The spiritual world, the physical world, time, life, and death were, and are, utterly subject to his will.’

Once we recognise that Jesus is God and the Creator of all that exists, [Colossians 1:16](#), then we will realise that nothing is outside the power of Jesus to control. For this reason, it is faith in Jesus that brings peace of mind, [Psalms 4:8](#) / [Acts 12:6](#) / [Philippians 4:7](#).

HOW WELL DO WE SLEEP?

Considering the things that the disciples had already seen Jesus do, their doubts about His ability to quiet the storm are astonishing. They had seen Him heal multitudes of people, cast out demons and prove Himself equal to any task at hand. Suddenly, they despaired because of a storm at sea. Obviously, they didn’t really think Jesus could solve this problem because they were amazed when He did.

How could they have been so slow and so distrustful? What about us? Do we not believe that Jesus can handle any situation if we trust and obey His will? Have we not seen in the Scriptures how Jesus can solve every problem?

How do we react when we confront a fresh crisis in our lives? Do we trustingly and confidently turn to Jesus, or do we throw up our hands in despair? How well do we sleep?

In the presence of Jesus, there should be a great emotional calm in our lives, [Psalms 65:7](#) / [Psalms 89:9](#) / [Luke 4:39](#). Sometimes the best thing to do amidst life’s storms is simply to stop, be still, and know that God is there and present, [Psalms 46:1-10](#).

God never sleeps, [Psalms 121:4-6](#), and He will never abandon us, [Hebrews 13:5](#). It’s always better to be in a boat with Jesus during a storm than to be in the storm without Jesus.

CHAPTER 5

INTRODUCTION

‘They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills, he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name, don’t torture me!’ For Jesus had said to him, ‘Come out of this man, you impure spirit!’ Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, “for we are many.’ And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, ‘Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.’ He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned. Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man, and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region. As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, ‘Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ So, the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. Mark 5:1-20

JESUS RESTORES A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

Jesus and His disciples went to the eastern shore of Galilee, a place called Gerasenes, **Mark 5:1 / Luke 8:26 / Matthew 8:28**. This must have been a Gentile area as there were many pigs around and we know that the Jews saw pigs as unclean animals, **Leviticus 11:7 / Deuteronomy 14:8**. It’s here Jesus meets two men who are demon-possessed who lived in tombs, **Mark 5:3 / Luke 8:27 / Matthew 8:28**. Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Mark and Luke mention only one of these people, **Mark 5:2 / Luke 8:27**, the principal one. Note that neither Mark nor Luke states that there was ‘only one’ of these men. The fact of demon possession is plain here. These were possessed not merely with one, but with many, demons.’

Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Mark and Luke mention only one demoniac, probably the fiercer of the two.’

There are many views today concerning demonic possession; some argue that it still exists, whilst others don’t. It’s generally supposed that no such thing as demon possession exists on earth today.

If that supposition is correct, it would simply mean that the power of Jesus Christ in destroying the works of the devil, which was His purpose in coming into this world, **1 John 3:8**, was effective and that Satan’s demonic followers are not able to work the havoc upon the human personality in this age, as formerly.

The multiplication of such disorders in the times of Christ should, in such a view, have been expected as the demons recognised the holy Saviour and His purpose of destroying them.

Mark stressed the unnatural strength of this caveman, using two entire verses to stress it, **Mark 5:3-4**, but Matthew supplied the significant fact that his wildness had closed the area to human traffic, **Matthew 8:28**, and Luke, the equally significant fact that he was naked, **Luke 8:27**.

Luke also adds that the man was seized by the demons many times despite being chained and guarded, **Luke 8:29**. Such a person had no doubt cast a terror over the entire village, **Zechariah 13:1-2**.

Night and day, he would cut himself, which shows us how much self-harm this demon was causing him, **Mark 5:5**. The demon-possessed always appear to have been able to recognise Christ.

The man's worship of Jesus is a reference to his falling down before Him, **Mark 5:6 / Luke 8:28**. In view of the man's behaviour, after he was healed, it must also have included on the man's part, if not the demon's, an adoration of the Lord spiritually.

The effect of his possession was that of splitting the personality, making it impossible in each instance to distinguish between what was done by the demon and what was done by the man.

The demon-possessed men recognised Christ as the Son of God, and so, they ask, 'What do you want with us, Son of God?' **Mark 5:7 / Luke 8:28 / Matthew 8:29**. He asks Jesus a question, but in doing so, he revealed He knew Jesus and His power and authority.

The name of God, 'Most High', **Mark 5:7 / Luke 8:28**, is very ancient, appearing in connection with Melchizedek, **Genesis 14:18**, Balaam, **Numbers 24:16**, and in the Song of Moses, **Deuteronomy 32:8**. The Hebrews didn't invent or evolve monotheism, that being the original view of the Father, even prior to Abraham.

Jesus commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man, **Mark 5:8 / Luke 8:29**. Notice the words, 'us' and 'they', **Matthew 8:29**, which implies there is more than one demon addressing Jesus.

Notice the word 'my', **Mark 5:9**, is singular and 'we' is plural, **Matthew 8:29**. This is a further indication of the separation that the demon had inflicted upon the man. This is seen when Jesus asks their name, and they reply, 'legion', for there were many demons who went into the man, **Mark 5:9 / Luke 8:30**.

Christ asked, 'the man,' his name, **Mark 5:9 / Luke 8:30**, not because the Lord didn't know it, but because He sought to bring the man back to a sense of his own identity, and the identity the demon had taken, as shown in the reply.

A legion was four or five thousand men, although no truth may be certain in such a reply from such a source. It's at least in harmony with the idea of multiple possessions in some cases, Mary Magdalene being another example, **Mark 16:9**.

Notice again in **Mark 5:10**, the confusion with the words 'he' and 'them'. It's as if he cannot make up his mind whether he is one or a Legion! It has been suggested that the speaker was the leading demon speaking for all the rest, but the view is precarious. Of course, we don't have the exact words of the petition, only Mark's account, which gives it indefinitely.

Notice also that these demons appear to know their destiny: 'Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?' **Matthew 8:29 / Matthew 25:41 / Acts 16:16-17 / James 2:19 / 2 Peter 2:4 / Jude 6**.

They knew that Jesus had absolute power over them, and they were well aware that their destiny was destruction, **Matthew 25:41**. The demons were fearful of having to depart the dwelling they had seized in the poor man, and they pleaded not to be sent away.

They begged Jesus repeatedly to send them away, but not into the Abyss, which is described as a bottomless pit, **Mark 5:10 / Luke 8:31**, that is, the grave, although some understand this as a dwelling place for demons until Judgment Day, **Revelation 9:1-2 / Revelation 11:7 / Revelation 17:8 / Revelation 20:1 / Revelation 20:3**.

Notice again, 'he' begged the Lord in **Mark 5:10 / Luke 8:32 / Matthew 8:31**, but it's 'they' who do the pleading, **Mark 5:12 / Luke 8:31**, making it sure that the demons were the ones pleading.

The request of the demon appeared to have been predicated upon God's prior promise that the demonic world would be vanquished at some time certain in the future; hence, his invoking God's name in the request, **Mark 5:7 / Luke 8:28 / Zechariah 13:1-2**.

A glimpse of God's ultimate plan of destroying evil surfaces here in the demonic knowledge that such destruction is in store for them and that an appointed time, **Matthew 8:29**, for it has already been determined, **Acts 17:31 / Zechariah 13:1-2**.

There was a large herd of pigs feeding, **Luke 8:32 / Matthew 8:30**. Around two thousand pigs were feeding on the side of the mountain according to **Mark 5:11-13**.

And so, after requesting permission to embody the pigs, **Mark 5:12 / Luke 8:32 / Matthew 8:31**, Jesus sends them into the herd of pigs, **Mark 5:13 / Luke 8:33 / Matthew 8:32**.

Of all the lower creation, only the serpent, **Genesis 3:1**, and swine are revealed in Scripture as possessed of an evil spirit. The serpent is a symbol of intellectual cunning and the pigs of gross uncleanness, suggesting that in both categories, there is a great temptation to the human family.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This shows that the emissaries of Satan are restricted and may not enter even a herd of swine without the Lord’s permission. Other restrictions of Satan are given in **1 Corinthians 10:13**, and **Matthew 13:25**.’

The pigs then rushed into the sea and drowned, **Mark 5:13 / Luke 8:33 / Matthew 8:32 / Job 1:12-22**. Notice that Christ didn’t destroy the pigs; the demons did. Christ’s permission of such a thing is no more than God’s permission of all-natural disorders like earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, droughts, tornadoes, etc., which kill millions of people, not pigs alone, and yet all thoughtful persons find no difficulty reconciling this with God’s love and justice. The pigs roamed the countryside as a result of a great multitude of people who gathered around the Lord, His disciples, and the man from whom the legion of demons was cast out.

Notice the contrast in the man, he was naked, bleeding, furtive, dwelling in tombs, constantly crying out, etc, but notice the change, he is now clothed and in his right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus! **Mark 5:15**. This shows what Christ does; He really can transform lives.

Despite Jesus healing the man and finding him sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind. Despite these two men’s lives being transformed, the crowd appear to be scared, **Mark 5:14-15 / Luke 8:34-35 / Matthew 8:33**.

WHY WERE THEY SCARED?

Possibly because they did not want Jesus’ kind of power in their midst. Possibly because they thought Jesus was going to wipe out every pig in the region, which would mean a loss of property and revenue.

At first, it may seem incredible that the people of the town did not want Jesus to stay, **Mark 5:17 / Luke 8:37 / Matthew 8:34**. But think about what they had just lost; they had just lost two thousand pigs. Some people owned them, some people were planning to make money slaughtering, processing, and selling them. He had hurt the town’s economy.

They evidently loved material possessions more than they loved Jesus, and because of that, they missed out on the supreme privilege. They asked Him to leave, **Mark 5:16-17 / Luke 8:37 / Matthew 8:34**.

Whatever the reason, it’s clear they were so blinded by the physical loss that they asked Jesus to leave the area. Jesus listened to them, left and would never set foot in the area again. How sad to see Jesus being rejected once again, despite doing a wonderful thing, not only for the men who were possessed but for those who lived in the area.

One can appreciate the feelings of the man whose life had been so distraught by the powers of darkness, and whose feelings of love and gratitude toward Jesus caused him to desire constant fellowship with the Lord, **Mark 5:18 / Luke 8:38**. Those who have tasted the blessing of the Lord desire to be ever in His company and partakers of His companionship.

Luke and Mark record that one of the men who was possessed was commanded by Jesus to tell others what God had done for him, which he proceeded to do, **Mark 5:18-20 / Luke 8:38-39**. On some occasions, Jesus prohibited the beneficiaries of His miracles from speaking of them, **Mark 1:40-45**, but here, it was commanded, why? Simply because this was a Gentile area, He was on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus didn't want to be crowded by spectators in the Capernaum area, west of the Sea, but in this wicked town, He was in no danger of becoming too popular.

The people in this place needed someone to report the miracle. It's of the greatest significance that Jesus here referred to Himself as 'the Lord' who had done for the man 'great things' and 'had mercy upon' him, **Mark 5:19**. Attempts to get rid of Jesus in all ages have generally been as futile and ineffective as were those of the village of the Gerasenes. The word 'Decapolis', **Mark 5:20**, means 'the ten cities' which lay in the area, nine of them east of Lake Galilee. It must have been a very effective witness indeed which was provided by that previous terror of the tombs who went up and down the area extolling the power and mercy of Jesus, whom he also, no doubt, identified as 'Lord'. No wonder it is said that 'all the people were amazed,' **Mark 5:20**. Do we ever invite the Lord to leave our lives because we love material things more than we love Him? **Luke 8:36-37**.

JESUS RAISES A DEAD GIRL AND HEALS A SICK WOMAN

'When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, 'My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.' So, Jesus went with him.' **Mark 5:21-24**

Jesus and His disciples went on to the western shore of Galilee, **Mark 5:21**, and the view would have been amazing, and the pulpit was the boat, which wasn't far from the city of Capernaum. As we've already looked at, Capernaum was Jesus' hometown.

In **Matthew 9:1**, Jesus calls Capernaum His own city. **Matthew 4:13** tells us that He had left Nazareth, and was now dwelling at Capernaum, thus fulfilling the prophecy with regard to Zebulun and Naphthalin, **Luke 4:16-31**.

Christ ennobled Bethlehem by His birth, Nazareth by His education, Jerusalem by His death, and Capernaum by making it His hometown. It's here that crowds were expecting Jesus, **Luke 8:40**.

Jairus was a ruler of the Jewish synagogue in Capernaum, a prominent and respected leader of the people, **Mark 5:22 / Luke 8:41 / Matthew 9:19**. His willingness to fall upon his knees before the Son of God emphasises the heartbreak which was crushing his soul, **Mark 5:22 / Luke 8:41 / Matthew 9:18**.

Think about his situation for a moment. Here is a man who sits in the synagogue and hears all the plans and plots to kill this same Jesus, but he comes to Jesus because he obviously believes in who Jesus claims to be and can do. There can be no doubt that many of his peers despised him for humbling himself before the Lord, but what a blessing he is going to receive.

Matthew uses the phrase, 'my daughter', **Matthew 9:18**, and Luke uses the phrase, 'my only daughter', **Luke 8:42**, whilst Mark uses the phrase, 'my little daughter', **Mark 5:23**.

This tells us that this was not only his only daughter but his only child. Notice Mark and Luke say she is 'dying', **Mark 5:23 / Luke 8:42**. Matthew quoted Jairus as saying, 'she is even now dead,' **Matthew 9:18**.

A USEFUL TIMELINE

When the father left the child, she was at her latest gasp, and he didn't know whether to regard her now as dead or alive and, because he didn't receive any certain knowledge of her death, he was perplexed whether to speak of her as departed or not, expressing himself one moment in one language, and at the next in another. Jesus agrees to go with him, but it seems a large crowd had got in Jesus' way, [Mark 5:24](#) / [Luke 8:42](#).

JESUS HEALS A WOMAN WITH BLEEDING ISSUES

'A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better, she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, 'If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.'" Immediately, her bleeding stopped, and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once, Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' 'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'

[Mark 5:25-34](#)

On the way to Jairus' home, Jesus heals a woman with bleeding issues, [Mark 5:25-34](#) / [Luke 8:43-48](#) / [Matthew 9:20-22](#). Mark and Luke's account gives us a lot more detail concerning this woman.

As Jesus was journeying to Jairus' house, a desperate woman in the multitude touched the Lord, [Mark 5:27](#) / [Luke 8:43-44](#) / [Matthew 9:20](#). She had been bleeding for twelve years, [Mark 5:25](#) / [Luke 8:43](#) / [Matthew 9:20](#) / [Leviticus 15:25](#), had gone to many doctors, and spent all of her money, [Mark 5:26](#), but had only worsened.

She's a nobody at this moment in time, but when she heard that Jesus was back in Capernaum, this appeared to her to be her only hope of a cure, and she is determined to reach him. [Mark 5:27-28](#), in the Greek says, 'if she could get to 'The Jesus'. As Jesus was a common name, she knew 'the Jesus' she was seeking, the Jesus who had the power to cure her.

Of course, the problem she faced was immense! Weak and frail and fragile as she was, what chance of reaching Him did she stand when faced with such a crowd of pushing, jostling, excited, noisy healthy people milling around Jesus? [Mark 5:21](#) / [Mark 5:24](#) / [Mark 5:27](#) / [Luke 8:42](#).

But she persisted and somehow managed to reach Jesus, and she touched Him, and immediately she was healed, [Mark 9:29](#) / [Luke 8:44](#) / [Matthew 9:22](#). She not only knew it, but she felt it and so did Jesus, [Mark 5:30](#) / [Luke 8:46](#).

I don't think that she expected to be able to have a conversation or a consultation with the great Teacher. Sure enough, when she touched Jesus' coat, she could sense that the flow of blood immediately dried up, and she was well, [Mark 5:29](#) / [Luke 8:44](#) / [Matthew 9:22](#).

Like all male Jews, the outer garment of Jesus, something like a shawl, had tassels of Blue on its corners. They were there to serve to remind the wearer to keep the Law, and they were regarded as holy.

Not surprisingly, this poor woman thought that, with such a holy person as the Teacher, they would be especially holy, if only she could manage to reach Him.

She would then have quietly gone away, but Jesus stopped and said, ‘Who touched me?’ Mark 5:30 / Luke 8:45. Not surprisingly, His disciples were astonished! ‘Master, you see the people crowding against you, his disciples answered, ‘and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’ Mark 5:31 / Luke 8:45.

I believe that Jesus already knew who touched Him, and He was giving this poor woman the opportunity of coming forward and declaring herself! In any case, Jesus knew the difference between the touch of the jostling crowd and the touch of faith, and He said, ‘Somebody touched me,’ Luke 8:46.

The woman came forward and told Him everything, Mark 5:33 / Luke 8:47. No doubt she was apprehensive as she had broken the law by deliberately touching Jesus, and furthermore, in Jewish society of that time, you didn’t touch such people as Priests or any religious leader! They were looked upon as holy men, and they liked it that way! She probably expected a rebuke from Jesus, but there was no rebuke; there was compassion, about which Jesus knew that the heart of that woman was beating fast. She was afraid of the consequences, and she may even have feared that Jairus, the ruler, would speak sharply to her for having touched the Teacher.

Mark and Luke record that Jesus insisted on being told who touched Him, Mark 5:30 / Luke 8:46. The woman subsequently came forward in fear and trembling, Mark 5:33 / Luke 8:47.

But Jesus looked at her and gently spoke some of the tender words of His ministry record, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering!’ Mark 5:44 / Luke 8:48 / Mark 12:34 / Matthew 9:22 / Luke 7:50 / Luke 17:19 / Luke 18:42. Do you see what has happened? The ‘nobody’ has become a ‘somebody’! She’s gone from being a nobody, ‘who’, to a ‘someone’, to a ‘daughter’.

Notice again what Jesus called her, ‘daughter’! Mark 5:34 / Luke 8:48 / Matthew 9:22. She came to Jesus a ‘nobody’, for whom nobody cared. She heard Jesus refer to her as a ‘somebody’, but her status has now changed, and now she hears Jesus call her ‘daughter’; she is everybody.

1. Physically, she has suffered from a debilitating haemorrhage for twelve years, as long as the daughter of Jairus has been alive, Mark 5:42, and all the doctors have been unable to help her, Mark 5:26; she was physically exhausted. No doubt the doctors tried all they knew, which by our standards wasn’t very much, but they had done their best. They had probably recommended such medication as ‘locust eggs’, ‘powdered eggs of grasshoppers’ or ‘the fingernail of a man who had been hanged’.

All of which were expensive medicines in those days! Indeed, she had spent all the money she possessed, and Mark doesn’t speak very flatteringly of the doctors when he says, ‘instead of getting better she grew worse’, Mark 5:24-34.

2. That wasn’t the only effect of her illness. According to Jewish Law, this illness rendered her unclean so that she was banned from entering the temple or the synagogue, Leviticus 15:25.

She was cut off from her religion and the support it should have given her.

3. And it didn’t stop there; there would have been a domestic consequence, maybe she was now divorced, Deuteronomy 24:1.

At some point in those twelve years, she would have lost her husband, and according to Jewish Law, her husband had the right to divorce her and considering the fact that if he had continued to live with her, he would also have contracted uncleanness and the consequences of it, I have no doubt this is what had happened.

4. Think about the social consequences.

She had lost all her friends and relatives, because they also wouldn’t dare to associate with her lest they become unclean. According to Leviticus 15, anything with which the woman came into contact was unclean, and anyone who had contact with her also became unclean.

Indeed, they wouldn’t sit on a chair that she had sat on. Think about this woman for a moment; she’s a widow, a woman with an incurable disease.

1. She was unclean.
2. This would give her husband the right to divorce her.
3. She was penniless. Spent all she had on doctors looking for a cure.

Locust eggs were given, powdered eggs of grasshoppers, and the nail of a dead thief was another remedy, but these all cost lots of money.

4. Excommunicated from her religion.
5. Excommunicated from society.

Put all this together, and you see the terrible consequences of her sickness; we can understand how desperate she was. There was no one to help her; it seemed no one cared, nobody wanted to know her, she was a 'nobody'.

This is the change that occurs when we come into faith in Jesus. This poor woman had been cut off from the Jewish faith, but she was received into the faith of heaven. She was rejected by her family but was received into the family of the Son of God.

She was excluded from the fellowship of human society but was received into the fellowship of those who believe. She was reconciled back into society and her religion.

And Jesus still changes people, and many of those who have done the most good in the world started out as 'nobodies', but they learned through the Gospel of Christ that they really are a 'somebody' for whom God declares, and they realised that in the eyes of God they are 'everybody', the most important people on earth.

'While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. 'Your daughter is dead,' they said. 'Why bother the teacher anymore?' Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, 'Don't be afraid; just believe.' He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John, the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.' But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha koum!' (which means 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!').

Immediately, the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this, they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.' Mark

5:35-43

It's possible that some of Jairus' fellow rulers of the synagogue had been embarrassed by one of themselves appealing to the humble Prophet of the poor and there seems to be a kind of calloused argument here to the effect that, 'Look, she's already dead, and we all know that this Teacher cannot raise the dead, why bother with him any further?' **Mark 5:35 / Luke 8:49.**

Whether or not this was exactly what they had in mind, it was certainly the attitude of their class. It's as though they had said, 'we are already proceeding with the funeral,' **Luke 8:52 / Matthew 9:23**, which, from **Mark 5:38**, it is plain to see that is what they were actually doing!

When Jesus said, 'don't be afraid', **Mark 5:36 / Luke 8:50**, He meant, don't fear for your daughter's life, don't fear the scorn of your peers, don't fear that our purpose has been upset by this delay in healing the woman. Jairus was instructed to retain his faith.

When Jesus arrived at the house, He allowed only Peter, James and John to follow Him into Jairus' house, **Mark 5:37 / Luke 8:51**. This marked a new milestone in Jesus' ministry, as already the abilities of these three had earned them a closer relationship with the Lord.

That relationship, however, wasn't predicated merely upon ability, but upon the role each of these would have in the future spread of Christianity. James would set the grand example by being the first of the apostles to die for the

faith, Acts 12:1-2. Peter would preach the first sermon, Acts 2:4-39. John would be the last witness and write the fourth Gospel.

Other instances in which these three were singled out for greater intimacy with Jesus were in the transfiguration, Luke 9:28-36 / Matthew 17:1-13 / Mark 9:2-12, and the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke 22:39-46 / Matthew 26:36-46 / Mark 14:32-42. The probable task assigned to the other apostles was that of controlling and dispersing the multitude, Matthew 9:25.

We are surprised to find so quickly the presence of the ‘hired mourners,’ Mark 5:38 / Luke 8:52, who were raising such a tumult in the house of Jairus, which might be explained by supposing some further delay necessitated by the dispersal of the multitude, during which Jairus had returned home and initiated this phase of the funeral himself, but this is denied by the fact that Jairus evidently remained with Jesus.

This leaves open the possibility that advance preparations had been made to become effective on the daughter’s death, or the additional possibility suggested under Mark 5:35, namely, that Jairus’ peers were proceeding with the customary funeral activities, the latter being the view accepted here, Matthew 9:23-26.

When Jesus says, ‘the child is not dead but asleep’, Mark 5:39 / Luke 8:52 / Matthew 9:24, He certainly didn’t mean these words as a denial that the daughter’s death had actually occurred, but it was His customary language regarding death, John 11:11.

In context, it also meant that He intended to raise her to life again. The attitude of the ‘professional mourners’ and the pipe players, Matthew 9:23 / Jeremiah 9:17 / Jeremiah 16:6 / Ezekiel 24:17 / Amos 5:16, shows conclusively that the girl’s death had indeed occurred and had been proven.

The scorers were put out by Jesus, the spiritual implications of this being profound and perpetual. Their conduct here denies any other status to them except that of hired performers at a funeral.

Scornful laughter is never the behaviour of broken-hearted friends and relatives, Mark 5:40 / Luke 8:53 / Matthew 9:24 / John 11:13 / Acts 20:10. Jesus’ questioning of the noise they were raising also supports the same conclusion. Mark recorded the actual syllables that Jesus used in this calling of the little girl back to life, Mark 5:41. The words are Aramaic, supposed to have been the language Jesus used, and from Peter, who was present in that inner room, Mark remembered the very words that Christ used.

The words, ‘little girl’, Mark 5:41 / Luke 8:54, can also be translated as ‘little lamb’, which again shows the tenderness of Jesus’ voice to the young girl. Jesus actually takes the young girl’s hand and tells her to get up, Mark 5:41 / Luke 8:54 / Matthew 9:25. Both Mark and Luke record that Jesus didn’t want this miracle to be made known, Mark 5:43 / Luke 8:56.

The reason for this was simply because He didn’t want the crowds to get excited, Matthew 4:24 / Matthew 14:1 / Mark 1:28 / Mark 1:45 / Luke 5:15 / Luke 7:17. Nevertheless, news about the event spread throughout that region, Matthew 9:26.

It is a strange coincidence that the age of this child, Mark 5:42, corresponded exactly with the twelve years of suffering endured by the woman, Mark 5:25 / Luke 8:43 / Matthew 9:20, suggesting some connection here that is not apparent to us. All commentators are intrigued by it, but none have a solution.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This miracle of raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead is the first resurrection recorded in the New Testament. There were three such wonders, forming a sequence.

1. Jairus’ daughter had been dead only a very short time.
2. The son of the widow of Nain had been dead longer and was being carried to the tomb.

3. Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days, **Luke 7:12 / John 11**. Christ considered raising the dead a part of his ministry, **Luke 7:22 / Matthew 11:5**, and he delegated the power to the apostles, **Matthew 10:8**. Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, acting under this commission, **Acts 9:40**.

Notice the theme that runs through the stories in Mark's Gospel. Jesus can do what is humanly impossible.

1. The storm.

The disciples were desperate, but Jesus calmed it with a mere word, **Mark 4:35-41**.

2. The demoniac.

Though many had tried, no one had been able to bind or subdue him. Jesus expelled the demons with a word, and the man returned to normal, **Mark 5:1-20**.

3. The woman.

No physician had been able to heal her, though she had spent all her money in the effort. With one touch, she was completely cured, **Mark 5:25-34**.

4. The daughter of Jairus.

When one dies, all attempts to cure the sickness end, because everyone knows you can't raise the dead. Jesus did, **Mark 5:32-43**. Four times in this part of Mark, Jesus entered situations that were humanly impossible and emerged.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

'Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. 'Where did this man get these things?' they asked. 'What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter?'

Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.' He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

He was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.' **Mark 6:1-6**

A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

This rejection of Jesus in Nazareth took place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The rejection of Jesus recorded in **Matthew 13:54-58** took place at the close of His ministry. The residents of Nazareth had two chances to hear Jesus, but they wouldn't listen on either occasion.

Jesus was now under the full power of the Holy Spirit to carry out His ministry, **Luke 4:14-30**. In His incarnation, He had given up equality with God. It was now the Spirit working through Him to accomplish the miraculous works of His ministry in order to fulfil the purpose of His coming into the world, **Matthew 13:54**.

The need for the Spirit to work through Him explains the extent of the incarnation. Jesus truly became a man in order to identify with those whom He sought to deliver from the confines of the flesh, **Philippians 2:5-11**.

THE SYNAGOGUE

As was the custom of the Jews, Jesus went to the synagogue to listen to the reading of the Old Testament law, **Matthew 13:54**. However, the Sabbath assembly in the synagogue wasn't a part of the Old Testament law. The synagogue came into existence in Palestine after the Jews' return from Babylonian captivity in 536 B.C. Keep in mind also that not all Jews in a community met in the synagogue simply because the synagogues were not large structures. The synagogue was a Jewish cultural centre where the reading of the law could be heard. The Jews' custom was that the Old Testament law was read only while the reader stood.

Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth, but it seems the teaching and the miracles that Jesus did were too much for those who knew Him from childhood. They weren't prepared to accept Him for who He actually was, **Mark 6:1-2**. Jesus' brothers are named but not His sisters, **Mark 6:3 / Matthew 13:55**. Notice they don't call Jesus the carpenter's son, but 'the carpenter', **Mark 6:3 / Matthew 13:55**. This suggests by the time of this event, Jesus' father, Joseph, has already died. In Greek, the word 'carpenter' is 'builder.'

He was the 'local boy' the village or town fathers couldn't accept to be the Messiah at this time in His ministry, **Mark 6:4 / John 4:44**. He could do no miracles because the people weren't driven by faith to go to Him, **Mark 6:5-6 / Matthew 13:58**.

No wonder Jesus says, 'a prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home,' **Mark 6:4 / Matthew 13:57 / Luke 4:16-30 / John 4:44**. Rejection usually comes from those who are closest to us, or from those who should know better.

Because those of Jesus' home country wouldn't accept Him, He didn't have the opportunity to heal many people, for few believed in Him, **Mark 6:5**. Since they considered Him only a local personality, they didn't accept Him as one who had authority over the supernatural, **Genesis 19:22 / Genesis 32:25**.

This event explains the faith that one had to have in order to be healed. The faith was in the one through whom God worked to heal. In this case, it was faith in Jesus to heal, **Mark 6:6**. And so, once again, Jesus is being rejected. The people in Nazareth forfeited an ideal opportunity to have the Lord with them.

Jesus went around the villages teaching, **Mark 6:6 / Matthew 9:35-38**. This one statement explains the ministry of Jesus, and thus gives an example to teachers who would function in following the example of Jesus' ministry. In the early part of His ministry, He wanted to do much teaching. He wanted emphasis placed on teaching in order to prepare people for His kingdom's reign that was to come.

For this reason, He asked those who were touched by healing not to speak concerning their healing, lest people be drawn to Him simply for the purpose of being healed, **Mark 5:43**.

His going about in a circuit to teach is certainly a good example for evangelists today who want to teach a great number of people in a specific region, **Luke 4:42-44**.

We must keep in mind that though these people didn't respond to Jesus at this time, when they later considered all that Jesus did in fulfilment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, they would believe. This event was early in His ministry. It occurred before they had all the facts concerning His fulfilment of prophecy, **Acts 6:7**.

Some people accept the Gospel and others reject it. We should share the Gospel with everyone who wants to listen, but what can we learn from Jesus about who is more likely to listen to the Gospel message? There are times, especially if someone is getting aggressive, that we just need to walk away.

What else can we learn from Jesus, in terms of who is more likely to listen to the Gospel message? Please read the following passages and see if you can notice the common denominator: **Acts 9:20 / Acts 13:5 / Acts 13:13-14 / Acts 14:1 / Acts 17:1 / Acts 17:10 / Acts 17:16-17 / Acts 18:4 / Acts 18:19 / Acts 19:8**.

Those who are already ‘religious’ will be more open to talking about their faith, and we can lead them to the truth if they only know partial truth, and we need to take advantage of those situations. Many people claim to be believers, but they haven’t read the Bible or obeyed the Gospel.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES

It is tragic to see people discarding the fantastic opportunity to be blessed by Jesus. In the country of the Gadarenes, they simply asked Jesus to leave, **Mark 5:17**. Here in Nazareth, they refused to believe and therefore didn’t even bring their sick for Jesus to heal.

As a result, they missed out on the opportunities that others, like Jairus and the woman with the bleeding, benefited from. What about us? Do we take advantage of the opportunity to know Jesus and to be blessed by Him?

JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

‘Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. These were his instructions: ‘Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.’ They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.’ **Mark 6:7-13**

In this section, Jesus sent His twelve apostles out in pairs on a preaching tour. This marked the fourth stage in their career. Earlier, they had heard Jesus, been called by Him, and been chosen as apostles. This was one of many preaching trips that Jesus commissioned the twelve to do, **Luke 9:1-6 / Matthew 10:1-15**.

They were given the power to heal as well as to cast out impure spirits, **Mark 6:7 / Luke 9:1 / Matthew 10:1**. Jesus gives the twelve the authority to work miracles in the lives of anyone they met, **Mark 6:13 / Luke 9:1 / Matthew 10:1**. Notice that they received this power before the events of **Acts 2**, when they were baptised with the Holy Spirit, **Acts 2:1-5**. What Jesus is doing here is giving them this power in order that their preaching could be confirmed as true, **John 20:30-31 / Mark 16:20**.

Here they were sent out as His representatives to proclaim the message of repentance, **Mark 6:12 / Luke 9:2**. The purpose of the trips was to accomplish the mission of teaching as many people as possible before the event of the cross and resurrection in Jerusalem, **Luke 9:2**.

The teaching prepared the minds of the people to accept Jesus’ kingship that would later be proclaimed by the disciples on and after the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**.

The preaching trips also prepared the disciples to face rejection by those to whom they went. Jesus had commissioned them to preach what would be ‘new wine.’ They were going to people of ‘old wineskins,’ **Matthew 9:17 / Mark 2:22 / Luke 5:37**.

Jesus often sent His disciples out alone, **Mark 6:7 / Luke 9:2**, but during this trip, they went out in twos. Sending out six pairs of preachers both facilitated the spread of Jesus’ message and gave the apostles valuable practical experience, **Mark 6:7**.

Notice they weren’t to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, **Matthew 10:5 / Matthew 15:24 / John 4:9**, they are instructed to go only to Jewish towns and villages, **Luke 9:6**.

It wasn't until after Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles in Acts 2, that they are instructed to go into all the world, **Matthew 28:19 / Mark 16:15**.

The preaching trips gave them an opportunity to face the rejection of a misguided religious world into which they would go after **Acts 2**. While Jesus was still with them, they could return for His counsel concerning problems they encountered on their preaching trips, **Mark 6:12-13 / Matthew 11:1**.

The message they were given to proclaim, 'the kingdom of heaven has come near', **Luke 10:9 / Matthew 10:7 / Matthew 3:2 / Matthew 4:17 / Mark 9:1**. The words, 'Come near', mean it's about to be established. As we know, Jesus isn't speaking about an earthly kingdom but a spiritual kingdom.

Through His preaching and the preaching of the twelve, Jesus was preparing Israel for His kingdom reign from heaven that would be the fulfilment of prophecy, **Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14**.

Jesus tells the twelve, 'Freely you have received, freely give,' **Matthew 10:8**. This should be one of the basic principles of Christian living. In the context of **Matthew 10:1-16**, Jesus was referring to their freely receiving the power to heal the sick, **Mark 6:13**. In other words, they weren't to heal for money; they were to use the free gift of healing in a generous manner.

Remember, after they received power from the Holy Spirit in **Acts 2:1-4**, they would remember this principle. And so, they would freely impart the 'miraculous gifts' to all by the 'laying on of their hands', **Acts 8:18**.

The miraculous gifts don't exist today because no apostles exist to 'lay their hands' on us, but we do recognise that God has freely given His grace; we should freely proclaim it to others.

The mission was urgent, so Jesus forbade them to take extra provisions, **Mark 6:8-9 / Luke 9:3 / Matthew 10:9-10**. This restriction wasn't intended to be permanent, **Luke 22:35-36**, but was appropriate for this brief mission, **Mark 6:30**.

Notice also that they were to take no extra possessions that would burden their trip; they were to take only the clothes they wore and no staff, **Mark 6:8-9 / Luke 9:3 / Matthew 10:9-10**. Wait a minute, **Mark 6:8** says, 'Take nothing for the journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.'

IS THIS A CONTRADICTION?

Were they to take a staff or not? Matthew and Luke seem to agree that Jesus prohibited the disciples from taking a staff on their journeys, while Mark appears to give them permission to take one.

Furthermore, although Luke doesn't record Jesus' command regarding sandals, some have concluded that Matthew and Mark also contradict each other on this point.

The differences between Matthew and Mark are explained easily when we understand that the writers used different Greek verbs to express different meanings. In Matthew, the word 'provide', NKJV, the root Greek word comes from 'ktaomai', meaning to 'procure for oneself, acquire, get'.

Based upon these definitions, the NASV used the English verb 'acquire' in **Matthew 10:9**, 'Do not acquire', instead of 'provide' or 'take.' In Matthew, Jesus is saying, 'Do not acquire anything in addition to what you already have that may tempt you or stand in your way. Just go as you are.' As Mark indicated, the apostles were to 'take', 'airo', what they had, and go, **Mark 6:8-9**.

The apostles weren't to waste precious time gathering supplies, extra apparel, staffs, shoes, etc, or making preparations for their trip, but instead were instructed to trust in God's providence for additional needs.

Jesus didn't mean for the apostles to discard the staffs and sandals they already had; rather, they weren't to go and acquire more. It's obvious from a comparison of the verses in Matthew and Luke that they are recording the same truth, that the apostles weren't to spend valuable time gathering extra staffs, only they are using different words to do so.

‘Provide ‘ktaomi’ neither gold nor silver, nor staffs, Matthew 10:9-10

‘Take ‘airo’ nothing for the journey, neither staffs,’ Luke 9:3

Luke didn't use ‘ktaomi’ in his account because he nearly always used ‘ktaomi’ in a different sense than Matthew and Mark did, **Mark 6:8**. In Matthew's account, the word ‘ktaomai’ is used to mean ‘provide’ or ‘acquire,’ whereas in the Books of Luke and Acts, Luke used this word to mean ‘purchase, buy, or earn.’

The point is simply this: Jesus wanted them to go as quickly as possible to proclaim the message that the Messiah had arrived, but at the same time, they needed to learn to trust God to take care of their everyday needs, **Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 6:25-34**.

Please note the word ‘worry’, ‘merimnao’, in **Matthew 6:11**, and **Matthew 6:25-34**, comes from the Greek root word ‘merimna’, which means ‘distraction’; in other words, don't let your everyday needs distract you from putting God first.

Jesus tells the twelve, ‘the worker is worth his keep,’ **Matthew 10:9-11**. In other words, those who minister spiritual things are worthy of physical things. Hence why it's Biblical to pay a ‘full-time’ evangelist. This has always been a principle among God's people, **Luke 10:7 / 1 Corinthians 9 / Galatians 6:6 / 1 Timothy 5:17-18**.

Why would Jesus tell them to stay in one house? **Mark 6:10 / Luke 9:4 / Matthew 10:11**. They weren't to live from house to house in the towns and cities because this may have been interpreted as them searching for material blessings. Also, when we think about it today, if we go somewhere on a trip, we don't book several places to stay; we book one place and use that place as a base.

If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages, **Luke 10:5-8**. Do not move around from house to house.

Notice they were to greet the owner of that household, not the house itself, **Mark 6:10 / Luke 10:5-9 / Matthew 10:12-13**. If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.

Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. The idea behind the greeting and saying peace was based on the thought that the household that received the messengers was in agreement with and wanted to fellowship the message of the messengers.

What does shaking the dust from your feet mean? **Mark 6:11 / Luke 9:5 / Matthew 10:14**. This was a Jewish custom that demonstrated to the inhospitable their lack of hospitality and acceptance of the messenger and his message, **Nehemiah 5:13 / Luke 10:10-11 / Acts 13:49-51**.

Jesus is saying that those who would receive the messengers of Jesus were receiving Jesus, **Matthew 12:41 / John 15:18-27**. If they didn't receive Jesus and what He taught, they would be rejected in the judgment of God.

Why were the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah less inexcusable than the sins of cities and villages that rejected the apostles? **Matthew 10:15**. Simply because they sinned in ignorance, whereas the cities of Jesus' day sinned against the light, the Messiah, they should have known better. You can read all about Sodom and Gomorrah in **Genesis 19** and **Jude 7**.

Their going out was going to be dangerous; they were going out among the wolves, **Matthew 10:16**. The brutal and vicious dangers to which the apostles would be exposed weren't concealed by the Lord. Their mission was dangerous and filled with countless perils. The words ‘sheep in the midst of wolves’ are very appropriate and expressive.

Ask any farmer, what would a wolf do to his flock? One wolf in a flock of sheep is a source of incredible slaughter and destruction. And so, in venturing into the dangers of their journey, the disciples must maintain their innocence in an environment of evil. In order to do so, they must exercise great wisdom on their journey, **Philippians 2:14-16**.

What does ‘shrewd as snakes’ mean? **Matthew 10:16**. It simply means the disciples are to exercise great wisdom in their work for the Master. The serpent was symbolic of carefulness, craftiness, and wisdom. The serpent was considered a symbol of wisdom among the ancients, especially the python.

The girl at Philippi who followed Paul and Silas was said to have had a ‘spirit which could predict the future’, **Acts 16:16**, but the Greek word denotes that she had a python! Genesis declares that ‘the serpent was more shrewd’, **Genesis 3:1 / 2 Corinthians 12:16 / Ephesians 5:15 / Colossians 4:5**.

What does ‘innocent as doves’ mean? **Matthew 10:16**. The dove was symbolic of peace, innocence, and purity. The dove, as a symbol of harmlessness and innocence, derived significance from Noah’s use of it as a messenger in the ark, **Genesis 8**.

We also see the significance of this when the Spirit descended upon Jesus, signifying the start of His ministry, **Matthew 3:16**. The disciples went out, preached repentance and drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them, **Luke 9:6 / Mark 6:12-13**.

JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED

‘King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’ Others said, ‘He is Elijah.’ And still others claimed, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.’ But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’ For Herod, himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married.

For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ So, Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. Finally, the opportune time came. On his birthday, Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.’ And he promised her with an oath, ‘Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.’ She went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’ ‘The head of John the Baptist,’ she answered. At once, the girl hurried in to the king with the request: ‘I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So, he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. **Mark 6:14-29**

At this time in Jesus’ ministry, people were trying to determine who He was, **Matthew 14:1-12**. Because of the miracles, they knew that He was more than a good teacher of Israel, **John 3:2**.

Perhaps because of the additional groups of preachers being sent out, Herod, **Mark 6:14**, the governor, heard about Jesus, **Matthew 14:1**. This was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, **Mark 8:15 / Luke 3:1 / Luke 3:19 / Luke 8:3 / Luke 13:31 / Acts 4:27 / Acts 12:1**.

They had at this time speculated that He might be the resurrected Elijah, or the Prophet who was to come in Israel as the Deliverer. They possibly believed that He would be like one of the other Old Testament prophets, **Mark 6:14-16 / Matthew 14:2 / Luke 9:7-8 / Matthew 16:13-14**.

He thought Jesus might be John the Baptist raised from the dead, **Mark 6:14 / Matthew 14:1 / Luke 3:19**. Herod at least concluded one thing that was right. If John had been raised from the dead, then the power of the supernatural was at work in the resurrected John.

The supernatural was at work, **Mark 6:14 / Matthew 14:2**, but it wasn't at work through a resurrected John. It was at work through the One about whom John prophesied and the One in whom all the world must believe, **Matthew 3:1-11 / Luke 3:2-16**.

Herod feared that if he acted against John, then something dreadful would happen to him, **Matthew 14:5**. To some extent, therefore, Herod accepted John as a just and holy man of God, **Mark 6:20**. It seems that his acceptance of John was greater than that of the self-righteous religious leaders of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, Herod's pride to maintain face among his peers moved him to overcome his fear and carry out a rash promise he had made in response to the lustful dance of Herodias' daughter, **Mark 6:21-28 / Matthew 14:6-11**.

John's physical death thus manifested Herod's spiritual death because he loved his position in this world more than the power of God. Herod's conscience may have been bothering him because he had killed John, **Mark 6:17 / Matthew 14:3 / Luke 9:9**.

Herod had killed John because John had been preaching against his marriage, telling him that it wasn't right for him to have Herodias, who had been his brother's wife, **Mark 6:17-19 / Matthew 14:3-4**. According to Old Testament law, it was unlawful for Herod to be married to Herodias, **Leviticus 18:14-16 / Leviticus 20:21 / Deuteronomy 25:5-10**.

As a result, he imprisoned John but didn't wish to kill him; Herodias did, **Mark 6:17-22 / Luke 3:19**. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She divorced Philip in order to marry Herod Antipas.

One day, he had a birthday party with many important guests, and his stepdaughter provided 'live entertainment,' **Mark 6:21 / Matthew 14:6**. Because of her provocative dance, Herod rashly vowed to give her anything she asked, up to half of his kingdom, **Mark 6:22-23 / Matthew 14:6-7**.

Upon receiving instructions from her mother, the girl requested that John's head be served to her on a platter, **Mark 6:24-25 / Matthew 14:8**. Herod hated to do it, **Mark 6:22**, but he didn't want to lose face in front of his dinner guests, so he obliged the girl's request and John was murdered, **Mark 6:26-28 / Matthew 14:9-11**.

The disciples went for John's body and buried him in a tomb, and then told Jesus about it, **Mark 6:29 / Matthew 14:12**. Jesus was obviously deeply moved as He went away by boat privately to a solitary place, **Matthew 14:13**.

SINS THAT BEHEADED JOHN THE BAPTIST

John was a righteous preacher who was murdered because of several sins.

1. An unlawful marriage.
2. Resentment and bitterness on the part of Herodias.
3. A lustful dance.
4. A rash promise.
5. Herod's lack of courage in not breaking the sinful vow.

Actions that produced such bitter fruit should be carefully avoided by Christians today.

1. Despite the frequency of divorce and remarriage in our society, Christians must not act against the Lord's instructions, **Mark 10:2-10 / Matthew 19:9**.

2. All disciples must rid their lives of resentment and bitterness because they build up and lead to hatred, harsh words and revengeful actions, **Ephesians 4:26 / Ephesians 4:31-34 / Hebrews 12:15**.

3. Lustful behaviour provokes every form of sexual sin in our society.

Followers of Christ should avoid activities that encourage sensual feelings, **Job 31:1 / Matthew 5:28 / Romans 13:14**.

4. No one should make any promise without careful thought, **Leviticus 5:4 / Matthew 5:33-37 / James 5:12**.

5. All should have the courage to do what is right regardless of the presence of others, **Galatians 6:9 / Colossians 3:17 / 1 Peter 3:14**.

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

‘The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So, they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, he began teaching them many things. By this time, it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. ‘This is a remote place,’ they said, ‘and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.’ But he answered, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said to him, ‘That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?’ ‘How many loaves do you have?’ he asked. ‘Go and see.’ When they found out, they said, ‘Five—and two fish.’ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.’ **Mark 6:30-44**

The feeding of the five thousand is the fourth sign recorded by John, and it is recorded in all four Gospels: **Mark 6:32-44 / Luke 9:10-17 / Matthew 14:13-15 / John 6:1-15**.

There are only two miracles of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels, the feeding of the five thousand and His resurrection, **Mark 16:1-15 / Luke 24:1-12 / Matthew 28:1-10 / John 20:1-20**.

We don’t know the time that transpired between the sending of the twelve in **Mark 6:12 / Luke 9:1** and their reporting back to Jesus, **Mark 6:29 / Luke 9:10**. It seems the disciples came to tell Jesus all that had happened to John, **Mark 6:14-30 / Matthew 14:1-12**.

When the disciples returned from their preaching trip, Jesus sought to leave the multitude in order to spend time with them privately, **Mark 6:30 / Matthew 14:13**. They had been so busy they hadn’t even had time for meals, **Mark 6:31**. Mark lists at least eleven instances when Jesus went to a place of rest. This is a good example for any evangelist who has given himself to periods of intensive evangelistic efforts. Because these worthy evangelists worked hard, they needed the rest.

They needed time to talk among themselves and with God about the great things God had done through them. This was a retreat for prayer, thanksgiving and discussion.

Everyone needs some time out from their busy life schedule, and Jesus knew that the disciples needed some time out, for many of them had first believed because of John’s preaching. They withdrew across the sea of Galilee to a quiet place for meditation and prayer, **Mark 6:31 / Matthew 14:13**.

The people saw that Jesus entered a boat to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, **Matthew 14:13**. When Jesus arrived at the other side, the multitudes had already arrived there on foot, **Matthew 14:13**.

A large crowd had followed Jesus because of the signs He performed by healing the sick, **Mark 6:33-34 / Luke 9:11 / Matthew 14:14 / John 6:1-2**. As the Passover was near, **John 6:4**, it must have been spring. This was one of the three major feasts that the Jews were obliged to attend.

It seems that Jesus is now at the height of His popularity. Soon, after this bread of life discourse, many of His followers were to turn back, **John 6:66**. Now they were coming to Jesus, and they were looking for spiritual leadership. They were like sheep without a shepherd, **Mark 6:34**.

This was the leadership that the religious leaders of the day weren't giving. It was in the context of their searching for someone to lead them that Jesus worked this miracle of creation.

We see Jesus' love and understanding of people. He wasn't only a leader but a leader with compassion for the multitudes. On this occasion, His healing of the sick and the feeding the multitudes was motivated by His compassion, **Matthew 15:32 / Matthew 20:34**.

Therefore, when He saw their zeal to follow Him, He was moved with compassion, **Mark 6:34 / Matthew 14:14**. They were a nation of people who hadn't been spiritually led for years, and thus, they sought someone to give them guidance.

The disciples want to send the people away, **Mark 6:36 / Luke 9:12 / Matthew 14:15**, but Jesus had other plans. Notice how Jesus allowed the apostles time to search for food to feed the people, **Matthew 14:16**. The disciples suggested that someone go into the city and buy food, **Mark 6:36**.

Jesus asked Philip where they were going to get food in order to feed so many people, but the question was really a test of Philip's faith, **John 6:5-6**. Jesus tests Philip, **John 6:5-6**. This is particularly relevant if the apostles have been out performing miracles, healing, preaching, etc.

He already knew what was to happen, but it was appropriate for His plans to test, 'peirazo', Philip at this time to see if he understood that his Lord can supply every need and handle every situation.

Philip fails the test miserably as he looks only to himself and the common purse for a solution, **Mark 6:37 / John 6:7**. He ignores the role Jesus could play by employing His power and fails to understand, **John 14:8**.

Two-hundred denarii equal around four quarts of barley, sixteen-hundred quarts of wheat which was the purchasing power of the day, an awful lot of money, **Mark 6:37 / John 6:7**. One denarius was a working man's wage for the day and so this equalled eight months' wages.

In **John 6:8-9**, we see Andrew attempting to get something organised, and he finds a 'paidarion,' a little boy with some food and presents this to Jesus. He passes the test that Philip failed, and he gives Jesus the chance to perform a miracle.

He uses a little initiative and gets the job done. Jesus asked the question in order to stimulate a faith response from Philip and the others. Among the disciples, or among the multitude, they came up with only five loaves of bread and two fish, **Mark 6:38 / Luke 9:13 / Matthew 14:17**.

The loaves, **Mark 6:38 / Luke 9:13 / Matthew 14:17 / John 6:9**, would have been small, almost like rolls, 'artos', round flat cakes made with wheat flour, or black barley bread, it was the common daily bread of the people. The fish were probably dried or pickled, as was the norm at the time.

Mark reports that the people sat down on the green grass, and the number given is five thousand men, **Mark 6:44**, as does **Luke 9:14**, and John, **John 6:10**. **Matthew 14:21** says 'five-thousand plus women and children'.

This could have been the total number present, or another five thousand women, and it's possible children could have been there. The total present was immaterial; if Jesus could feed five thousand, He could just as easily feed ten thousand, **Psalms 23:1-2**.

Luke's accounts tell us that Jesus split the people into groups of fifty, **Luke 9:14**. Mark tells us they were split into groups of one hundred and groups of fifty, **Mark 6:40**.

Jesus always gave thanks before eating. Some Bibles say, ‘blessing’, but this wasn’t blessing the crowd, but thanks to God for the bread, **Mark 6:41 / Luke 9:16 / Matthew 14:19 / John 6:11**.

In other words, Jesus thanked the Father for the food. This is what He did for the bread and the wine when He instituted the Lord’s Supper: He didn’t bless the bread and the wine; He thanked God for providing it, **Mark 14:22-23 / Luke 22:19-20 / Matthew 26:26-27**. Jesus left a good example for the disciples in the years to come to do likewise concerning the blessing of food, **1 Timothy 4:4-5**.

‘BLESSED THE BREAD!’

Imagine you’re sitting around the dinner table preparing to enjoy a sumptuous meal, and someone is asked to ‘bless the food’ before you eat. The person praying says something like this, ‘Heavenly Father, ‘bless this food’ to the nourishment of our bodies, may it strengthen us to do your work, in Jesus’ Name, Amen.’

I’m sure we’ve all heard this prayer at some point in our lives, maybe you’ve even prayed something similar before you ate your food. I was speaking with a brother just recently and asked him why he blessed ‘the food’ before eating. Jokingly, he said, the food might be poisoned, and we need God to make it safe to eat!

Now he may have been joking, but there’s some truth in what he said. Some Christians sadly believe, although they won’t openly say it, that they can’t or won’t eat any food unless God has somehow miraculously made it safe to eat first.

It’s as though there’s something wrong with the food in the first place, and so by blessing the food before eating, it somehow becomes ‘kosher’ enough to eat. I can understand this kind of thinking, especially when you’re about to eat some food from certain fast food outlets: ‘Dear God, this food doesn’t look or smell great, so please bless it and make it edible for me to eat!’

WHERE DOES OUR FOOD COME FROM?

When we ask the question, where does our food come from? You may be forgiven for saying the local supermarket or the local farmers. As Christians, we know this isn’t true; they are simply the suppliers of the food, but it’s God Himself who is the real provider of food, **Genesis 1:29-30 / Genesis 9:3 / Psalm 104:14**.

Since it’s God who is the ultimate provider, He’s the one who provides the sun and the rain for our food to grow, it’s Him we should be thanking for our food. James tells us that ‘every good and perfect gift is from above’, **James 1:17**, and this would include our food. And when we pray, ‘Give us our daily bread’, **Matthew 6:11**, we’re acknowledging that our food is an answer to our prayers for that food.

The problem with ‘blessing the food’ is that it doesn’t acknowledge where the real source of the food comes from. When we pray before eating, should we bless the food or give thanks to God for providing that food?

Paul taught that believers should receive their food with thanksgiving when he spoke of ‘Certain foods, which GOD CREATED to be received with THANKSGIVING by those who believe and who know the truth,’ **1 Timothy 4:3**.

GIVING THANKS FOR THE FOOD

Before miraculously multiplying the loaves and fishes and providing a meal for the five thousand, Jesus asked the Father's blessing upon the food. Notice, He didn't bless the food, but blessed God or thanked God for providing it, **Mark 6:41 / Luke 9:16 / Matthew 14:19 / John 6:11**.

Before miraculously multiplying the loaves and fishes and providing a meal for the four thousand, Jesus asked the Father's blessing upon the food. Notice again, He didn't bless the food, but blessed God or thanked God for providing it, **Matthew 15:36 / Mark 8:7**.

Later in the Book of Acts, we read about the Apostle Paul, publicly and in the presence of many people, some of whom were probably not Christians, who thanked God for the food before eating. Notice again, Paul didn't bless the actual food; he thanked God for it, **Acts 27:35**.

BEFORE AND AFTER A MEAL

Let me share with you another interesting thought concerning giving thanks to God for our food. In the Old Testament, we see that God's people not only gave thanks BEFORE they ate the food God provided for them, but they also gave thanks to God for the food AFTER they had eaten it, **Deuteronomy 8:7-10**.

Remember, we're to thank God or bless God for the food, and that's because we acknowledge that the food itself is already a blessing. Now notice **Deuteronomy 8:10**, which tells us that God's people were to praise or bless God AFTER they had eaten. I think it's right that we give thanks to God BEFORE we eat, but maybe it wouldn't be a bad practice to give thanks to God AFTER we've eaten.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

So here we are gathered together on the Lord's Day as a church to remember the Lord's death, burial and resurrection at 'The Lord's Supper'. The presiding brother says a few words and shares a few thoughts to help us focus on Christ's death, burial and resurrection and then the prayers come.

The prayer for the bread usually goes something like this, 'Dear God, as we're about to partake of this bread, which represents your Son's body, please bless it to us as we partake of it.'

Then follows the prayer for the wine, which usually goes something like this: 'Dear God, as we're about to partake of this wine, which represents your Son's blood, please bless it to us as we partake of it.'

If you've been attending worship for a few years and participating in the Lord's Supper, the chances are you've probably heard these prayers or something similar many times in your Christian life.

Maybe you've prayed something similar yourself if you were presiding over the Supper. I'm sure you've noticed the link between asking God to 'bless the food' before eating the food and asking God to bless 'the bread and the wine' before partaking of it.

The Catholic church believes the Eucharist, the bread and the wine, actually becomes the body and blood of Christ; this is called ‘Transubstantiation’. Now, I know most Christians don’t believe in that teaching, but again, we ask the question, why would anyone want God to bless the bread and the wine?

Is there something wrong with the bread and the wine? Do they really believe that something miraculous is going to happen when they ask God to bless them both?

Notice what Jesus actually did when He instituted His Supper, and notice especially that He never once blessed the actual bread and wine, **Mark 14:22 / Luke 22:19-20 / Matthew 26:26-27 / Luke 24:30 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-25**. As I mentioned earlier, you will notice what Jesus actually did, He ‘Gave Thanks’, for the bread and wine, He never blessed the actual bread and wine.

WHO DID HE GIVE THANKS TO?

Obviously, it was the Father for providing the bread and the wine. He gave thanks to the Father or blessed the Father; the word ‘bless’ is another way of expressing thanks to God.

The Jews, even to this day, still declare with the entrance of the Sabbath on Friday evenings as members sip wine from a cup, ‘Blessed are you, O Lord, Our God, King of the Universe who creates the fruit of the vine.’ Another blessing as members break bread is, ‘Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe who brings forth bread from the earth.’

Notice again that in these ‘blessings’, God the Creator is being thanked for giving food, not the bread and wine. These would probably have been similar to the prayers that Jesus would have uttered during His ‘Last Passover Supper.’ **Luke 22:17-18**.

WHAT ABOUT MATTHEW 26:26?

When we read the King James Version, at first glance, it reads as Jesus ‘blessed it’ i.e. ‘blessed the bread’, however, when you read a Greek lexicon, you’ll discover that the word ‘IT’ isn’t in the original text. It reads as follows,

‘(as) they were eating moreover of them, having taken Jesus bread and having blessed, broke and having given to the disciples, he said eat: this is the body of me.’ **Matthew 26:26**

The word ‘IT’ is kind of misleading in the KJV and so we always have to remember that the Bible doesn’t contradict itself, if any text appears to say the opposite of all the other related texts, it’s usually because the translators haven’t done a good job of translating it.

When Christians pray, I believe it’s good practice to think about what we’re actually saying in our prayers, especially when it comes to giving thanks to God for our food or giving thanks to God for providing the bread and the wine at the Supper.

Our children and any visitors often learn how to pray by listening to others, and all too often, they will simply repeat what they have heard time and time again until they are mature enough to share their own thoughts.

Here we are, getting ready to enjoy a sumptuous meal, and someone asks you to ‘bless the food’, why not simply say, ‘The food is already a blessing from God, and so, if you don’t mind, I’ll give thanks to Him for providing it.’

Here we are gathered together on the Lord’s Day to participate in the Lord’s Supper. Someone asked you to bless the bread and the wine. Why not simply say, ‘the bread and the wine are already a blessing from God, and so, if you don’t mind, I’ll give thanks to Him for providing them.’

WHY TWELVE BASKETS?

There are so many ideas out there about the significance of the twelve baskets, **Mark 6:43 / Luke 9:17 / Matthew 14:20 / John 6:13**. The number twelve is such a common recurring number throughout the Scriptures.

The number twelve is mentioned forty-eight times, and the word twelve is mentioned one-hundred and thirty-three times. Jacob had twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel; Abraham’s son Ishmael had twelve sons, and Jesus had twelve Apostles.

There’s always a danger of reading a text and making it mean something which it wasn’t meant to mean. I personally believe that the twelve baskets of food were left so that each one of those disciples who participated could take one. This miracle was unique.

Jesus asked them to take up the leftovers in order to impress on the minds of the disciples that this was a miracle of creation. They knew how much bread and fish they started with and how much was left over, and the only conclusion they could come to was that bread and fish had been created by God, who was in their midst.

Later in His ministry, when He wanted to confirm who He was in the minds of the disciples, Jesus asked them to recall this miracle and the second feeding of four thousand in **Matthew 15:32-38**, where Jesus discussed the ‘bread of life,’ which discussion resulted from this miracle, **Matthew 16:8-19 / John 6:27-59**.

In **John 6:14-15**, we see that this was a visible sign because all present saw it and benefited from it. There were two results: first, they wanted to make Jesus king by force and second, they deduced that Jesus must be the prophet that was foretold, the prophet mentioned is a reference to the one predicted in **Deuteronomy 18:18 / John 1:21**.

The people have obviously wanted a political Messiah, and now here is one who can feed them without any effort on their part. He could provide a physical utopia for them. The Jews wanted a political and military leader like David, who would re-establish David’s throne and the physical kingdom of Israel.

Jesus wasn’t the kind of king they wanted Him to be. This was the high time in His popularity, and from this time on, they began to leave in disappointment, as He wasn’t what they expected, and also, they were disturbed by his teaching, **John 6:60-66**.

Jesus withdrew alone for a time of reflection, **John 6:15 / Matthew 14:25**. He wanted the people to receive Him after a sincere, well-thought-out decision, but He didn’t want them to take Him in the emotional state they were now in.

Christ is the king of individual hearts by faith and obedience, true and sincere, not by force, which is no example of kingship. Jesus is looking for unconditional surrender of the heart, **Luke 9:23 / Proverbs 3:5-6 / Romans 12:1-2**.

This multitude of seekers came looking for one who would lead them. They found the Chief Shepherd and the Son of God who would lead them to victory through the cross.

The proof of the miracle was magnified in the baskets of leftovers they took up. The power of the One who was in their midst was measured by the leftovers. He was truly the Son of God who had the power of creation, **John 1:1-2**.

Jesus set the stage for the miracle to prove His power over the physical laws of nature. He sent the disciples on by themselves by boat on the sea, knowing that a storm would develop that would engulf them, **Matthew 14:22-23**.

JESUS WALKS ON THE WATER

‘Immediately, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. After leaving them, he went up to a mountainside to pray. Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn, he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately, he spoke to them and said, ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.’ **Mark 6:45-52**

The account of Jesus walking on the water is recorded in **Mark 6:45-52 / Matthew 14:22-36 / John 6:16-21**. Jesus sent His disciples ahead of him on a boat and then proceeded to spend some time alone in prayer, **Mark 6:45-46 / Matthew 4:22-23**.

In the early morning from 3:00 am to 6:00 am, the fourth watch, Jesus, walked by them on the Sea of Galilee, **Matthew 14:25**. The disciples left about 6 pm, but were still rowing when Jesus came to them in the fourth watch of the night, 3-4 am, and they had rowed only three or four miles, **John 6:19**.

The disciples were rowing against the wind in the late evening, **Mark 6:47-48 / Matthew 14:24-33**. They didn’t think that their lives were in danger; they were simply struggling against the wind. The sea became so rough that some of the disciples were becoming seasick!

The Sea of Galilee was infamous for its storms, as they were sudden and violent in this area, causing common disruption of the fishing, **John 6:18**. The wind is upset by the mountains of the region and funnelled through the Jordan river valley, causing strong winds on the Sea of Galilee; this is common even today.

Jesus was passing by them, **Mark 6:48**, not in the sense of leaving them in their predicament, but in order to present the situation that would truly manifest His deity, but Jesus may have been exercising a sense of humour.

They were struggling against the wind, and He, with ease, was simply walking by on the water. There would come a time, however, when they would have the faith to move mountains, **Matthew 17:14-20**.

They looked out at the sea and guess who they saw? They are frightened when they see Jesus; they think it is a ghost, **Mark 6:49-50 / Matthew 14:26 / John 6:19**. They would think this again after His resurrection, **Luke 24:37**.

They saw Jesus walking toward them on the water! This was a Divine display of His power over the natural laws. Now let’s just pause and think about this for a moment. Jesus is walking on water. Now, I don’t know about you, but this is nothing less than a miracle, isn’t it?

You might be thinking I don’t really believe that Jesus actually did walk on the water, but if you believe **Genesis 1:1**, where the Bible says, ‘God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them’, then you shouldn’t have any problem believing this miracle.

If God can create the whole world and everything out of nothing, then why can’t the One who created the water in the first place be able to walk on what He created?

Why can’t the One who created the sun stop the sun from going down, as we read about in **Joshua 10**? Why can’t the One who created life bring Lazarus back to life after he had been dead for four days, like we read about in **John 11**?

My point is, Jesus walked on water, so that means that Jesus is definitely afloat. Now seeing anyone walking on water would be enough to frighten me, and it frightened the disciples too, **Mark 6:49-50 / Matthew 14:26 / John 6:19**. And so knowing their fear, Jesus reassures them and says, ‘Don’t be afraid, it is I.

When Jesus says, ‘it is I’, **Mark 6:50 / Matthew 14:27 / John 6:20**, this could be translated, ‘EGO EIMI,’ ‘I am’, **Exodus 3:14 / John 8:24 / John 8:28 / John 8:58**. Their superstitious nature led them to think that they were seeing a ghost, but Jesus reassured them that it was He.

Note that only Matthew records Peter walking on the water, **Matthew 14:22-33**. It teaches us that the unexpected should be expected when we spend time with Jesus.

And so Jesus is walking on the water, and the storm is still raging, and according to Matthew, when Peter saw Jesus, he asked, ‘Lord, if it is you’, which could be translated, ‘Since it is You.’ **Matthew 14:28**.

Peter became excited, and he said to him, ‘Lord, if that’s really you, let me walk to you on the water’, **Matthew 14:28**. Then Jesus answered Peter and said, ‘Come’, **Matthew 14:29**. Peter climbed over the side of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus, **Matthew 14:29**.

This is a big lesson we all need to learn from time to time. When was the last time we stepped out in faith as Peter did? You see, it’s easy to stay in the boat where everything is nice and safe. But when was the last time we got out of the boat and started to trust God as Peter did?

This is amazing, isn’t it? Peter didn’t create the water, so how did he manage to walk on the water? He had a little of what we all need as Christians; he had one of those things we can’t see, he had faith.

And his faith was great until, according to Matthew, he began to look around, he felt the strong winds and saw the waves, and he became afraid and started to sink, **Matthew 14:30**.

He had great faith until he took his eyes off of Jesus, and it was then that he cried out to Jesus for help. I want to raise an important point right here. Sometimes in life, we find ourselves drowning in all sorts of things.

Adults drown in the waters of bereavement, sorrow and worries. Adults drown in the waters of debt, family pressures and broken relationships. Children drown in the waters of peer-pressure, unloving parents, and having no good role models in their lives.

Children drown in the waters of neglect, abuse and lack of support.

Now, all these things can drown anyone, and sometimes they do, although Peter started off with great faith, and even though his faith achieved a great thing like walking on water, he took his eye off the creator of the water and began to drown.

The point is this, Jesus didn’t just leave him to drown, He reached out and saved him, **Matthew 14:31**. There are times when life is great, and we feel like we are walking on water. But there are other times when life isn’t so great, and we begin to drown in the waters of life.

But there is hope; you don’t have to drown. Why? Simply because Jesus has His arm outstretched and He is trying to save you. But you need to take hold of His hand.

As long as Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, he was walking on the water, but when he took his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink. We face many storms in our daily life, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus, we can weather the storm, **Hebrews 12:2**.

When Jesus says to Peter, ‘you of little faith’, ‘why did you doubt?’ **Matthew 14:31**. I don’t think we’re to believe that Jesus was rebuking Peter; He probably had a smile on His face. The point is, we should do what Peter did; we need to reach out to God in times of need, **Matthew 6:30 / Matthew 8:26 / Matthew 16:9**.

Notice also that Peter must have walked on the water a second time, to get back into the boat and it was then that the wind died down, **Mark 6:51 / Matthew 14:32**.

The disciple's reaction indicates a growing faith, **Matthew 14:33**, and the result, again they worshipped Him saying 'Truly you are the Son of God', **Mark 6:51-52 / Matthew 14:33**.

They worshipped Him, **Matthew 14:33**, which tells us they recognised that Jesus was indeed God, **John 1:1 / John 1:14**. They proclaimed that Jesus truly is the Son of God, **Matthew 16:16 / Matthew 26:63 / Mark 1:1 / Luke 4:41 / John 1:49 / John 6:69 / John 11:27 / Acts 8:37 / Romans 1:4**.

Mark adds the statement in **Mark 6:52** to associate these two miraculous wonders of Jesus. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water proved that Jesus was Deity, **John 1:1-3**. He had the power to create, **Colossians 1:16**. He also had the power to control that which He had created, **Hebrews 1:3**.

It was at this time in the ministry of Jesus that the disciples were beginning to realise who He was. At the time of the feeding of the five thousand, they were slow to understand who He was, **Mark 3:5 / Mark 16:14**.

They hadn't understood from the miracle that He was God. They were astounded, for like Philip, their hearts were hardened, for they didn't fully understand the implications of the signs of the loaves and fishes, **Mark 6:52**.

Therefore, the statement that their hearts were hardened, **Mark 6:52**, must be understood in the context of what Jesus wanted them to understand concerning who He really was.

They had accepted Him as a good teacher who could work miracles as Elijah or one of the prophets, but Jesus was more than a prophet; He was the Son of God who had the power of creation, **Matthew 16:18-19**. Jesus wanted them to realise that He was the Son of God.

He could feed the hungry. He who could heal the sick could calm and control the tempest. He can and will take care of you. Anyone who follows Jesus for physical gain has missed the point and will not gain the spiritual benefits of salvation.

Many arguments have been built up around this miracle. Today, some people think that Jesus walked on a sandbank, while others say that the Greek indicates that He was still on the shore.

However, as the boat was three miles into the sea and Jesus got into the boat, it seems that the Biblical version holds more water! The boat then enjoyed some miraculous transportation to the shore. This miracle built up the faith of the disciples, also proving Jesus' power over natural laws.

The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water proved that Jesus was Deity, **John 1:1-3**, He had the power to create, **Colossians 1:16**, He also had the power to control that which He had created, **Hebrews 1:3**.

It was at this time in the ministry of Jesus that the disciples were beginning to realise who He was. At the time of the feeding of the five thousand, they were slow to understand who He was, **Mark 3:5 / Mark 16:14**.

They hadn't understood from the miracle that He was God. Therefore, the statement that their hearts were hardened must be understood in the context of what Jesus wanted them to understand concerning who He really was.

They had accepted Him as a good teacher who could work miracles as Elijah or one of the prophets, but Jesus was more than a prophet; He was the Son of God who had the power of creation, **Matthew 16:18-19**. Jesus wanted them to realise that He was the Son of God.

'When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognised Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.' **Mark 6:53-56**

After walking on water, Jesus and His disciples now end up in a place called Gennesaret, which was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee and south of Capernaum, **Mark 6:53**. At this time in Jesus' ministry, many of the people were coming primarily for healing, **Mark 6:54-56 / Matthew 14:34-36**.

Though the works of healing provided a teaching opportunity, it seems that the masses were more concerned with their physical problems than their spiritual problems.

And so, it is in a world where men have allowed the physical and temporal to distract them from the spiritual that will extend far beyond the destruction of this physical environment.

Though the disciples had seen Jesus do many amazing things, every new incident seemed to surprise them. When they landed on the shore, many recognised Jesus and began to bring sick people for Him to heal, **Matthew 14:35**. In **Mark 6:56**, it is stated that they first begged Jesus that He might heal them. However, it seems that the number of those who were seeking healing was so great that Jesus simply allowed them to touch Him in order to be healed, **Matthew 14:36**.

Those who touched His cloak were completely healed, **Mark 6:56 / Matthew 14:36 / Mark 5:24-34 / Luke 6:19**. On this occasion, Jesus at least manifested a small glimpse of what heaven will be.

It would certainly have been an amazing experience just to have been there. It would have been exciting to see the reaction of the multitudes to the presence of the Son of God among so many who sought healing.

The redeemed will be in the presence of God, and thus, there can be no sickness there. They will be in an environment of continual well-being, **Revelation 21:4**. The redeemed will be in an environment where the power of the supernatural will not allow sickness and pain to exist.

It's difficult for us to understand such an environment in this world of pain and suffering. However, since God is above this physical world, we must conclude that He will provide an environment of perfect well-being above and beyond this present world. This is the hope of the Christian. It's in this environment that we continually long to dwell.

CHAPTER 7

INTRODUCTION

‘The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.) So, the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?’ **Mark 7:1-5**

Before we get into the text, I think it would be useful to define what we mean when we speak about ‘tradition’ and ‘God’s Word’. Simply put, a command is a law of God and is sometimes described as the Word of God, **Matthew 15:6 / Mark 7:13 / Luke 23:56 / 1 John 3:4**.

A tradition doesn’t come from God but is something which has been passed down by men from generation to generation, **Matthew 15:3 / Colossians 2:8**. We must also note that traditions can be used in a positive sense, **1 Corinthians 11:2 / 2 Thessalonians 2:15 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6**. The problem comes when traditions become as important or more important than God’s Word, **Matthew 23:4**.

Jesus continually referred to the oral law as the ‘tradition of the elders’ or the ‘tradition of men’, **Matthew 15:1-9 / Mark 7:1-23**. Some examples in the New Testament alluding to the scrupulous concern of the Pharisees with the fine detail of their legalism are.

The tithing of herbs, Matthew 23:23 / Luke 11:42.
 The wearing of conspicuous phylacteries and tassels, Matthew 23:5.
 The careful observance of ritual purity, Mark 7:1-23.
 Frequent fasting, Matthew 9:14.
 Distinctions in oaths, Matthew 23:16-24.

TRADITIONS

The big question is, how authoritative is the oral law? The Pharisees accepted the oral law along with the Torah, and it was believed to be equally inspired and authoritative, and all of the explanatory and supplementary material produced by and contained within was the oral tradition.

This material began to emerge during the Babylonian Captivity that was brought upon the Jewish people. The Captivity was explained as divine punishment for the neglect of the law, and many during this period earnestly turned to the law.

During the Captivity or Exile, detailed commentaries on the law appeared in the form of innumerable and highly specific restrictions that were designed to ‘build a hedge’ around the written Torah and thus guard against any possible violation of the Torah by ignorance or accident.

During the time of Zerubbabel and Ezra, there was a clear call to separation from foreigners and anything unclean. Some verses that clearly indicate separation during this time period are [Ezra 6:21](#) / [Nehemiah 9:2](#).

THE PHARISEES

The word ‘Pharisee’, [Mark 7:1](#), is from a Greek word ‘pharisaaios’ taken from the Hebrew, Aramaic ‘Perisha’, meaning ‘Separated one.’ In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were one of the three chief Jewish sects, the others were the Sadducees and the Essenes.

Of the three, the Pharisees were the most separated from the ways of the foreign influences that were invading Judaism, and from the ways of the common Jewish people in the land.

The sect of Pharisees is thought to have originated in the third century B.C., in the days preceding the Maccabean wars, when under Greek domination and the Greek effort to Hellenize the Jews, there was a strong tendency among the Jews to accept Greek culture with its pagan religious customs.

The rise of the Pharisees was a reaction and protest against this tendency among their fellow kinsmen. Their aim was to preserve their national integrity and strict conformity to Mosaic law. They later developed into self-righteous and hypocritical formalists. Later, they were among those who had condemned Jesus to death.

SCRIBES

For the Jews, the Law was made up of the Ten Commandments and the Pentateuch. Now it’s true that the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, contains a certain number of detailed regulations and instructions.

But in the matter of moral questions, what is laid down is a series of great moral principles, which a man must interpret and apply for himself, and for a while, the Jews were content with that.

But around the fourth or fifth centuries before Christ came along, there was a group of people who got together who were classed as legal experts, now we know them as the Scribes, [Mark 7:1](#). Now, these guys weren't content with great moral principles. These guys had what can only be described as a passion for definition and detail. In other words, they wanted these great moral principles amplified, expanded, and broken down. But they did it to the extent that they issued thousands upon thousands of little rules and regulations, which oversaw every possible action and every possible situation in life.

In [Matthew 15](#), Jesus said something that truly offended the Jewish leaders, [Matthew 15:12](#). So, why were they offended? What did Jesus say that really upset the Pharisees?

Well, the argument between Jesus and the Pharisees and the experts in the Law, which this chapter deals with, is of tremendous importance. Because of what it does, it shows the Jewish religion at its core, and Jesus is exposing the very heart of the Jewish religion in this chapter.

They had a handwashing tradition, and we know that the priests had to wash their hands and feet prior to entering the Tabernacle, [Exodus 30:19](#) / [Exodus 40:12](#), and it appears it was from this command that the widespread practice of ritual washings was practised, [Mark 7:3-4](#).

They added to this the washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles, which they suspected had been made use of by anyone unclean. It was regarding these earthenware items, [Mark 7:4](#), that the oral law said, 'a hollow container made of pottery could contract uncleanness inside but not on the outside'.

In other words, it doesn't matter who or what touched the outside, but it does become a problem when the inside is involved. 'If it became unclean, it must be broken, and no unbroken piece must remain in your house, which was big enough to hold enough oil to anoint the little toe.'

So, what was this tradition, and what was the spirit behind it? The Scribes and the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of eating with 'unclean hands', [Mark 7:5](#) / [Matthew 15:2](#).

In other words, they had ceremonially unclean hands, hands that weren't fit for the service and worship of God. This was the heart of their religious thinking; this was an offence and a breach of God's Law in the Jewish mind.

It was these ceremonial washings which were commanded by tradition, not by Scripture. The religious leaders knew this, but still, they criticised the disciples for not obeying these traditions.

HOW TO WASH YOUR HANDS

Before every meal, and between every course of the meal, the hands had to be washed. To begin with, your hands had to be free from any sand or dirt, gravel, or any kind of substance.

The water for washing had to be kept in a special, large stone jar so that the water itself was clean in the ceremonial sense and to make sure that it wasn't used for anything else and that nothing else had fallen into it or had been mixed in it.

So, to start with, your hands were held with your fingertips pointing upwards, and then the water was poured over them. But the water must run at least down to your wrist.

Now, while your hands were still wet, each hand had to be cleaned with the fist of the other. Now this meant that at this stage your hands were wet with water, but that water was now itself unclean because it touched unclean hands.

Next, your hands had to be held with your fingertips pointing downwards, and the water had to be poured over them in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off the fingertips. And after all that had been done, your hands were now classed as being clean. And remember, you had to do that between every course of every meal.

Now, if you failed to do this, in Jewish eyes, you wouldn't be guilty of bad manners. You wouldn't be guilty of being dirty in the hygiene sense, but you were seen as unclean in the sight of God.

If you were to eat bread with unclean hands, pardon the expression, that was no better than excrement. If the Romans put a Jewish rabbi in jail, he would use the water given to him for handwashing purposes rather than for drinking, and there have been reports of some of these Jews almost dying of thirst.

Mark tells the extent of how zealous they were with their traditions, Mark 7:1-5. To the Pharisees and the Sadducees, that was their religion. It was ritual, ceremonial, rules, and regulations like that which they considered the essence of their service to God. Jesus says that their religion consisted of a mass of taboos, rules and regulations, Matthew 23:23.

‘He replied, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.’ And he continued, ‘You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! Mark 7:6-9

Notice that Jesus calls them ‘hypocrites’ Mark 7:6 / Matthew 15:7-9, before quoting Isaiah’s words, Isaiah 29:13. Several different things might pop to mind when we hear the word ‘hypocrite.’

Several different things might pop to mind when we hear the word ‘hypocrite.’ Maybe it’s a politician caught in a scandal, maybe it’s a religious leader doing something counter to their creed, maybe it’s a scheming and conniving character featured in soap operas. But the one thing that doesn’t come to mind is likely the theatre.

The word ‘hypocrite’ ultimately came into English from the Greek word ‘hypokrites’, which means ‘an actor’ or ‘a stage player.’ The Greek word itself is a compound noun; it’s made up of two Greek words that literally translate as ‘an interpreter from underneath.’

That bizarre compound makes more sense when you know that the actors in ancient Greek theatre wore large masks to mark which character they were playing, and so they interpreted the story from underneath their masks.

The Greek word took on an extended meaning to refer to any person who was wearing a figurative mask and pretending to be someone or something they were not.

This sense was taken into medieval French and then into English, where it showed up with its earlier spelling, ‘ypocrite’, in the thirteenth-century religious texts to refer to someone who pretends to be morally good or pious in order to deceive others.

Hypocrite gained its initial ‘h’ by the sixteenth century. It took a surprisingly long time for the hypocrite to gain its more general meaning that we use today, ‘a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.’ Our first citations for this use are from the early 1700s, nearly five hundred years after the hypocrite first stepped onto the English stage.

MEN’S DOCTRINES VS. GOD’S COMMANDS

Men continue to follow their own traditions and doctrines rather than God's Word. Just like the scribes and Pharisees, people today believe that their doctrines actually are God's will.

They haven't learned how to distinguish between unnecessary rules and binding commands. Jesus showed how easy it is to tell the difference; look at their source!

Any religious practise or teaching that comes from man is wrong; those which come from God are right. We should examine everything we do to see whether it comes from God or man. Everything from God is in the Bible. So, if what I believe isn't taught by Scripture, I can know it must be from man.

HONOURING YOUR PARENTS' TRADITION

'For Moses said, 'Honour your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)—then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus, you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.' Mark 7:10-13

It appears that the Jews found a way to get around the law of honouring your father and mother, Matthew 15:3-6 / Exodus 20:12 / Deuteronomy 5:16, with a tradition.

Their tradition commanded that if they declared that all their possessions or savings were a gift to God, which was especially dedicated to Him, they could then say that their resources were unavailable to help their parents, Mark 7:10-11.

Honouring your father and mother didn't just apply to children who still lived with their parents; it carried on as long as their parents were alive. Even when a child grows, gets married and has children of their own, they still have the responsibility of taking care of their parents' needs in their old age, Mark 7:10.

He showed that their insistence on following rules established by men caused them to actually break God's law. He cited the case of 'Corban,' Mark 7:11. This was a Jewish tradition that prohibited a person from using his resources to provide for his ageing parents if he had previously declared those resources 'dedicated' to God. Their obedience to men's doctrines led them to disregard God's will.

This was the way they got around honouring their parents, and so, Jesus tells them that they have 'nullified the word of God' because of their tradition, Mark 7:13.

The Pharisees had developed elaborate cleansing procedures that they believed were a part of God's will. The truth is, God had never commanded these washings; they originated with the doctrines and traditions of men. Jesus answered His critics by pointing out the difference between God-given commandments and human traditions.

JESUS' RESPONSE TO THEIR TRADITION

'Again, Jesus called the crowd to him and said, 'Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.' Mark 7:14-15

Jesus, addressing the crowd, shares a very important truth that eating with 'unclean hands' or any other such thing that we put into us isn't defiling; rather, what comes out is what defiles and reveals if we have unclean hearts, Mark 7:14-15 / Matthew 15:10-11.

Jesus spoke about ceremonial cleanliness regarding food, and He anticipated that under the New Covenant, all food would be declared clean, [Acts 10:15](#). A thing might in the ordinary sense be completely clean and yet in the legal sense be unclean. This idea comes from [Leviticus 11-15](#) and [Numbers 19](#).

For example, certain animals were classed as unclean. A woman, after giving birth to a child, was classed as unclean. A dead body was classed as unclean. And so, anybody who had become unclean and touched something else made whatever they touched unclean.

A Gentile was unclean, the food touched by a Gentile was unclean, and any container touched by a Gentile was unclean. In fact, if a strict Jew came back from the marketplace, he would go home and immerse his whole body in clean water to take away the contamination that he might have caught when he was out.

To the Scribes and the Pharisees, these rules and regulations were the essence of their religion. To observe them was to please God, and to break them was to sin; this was their idea of goodness and service to God. Why were the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law so offended?

[Matthew 15:12-14](#) tells us they were offended because the very ground of their religion was being cut from underneath them. They identified religion and pleasing God with the observing of rules and regulations, which had to do with cleanness. With what a man ate, with how he washed his hands before he ate it.

After being informed by his disciples that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were offended by Jesus' words, Jesus says, that the Father didn't plant either the scribes or Pharisees with their religion and both will be rooted out of His people when the truth of the Gospel is preached, [Galatians 4:30](#) / [Galatians 5:12](#).

Jesus says that the Pharisees were nothing but blind guides who had no idea of the ways of God, [Matthew 23:16](#) / [Matthew 23:24](#) / [Isaiah 9:16](#) / [Malachi 2:8](#) / [Luke 6:39](#) / [John 9:40](#). And that if people followed them, then all they could expect was to stray off the road and fall into a ditch, [2 Peter 1:9](#).

Jesus identified religion with the state of a person's heart and said quite bluntly that these Pharisees and Scribal regulations had nothing to do with religion. That's why He goes on to explain the parable to Peter and the others.

THAT WHICH DEFILES

‘After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ‘Are you so dull?’ he asked. ‘Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.’ (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) He went on: ‘What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.’ [Mark 7:17-23](#)

The disciples didn't understand, [Mark 7:17-18](#) / [Matthew 15:15](#), and so, Jesus expands on the point he made back in [Matthew 15:11](#). We are defiled from the inside out rather than from the outside in, [Mark 7:19](#), and this is particularly true of ceremonial things like foods, [Mark 7:19-23](#) / [Matthew 7:20](#) / [1 Corinthians 6:13](#) / [Matthew 13:34](#). The heart is the source of man's true character, [James 1:14-15](#), and therefore of his purity or impurity, it isn't merely the seat of emotion, but the true person as he really is, not just as he appears outwardly.

The Pharisees focused primarily on external things, but Jesus showed that what actually defiles a person are the things inside his heart, [Mark 7:21-23](#). In the Bible, the heart refers to the mind or spirit of man. Every sin germinates and grows within man's spirit and is then expressed in external action.

In this way, the Lord showed how foolish it was for the Pharisees to be frantically seeking external purity by a ritual hand washing procedure. This principle also proved that God no longer had rules prohibiting the eating of certain foods.

WE NEED A HEART CHECK-UP

Jesus' words should motivate us to carefully examine our own hearts. Heart disease is a warning symptom, and if not detected and cured, it will result in all manner of sin. Jesus warned about greed, envy, pride, and lust, [Mark 7:21-23](#). These attitudes are wrong and must be checked at their onset. We must care for our hearts by feeding on the pure Word of God and constantly seeking the Lord.

THE FAITH OF THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

'Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 'First let the children eat all they want,' he told her, 'for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' 'Lord,' she replied, 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.' She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.' [Mark 7:24-30](#)

There are only two, possibly three people who were ever commended for their faith by Jesus, which incidentally were two, possibly three Gentiles, one or two Roman Centurions, [Matthew 8:5-13](#) / [Luke 7:1-10](#), and a Syrophenician woman, [Mark 7:24-30](#).

In this chapter, probably a chapter more difficult to understand than anything else, we see Jesus 'escaping' from the vast crowds who literally pursued Him wherever He went in Galilee. This wasn't the only occasion when He sought to get away for a time of quietness and recuperation.

Tyre and Sidon, Sidon isn't mentioned in Mark's account, but it is mentioned in some manuscripts, were the two most important cities, north of Galilee, [Mark 7:24-25](#) / [Matthew 15:21](#), in what was earlier known as the 'Phoenician Empire' [Mark 7:26](#). The Lord had entered territory, which was formerly Canaan and Gentile territory, today we know it as Syria.

WHY DID HE GO THERE?

Why did He go there, when, as He actually said, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel', [Matthew 15:24](#), and, when He sent out His disciples, He expressly told them, 'Do not go to the Gentiles', [Matthew 19:5](#)? He certainly didn't want it to be known that He was there, and, just as certainly, He wouldn't be 'mobbed', as He was in Jewish territory.

The house into which He entered was a Gentile house, [Mark 7:24](#), because no Jew would have lived in that region. Whatever his reason for visiting that region, he was recognised by one woman, with the result that 'He could not keep his presence secret', [Mark 7:24](#).

Matthew 15:22 tells us she, ‘came to him, crying out, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Matthew 1:1 / Matthew 20:30-31 / Matthew 22:41-42. This is a confession that Jesus is the Son of Man, the Messiah of Israel and the fact that this woman in the area of Tyre and Sidon came making this confession is evidence that the knowledge of who Jesus was had spread even to Gentile regions.

Matthew tells us that when the woman came to Jesus, He didn’t answer her, Matthew 15:23. Why didn’t He answer her? Jesus didn’t answer her in order to teach the disciples a lesson; it was their Jewish prejudice that made them unwilling to heal her.

Jesus’ earthly mission was mainly to the Jews, for it was to them that God had prophesied the Messiah, Matthew 10:5-6. The lesson Jesus was trying to teach was that all must be reached regardless of their nationality, Matthew 28:19-20 / Mark 16:15.

Jesus’ refusal to answer the woman gave His disciples the opportunity to demonstrate their inward feelings. The woman’s cries annoyed them because they were prejudiced against the Gentiles, Matthew 15:23. It’s clear that the persistence and clamour of this woman, who demanded His attention, brought Him to the attention of the people! In response to her worshipful petition, Mark 7:27, He quoted Isaiah 29:13, from the Septuagint version, Matthew 15:24. This was virtually the Authorised Version of the Old Testament widely used in Judea at that time.

Although she probably wasn’t familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, and she’s unlikely to have spoken Aramaic, she certainly understood the Greek that Jesus used. Jesus was bilingual. Remember that Galilee was the region known as the Decapolis, where the inhabitants had used Greek as a second language since the time of Alexander.

Matthew tells us without any argument that the woman simply poured out her worship of Jesus, Matthew 15:25 / Matthew 8:2. We can’t help but believe that Jesus knew her heart, and so, He knew that she would behave in this manner toward Him.

She thus presented herself in a manner that would break down the prejudice of the disciples. I can imagine the twelve were waiting for Jesus to get rid of this woman, but the truth was, He wasn’t going to get rid of her; He was about to get rid of an ugly attitude in them.

Although at first glance, it seems that He treated the woman coldly, and used the word ‘dogs’, Mark 7:27 / Matthew 15:20, to refer to Gentiles in the usual Jewish manner, He softened the word by using the little form, speaking of ‘the little dogs’, or ‘puppies’.

F. F. Bruce in his commentary, suggest the following.

‘Jesus may have had a twinkle in His eyes, as He used the word! Perhaps he was testing her, and, in any case, we mustn’t suppose that by using that expression, he was approving the disgraceful attitude that the Jews displayed towards other races. She would be perfectly aware of what the Jews would think of her!’

Whatever may have been the reason for the Lord’s use of the expression, the woman quickly took up the Scripture quotation in her reply. ‘Yes! But even the little dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall from the table!’ Mark 7:28 / Matthew 15:27.

We encounter an expression something similar to this in the story of the Rich man and Lazarus, in Luke’s record of the sayings of Jesus. In Luke 16, it’s used to describe the pieces of bread on which the diners wiped their hands and threw to the ‘unclean’ dogs that waited for them, Luke 16:21.

Remember that the Jews didn’t keep dogs as house pets in those days! The word, which in this chapter has been translated as ‘crumbs’, probably would be better rendered ‘scraps’, because there was no Greek word that could be accurately translated as ‘crumbs’ in our sense of the word.

At first, Jesus refused. He said that it ‘wasn’t good to take bread from the children and feed it to the dogs’, [Mark 7:27](#) / [Matthew 15:26](#). What He meant was that according to God’s plan, it wasn’t time yet to heal and teach the Gentiles.

The Jews, ‘the children,’ [Mark 7:27](#), were the ones God intended to be the recipients of the bread. The ‘Healings and blessings in general,’ would come to the Jews first. God planned that later on, through the Jewish people, the Gospel would be introduced to the Gentiles.

This woman showed great faith, [Matthew 8:10](#) / [Matthew 9:22](#), humility and quickness because she responded, ‘Yes, but even the dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs’, [Mark 7:28](#) / [Matthew 15:27](#).

One commentator suggests that the woman was saying the following.

‘Yes, Lord, I am indeed a dog, but not a very big one, only a tiny one; and since the little dogs stay under the master’s table and eat the crumbs the children drop, surely you must be able to help me. It is only a crumb that I ask.’

She implies that just a mere crumb of Jesus’ miraculous power would be sufficient to heal her daughter. She also recognised that this didn’t signal the beginning of a major Gentile campaign.

As a result, Jesus healed her demon-possessed daughter, [Mark 7:29](#) / [Matthew 10:28](#) / [Matthew 4:24](#). The conversation had made it clear that she wouldn’t misinterpret the healing as a sign that the time for the Gentiles had come.

HER FAITH

Matthew tells that Jesus gave in to her pleas by proclaiming to the disciples the great faith of the woman, [Mark 7:29](#) / [Matthew 15:28](#) / [Matthew 8:10](#) / [Matthew 9:22](#). Remember this woman presented herself to Jesus and clung to Him for hope, despite the attitude of the disciples.

I would imagine that the disciples were left a little embarrassed with themselves as they saw their own hardness of heart melt into compassion for this Gentile woman and her beloved daughter.

Didn’t Peter remember the time when Jesus healed his mother-in-law? [Luke 4:38-40](#). Can you imagine the anticipation this woman must have had as she was going home? [Mark 7:30](#). Imagine the joy she must have had when she got home and saw that her daughter was healed? [Hebrews 11:6](#).

JESUS HEALS A DEAF AND MUTE MAN

‘Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people who brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ (which means ‘Be opened!’). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear, and the mute speak.’ [Mark 7:31-37](#)

In avoiding the region that was governed by Herod Antipas, Jesus returned to the area of Galilee, [Mark 7:31](#) / [Matthew 15:29](#).

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This story begins by describing what is on the face of it an amazing journey. Jesus was going from Tyre to the territory around the Sea of Galilee. He was going from Tyre in the north to Galilee in the south, and he started by going to Sidon. That is to say, he started going due south by going due north! As one scholar has put it, it would be like going from London to Cornwall via Manchester, or like going from Glasgow to Edinburgh via Perth.’

Jesus now moves along the Sea of Galilee and up to a mountainside, [Matthew 15:29](#). Once again, great crowds come to Him to bring people who were suffering all kinds of ailments, [Matthew 15:30](#) / [Mark 7:32](#). Obviously, news that Jesus can heal these people has spread, [Isaiah 35:5-6](#).

Jesus heals the lame, that is, those who have deformed limbs; He heals the mute, that is, those who can’t speak. He heals the blind, that is, those who can’t see, and He heals the crippled, that is, those who have suffered some injury to their bodies, [Matthew 15:30-31](#).

It’s not surprising that the people were amazed, [Mark 7:37](#), when they say all of these people were healed, [Matthew 15:31](#), and it’s not surprising that they went on to praise God, the God of Israel, [Matthew 15:31](#) / [Luke 5:25-26](#).

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN

Mark points to one man in particular who was deaf and dumb, [Mark 7:31-37](#). Notice that this man was also from the region of the Decapolis, [Mark 7:31](#), which is Gentile territory. It’s certainly possible the man was deaf from birth, hence why he could hardly speak, [Mark 7:32](#).

We can only imagine how difficult life must have been for this man who was deaf and could hardly speak. There were no remedies or medicine available back in Jesus day, and there were certainly no support groups.

I’m sure, just like sadly happens today, people would have made fun of him because of his disabilities. People would probably treat him like some kind of outcast.

Even more concerning, the Jews may have thought that he was deaf and dumb because God was judging him for some sin that he or his parents committed, [John 9:1-2](#).

The word, ‘hardly talk’, [Mark 7:32](#), in Greek is ‘mogilalos’, which could mean a speech impediment or someone who is dumb. The word ‘speak plainly’, [Mark 7:35](#), in Greek is the word ‘orthos’ which means in an upright manner. Although a few commentators suggest that the correct translation is the word ‘dumb’, this isn’t clear from the text. If we compare the words ‘hardly speak’ with ‘speak plainly’, I believe this implies a speech impediment, the same disability is described for Moses, [Exodus 4:10](#).

It’s clear that those who brought the man to Jesus had great faith in Jesus being able to help him, [Mark 7:32](#) / [Psalm 37:23](#). Jesus’ compassion for man is seen in Him taking the man away from the crowd, [Mark 7:33](#), probably to ensure the man wasn’t embarrassed, [Isaiah 53:3](#).

You undoubtedly noticed that Jesus used an unusual procedure to heal this man. Jesus put His fingers into the man’s ears and touched the man’s tongue with His own saliva, [Mark 7:33](#).

Apparently, Jesus was using ‘sign language’ to communicate with him and to let him know who was about to heal him. Had Jesus not done this, the man would have suddenly begun to hear, but wouldn’t have understood why.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Why this was done, it has been found exceedingly difficult to explain. Jesus had power at once to open his ears and loose his tongue, but for some cause, he chose to accompany it with a sign. This was intended, probably, simply to denote that the power of healing came from him; to satisfy the man by the touch that he had this power, and that it

could come from no other quarter. Our Saviour often used signs in this way to denote his power to heal, Mark 8:23 / John 9:6.’

After taking him away from the crowd, Jesus looked up to heaven to show that it was from God that help was to come, Mark 7:34. The ‘deep sigh’, Mark 7:34, may mean a silent prayer, Romans 8:26. Then He spoke the word and the man was healed, Mark 7:34-35 / Exodus 4:11.

This man couldn’t speak clearly because he was deaf. In private, Jesus signalled to the man by touching his ears and tongue because the man couldn’t hear. The word, ‘Ephphatha’, Mark 7:34, was an Aramaic expression that means ‘to be opened.’ Aramaic was possibly the language Jesus and the disciples spoke as their common language.

Notice that there was no prolonged healing indicated here. A true miracle is defined by the instantaneous result of its effect. A miracle was defined as being openly perceived by others who couldn’t deny it. This was the case with this miracle, Acts 4:14-16 / Acts 7:36-37.

Jesus commands them not to tell anyone, Mark 7:36, because He simply wanted to discourage people from coming to Him only for healing, Mark 5:43. Miracles were for the primary purpose of confirming God’s messengers and message, Mark 16:17-20 / John 20:30-31.

This miracle once again proves the Messiahship of Jesus, Isaiah 35:5-6. As a result of this healing, they were utterly astonished, and the extent of their astonishment measured the undeniable evidence of the miracle, Mark 7:37.

A true miracle is so definite and obvious that it affects one intellectually and emotionally. It was an occurrence that changed the lives of sincere people. The multitude’s affirmation was absolutely correct, ‘He has done everything well!’ Mark 7:37 / Genesis 1:31.

THE CHANGE IN THIS MAN’S LIFE

We can only imagine how this man’s life changed, and I’m sure he wasn’t only thankful to Jesus for healing him but also thankful to those who had the faith to take him to Jesus in the first place, Mark 7:32. We can only imagine what his first words were when he spoke plainly.

Imagine him listening to music for the first time. No longer would he be made fun of, no longer would he be treated like some kind of outcast. Imagine the excitement as he returns home, possibly to meet his friends and family. I’m sure he would just speak and speak and speak as well as listen clearly to others speaking to him.

This man would have never met Jesus if no one had taken the time to take him to Jesus. Friends will go to any lengths to bring others to Jesus, Mark 2:4 / John 1:40-42 / John 1:46. When was the last time you brought someone to Jesus?

CHAPTER 8

INTRODUCTION

‘In those days, there was another large crowd with nothing to eat. So, Jesus called his disciples and said to them, ‘I have compassion on the crowd, because they have already been here with me three days, and they have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will faint on the way, and some of them have come from a great distance.’ His disciples answered him, ‘Where can someone get enough bread in this desolate place to satisfy these people?’ He asked them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ They replied, ‘Seven.’ Then he directed the crowd to sit down on the

ground. After he took the seven loaves and gave thanks, he broke them and began giving them to the disciples to serve. So, they served the crowd. They also had a few small fish. After giving thanks for these, he told them to serve these as well. Everyone ate and was satisfied, and they picked up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. There were about four thousand who ate. Then he dismissed them. Immediately, he got into a boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.' Mark 8:1-10

JESUS FEEDS THE FOUR THOUSAND

The miracle of feeding the four-thousand we read about here does have a few similarities with the feeding of the five-thousand, **Matthew 14:13-21 / Mark 6:30-44 / Luke 9:10-17 / John 6:1-15**. They are similar in terms of Jesus multiplying loaves and fish, a multitude is fed, the disciples are sceptical, and they collect leftovers.

However, there are some differences: the crowds are of different sizes, the disciples speak first in the first miracle, but Jesus does in the second, they occur in discrete locations, they follow different events, the numbers of loaves and fish differ.

Huge crowds were constantly following Jesus, and notice that it was Jesus who saw the needs of the people, not the disciples, **Mark 8:1 / Matthew 15:32**. Notice here that Jesus didn't just take care of their physical ailments, **Matthew 9:36**, He also cares about their physical necessities.

It appears that everyone was so amazed by all those being healed, **Mark 7:31-32**, that they forgot to eat for three days, **Mark 8:2 / Matthew 15:32**. Jesus really showed compassion for the people and was obviously concerned about their physical welfare and didn't want to send them away, **Matthew 15:32**.

Jesus didn't want to send them home hungry for fear they would faint during the trip, **Mark 8:3 / Matthew 15:32**. On this occasion, they were in a remote place, a wilderness area, **Mark 8:4 / Matthew 15:29**.

The disciples then state the obvious, as far as they were concerned, they are in the middle of nowhere with no way of getting enough food to feed all these people, **Mark 8:4 / Matthew 15:33**.

The 'remote place' or 'wilderness' doesn't mean barren land; it simply means the place where wild animals roam. The disciples recognised this, and so Jesus asked for a food inventory; there were seven loaves and a few small fish, **Mark 8:5 / Matthew 15:34**.

The reason Jesus asked them this question was simply to prepare their minds for what was about to happen miraculously. The One who created all things, **Colossians 1:16 / Matthew 14:15-20 / Matthew 16:8-13**, is certainly more than capable of feeding thousands of people.

The number of baskets differs, the baskets themselves are different, and finally, Jesus spends one day with the five-thousand, but three with the four-thousand. Jesus Himself removes any doubt by referring to them as two different miracles.

Jesus directed the multitude to sit down, **Mark 8:6 / Matthew 15:35**, and then he took the bread and fish and gave thanks to God for them, **Mark 8:7 / Matthew 15:36**. He gave them to His disciples who then served the people, **Mark 8:7 / Matthew 15:36**.

Miraculously, the supply didn't dwindle, the people were all fed and satisfied, **Mark 8:8 / Matthew 15:37**. Each loaf generated a large basketful of leftovers, **Matthew 15:37 / Mark 8:8**.

The word 'basket' here is a different word from the word used earlier in **Mark 6:43**, for the feeding of the five-thousand, in **Mark 6**, it's the word 'kophinos' which means small basket.

But here the word for basket is 'spuris', which means a hamper, a larger basket. This is the same word used in **Acts 9:25** to describe the basket in which Paul was lowered from the city.

Besides feeding four-thousand men, not counting the women and children, **Mark 8:9 / Matthew 15:38**, the food just kept on coming out of nowhere. Jesus' power couldn't be disputed.

Can we imagine the amount of food this took to feed four-thousand men, not counting the women and children? Only the Bread of Life could do such a thing, **John 6:35**. Once everyone had their fill of food, Jesus sent them away and went to the vicinity of Magadan Dalmanutha, **Mark 8:10 / Matthew 15:39**, by boat.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘As for the sceptic’s contention that Mark and Matthew’s accounts are contradictory, the explanation is simple.’

1. Christ might easily have gone to both places.

The only possibility of finding a contradiction would have to lie in the discovery that one of the gospels had said he did NOT go to one or the other of the two places, and, of course, no such statement exists.

2. It is far more likely that the village, so small as to have been lost to history, actually had two names, Dalmanutha and Magadan!

THE DEMAND FOR A SIGN

‘The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, ‘Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.’ Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.’ **Mark 8:11-13**

Although the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed with one another in their beliefs, that is, the Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, or the afterlife, **Matthew 22:23 / Acts 23:8**, they came together to test Jesus. Despite much evidence of Jesus' power and authority, the Pharisees and the Sadducees challenged Him to show a sign from heaven, **Matthew 16:1**. Mark only mentions the Pharisees, **Mark 8:11**.

Jesus refused their request. They were simply blind to all evidence, and no sign would ever be enough to convince them. Notice Jesus 'sighed deeply,' **Mark 8:12**, this means He was dismayed at the attitude of the Pharisees. They were simply blind to all the evidence, and no sign would ever be enough to convince them, **Mark 8:12**.

In **Matthew 16:2-4**, we see that Jesus tries to reason with both groups by speaking about the well-known fact that they had the ability to give a forecast of weather conditions based upon the appearance of the skies and clouds, **Matthew 16:2-3**.

Both groups could easily look to the heavens and see the signs in the sky and make a determination as to what would happen with the weather. Jesus challenged them to do the same thing in relation to the spiritual nature of the miracles He had performed and the preaching He had taught.

If they can determine the outcome of the weather by the signs they see, then why can't they discern that Jesus is the Lord by the signs that He has performed? **John 20:30-31**.

The point is that these men know that obvious signs have been given; however, due to the hardness of their hearts, they close their eyes to them, **Matthew 12:9-12 / Mark 3:5**. They don't close their eyes to the signs in the heavens regarding the weather, yet they ignore the clear signs Jesus has performed.

As their minds were closed to who Jesus was, they had become a 'wicked and adulterous generation', **Matthew 16:4**. They had separated themselves from God and His will, **Jeremiah 3:8-9**, and they had committed spiritual adultery, **Mark 7:6-9 / Matthew 15:8-9**.

Jesus says the only sign which will be given is the sign of Jonah, **Matthew 16:4 / Matthew 12:39-41**. Just as Jonah came up from the depths of the sea after being in the fish for three days, so Jesus will rise from the depths of the dead

in a resurrected state. Those who refuse repentance and His kingdom after this have nothing to look forward to but the judgment of the inhabitants of Nineveh.

1. The four Gospels reveal that, repeatedly, the Lord Himself declared in unequivocal terms that He would be put to death and would rise from the dead ‘on the third day’.

2. He first predicted His resurrection early as **John 2:19**, ‘destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,’ in a statement which John admits His disciples only later understood, but later He began to speak about it openly, after Peter had declared Him to be ‘the Christ, the Son of the living God’, in **Matthew 16:16**.

Similar statements are recorded in the Gospels; here are but a few: **Matthew 17:23** / **Matthew 20:19** / **Mark 9:31** / **Mark 10:34** / **Luke 9:22** / **Luke 13:32** / **Luke 18:33** / **Luke 24:7** / **Luke 24:21** / **Luke 24:46**.

3. What Jesus said was evidently accepted without question by both His apostles and the members of the early church, all of whom subsequently believed that what He had predicted had actually come to pass.

Paul states this in **1 Corinthians 15:4**, ‘raised on the third day’. The New Testament contains nothing to suggest that the Lord made a prediction that failed.

4. **Matthew 27:63-64** tells us that, after the burial of the body of Jesus, the leaders of the Jews came to Pilate with a request.

5. On the morning of the third day, the women came to the tomb, and **Luke 24:5-8** records that the heavenly messengers who met them even quoted the Lord’s own words, **Luke 24:5-8**.

Matthew 28:6 says that one of the angels told the women, ‘He is not here, for He is risen, even as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.’

Jesus then left the Pharisees and the Sadducees and went away, **Mark 7:13**. There was simply no point in casting pearls before pigs, **Matthew 7:6**. There was no point in trying to teach those whose hearts had become so hard.

THE YEAST OF THE PHARISEES AND HEROD

‘The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. ‘Be careful,’ Jesus warned them. ‘Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.’ They discussed this with one another and said, ‘It is because we have no bread.’ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ ‘Twelve,’ they replied. ‘And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?’ They answered, ‘Seven.’ He said to them, ‘Do you still not understand?’ **Mark 8:13-21**

Then Jesus and His disciples began to cross the sea by boat, **Mark 8:13** / **Matthew 16:5**. The disciples were worried because they had forgotten to take enough bread with them for the trip, **Mark 8:14**. Matthew tells us they didn’t bring any bread because they forgot, **Matthew 16:5**, Mark tells us they had one loaf of bread with them, **Mark 8:14**.

Jesus warned them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, **Matthew 16:11**, Mark adds Herod, **Mark 8:15**. They should have known that He could handle problems with insufficient food.

His warning wasn’t about the yeast of bread, but about the false teaching and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Herod, **Matthew 15:1-9** / **Mark 7:1-9** / **Luke 12:1**.

It is the nature of yeast to spread throughout the bread, and so, it would be with the teachings and influence of the Pharisees whose hearts were far from God, **Matthew 15:1-9** / **Mark 7:1-9**.

Bad attitudes spread like yeast, and He was worried that the disciples might be contaminated by them. Yeast breaks things up; it doesn’t unite anything, **Acts 15:10**.

Bell, in his commentary, says the following concerning the yeast of the Pharisees, Herod and the Sadducees.

‘The Pharisees’ teachings to watch for? Legalism. Today, we can fall into the same trap of legalism, that is, trying to live the Christian life by obeying a set of rules. Christianity isn’t being inhibited by rules, but by being inhabited by a Ruler. The legalistic church is a sad church, no joy, no thrill, no excitement, no victory.’

Herod’s teachings to watch for? **Mark 8:15**. Worldliness. This is the church where there is no difference in the lifestyles of its members and those of the lost world. The Sadducees’ teachings to watch for? Liberalism. They didn’t believe in the supernatural, in the power of God, in miracles. The spiritual Liberals don’t understand God’s power. Today, Jesus still warns us, ‘Beware of the leaven of Legalism, the leaven of Worldliness, and the leaven of Liberalism.’

What appears like a contradiction is quickly cleared up with The Literal Translation, which reads as follows. ‘And the disciples forgot to take loaves. And they did not have any with them, except one loaf in the boat.’

Immediately, the disciples imagined that He was criticising them for having forgotten the bread, **Mark 8:16-17 / Matthew 16:7**. Jesus, in this small section, asked eight questions to help them remember, **Mark 8:17-21 / Matthew 16:8-11**.

Jesus knew what they were saying to each other and rebuked their hard-heartedness, **Mark 8:17 / Matthew 16:8**. They forgot what Jesus did earlier, **Mark 8:19-20 / Matthew 16:9-10**. He had twice produced enough food to feed thousands with abundant leftovers, **Mark 8:1-13 / Mark 6:30-44 / Matthew 14:13-21 / Luke 9:10-17 / John 6:1-15 / Matthew 15:32-39**.

JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN AT BETHSAIDA

‘They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, ‘Don’t even go into the village.’ **Mark 8:22-26**

BETHSAIDA

Jesus comes into the region of Bethsaida, **Mark 8:22**. This is probably Bethsaida Julius, which was north of the Sea of Galilee. It was the native city of Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip; its name means ‘house of fish.’ It was here that He encountered a blind man.

Why did Jesus take him outside the village? **Mark 8:23**. He took this man outside the town to an area where there was no audience. Jesus did this in order not to cause excitement in the city that a healing of this nature would cause, and He probably didn’t want people coming to Him simply for healing.

Jesus sought to accomplish the healing, and at the same time be able to teach the multitudes in the town later, **Mark 7:36 / Mark 5:43**. What would this man’s life be like being blind?

People with complete blindness often have a difficult time self-navigating outside well-known environments. Travelling or simply walking down a crowded street may pose great difficulty. In the home, large obstacles such as tables and chairs must remain in one location to prevent injury.

Blindness causes considerable social challenges, usually in relation to the activities in which a blind person cannot participate. All too frequently, blindness affects a person's ability to perform many jobs, which severely limits their employment opportunities.

This may not only affect a person's finances but also their self-esteem. Blindness may also cause difficulties with participating in activities outside of the workplace, such as sports and academics. Many of these social challenges limit a blind person's ability to meet people, and this only adds to low self-esteem.

Blind people are naturally helpless in many ways, 2 Samuel 5:6 / Isaiah 35:5-6 / Jeremiah 31:7. The appeals to the blind, the lame, and the mute as representative examples of helplessness and subject to exploitation, Deuteronomy 28:29. There are warnings against exploiting them found in Leviticus 19:14 / Deuteronomy 27:18 / Job 29:15.

THE BLINDNESS TEST

Describe what Jesus looks like! Describe what a Scottish Thistle looks like, without using colours! Describe what a tree looks like without using colours! Imagine how difficult this would be if you've never seen these things!

THE HEALING

Normally, Jesus' healings were complete and immediate, but this case was different. He applied saliva to the eyes of the blind man, laid His hands on him, and then asked what he saw. The man reported seeing men like trees walking around, Mark 8:23-24.

So, Jesus touched his eyes again, and his vision was perfectly restored, Mark 8:25. Despite the fact of there being two stages in the man's healing, it was nevertheless accomplished almost immediately.

Why didn't Christ heal this man all at once, like He normally did? Mark 8:23-24. Jesus' healings were signs, symbols of spiritual truths. In this case, the two-stage healing of the blind man symbolised how men's understanding and insight are often healed in two steps.

The disciples, for example, weren't totally blind, for they understood that Jesus was the Son of God, Mark 8:29. But, on the other hand, they still didn't perceive Jesus' complete ability and therefore had defective vision, Mark 8:17-18 / Mark 8:31-33.

They needed to be touched again so they could see clearly. Jesus deliberately did this healing this way to encourage the faith of the blind man and to use him as an object lesson.

There's no other incident in Jesus' miraculous works like the action of Jesus in this case, and the truth is, we can't be certain as to why Jesus healed this man in two steps.

It's interesting in modern times that when someone is having eye surgery, after the operation, the doctors put on many layers of bandages but then remove one layer every day, so that their sight will gradually get used to the light again. If they remove them all in one go, it can cause irreversible damage to the eyes, and they may never see again.

OPINIONS

1. Jesus may have wanted to prepare the way for the following teaching that He must be accepted as someone more than a prophet.

He must be accepted as the Christ and Son of God, **Mark 8:27-30**.

2. Coffman suggests that the man was healed in stages, probably because his faith was imperfect.

Jesus first strengthened his faith by partly healing him, and then, when his faith was adequate, completed the cure. In this connection, it should be remembered that they were the citizens of Bethsaida who brought this man to Jesus, and that city was noted for its unbelief and rejection of the Lord. **Matthew 11:21-22 / Luke 10:13**.

3. Jesus' healings were signs, symbols of spiritual truths. In this case, the two-stage healing of the blind man symbolised how men's understanding and insight are often healed in two steps.

The disciples, for example, weren't totally blind, for they understood that Jesus was the Son of God, **Mark 8:29**, but, on the other hand, they still didn't perceive Jesus' complete ability and therefore had defective vision, **Mark 8:17-18 / Mark 8:31-33**.

They needed to be touched again so they could see clearly. Jesus deliberately did this healing this way to encourage the faith of the blind man and to use him as an object lesson to his disciples.

Why wasn't he permitted to go back to Bethsaida? **Mark 8:26**. I believe that Jesus knew that more than enough had already been done for this sinful, unbelieving village, and Christ here practised what He preached, regarding the casting of pearls before pigs. **Matthew 7:6**.

What effect would this miracle have on this man's life? A good friend of mine told me a story about when a congregation got on a minibus to visit another congregation to support their Gospel meeting. My friend sat next to a woman who was blind, and she asked him to describe what he could see on the journey.

She says, 'It sounds beautiful, I wish I could see it all.' My friend went on and said to her, 'When I describe something blue, just think of something cold, and when I describe something warm, just think of the colour orange.'

When they finally got off the bus, my friend noticed a dear sister wearing a blue scarf and said to the blind lady, 'It's cold today, what colour scarf is our dear sister wearing?' To which she replied, 'It's blue'. As you can imagine, everyone thought a miracle had occurred.

I think something like this may have happened with the blind man when he said he saw 'men like trees walking around'. I'm sure that people would have tried their best to describe something he couldn't see.

Presuming the man was blind from birth, imagine how he can now see colours for the first time, and the beauty of God's creation. Imagine him seeing his wife and children for the first time if he were married and had children. He wouldn't have to rely on anyone to take him places; he could work again.

Just like the demon-possessed man who was healed, **Luke 8:39**, I'm pretty confident that the healed blind man would later be a witness for Jesus in the region. Consider the situation of the blind man; while blind, he saw absolutely nothing.

When Jesus first touched him, his vision improved, and he saw men, though they looked like trees. To one who had been totally blind, that was fantastic progress, but Jesus could do more. He touched the man again, and he began to see perfectly.

Unfortunately, in the spiritual realm, some people, including some Christians, are satisfied with one touch; they see, but not clearly. Many don't even realise that they need a complete cure, and they have become content to see men like trees walking.

Consider, for example, someone whose life has been totally devastated by sin, they hear about Jesus, begin to follow many of His teachings, and their life improves.

Sadly, however, the people who are unaware that they lack understanding of Jesus' words in many areas, and they settle for a distorted vision. Let's check out our own lives. Could it be that we still aren't seeing clearly, and that Jesus could restore our vision perfectly?

PETER DECLARES THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH

'Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way, he asked them, 'Who do people say I am?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.' Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.' Mark 8:27-30

CAESAREA PHILIPPI

Situated twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee and at the base of Mount Hermon, Caesarea Philippi is the location of one of the largest springs feeding the Jordan River, **Mark 8:27 / Matthew 16:13**.

This abundant water supply has made the area very fertile and attractive for religious worship. Numerous temples were built in this city in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Known as Baal Hermon and Baal Gad in the Old Testament period, this site was later named Pnias after the Greek god Pan, who was worshipped here.

There is no record of Jesus entering the city, but the great confession and the transfiguration both occurred in the vicinity of the city, **Mark 9:2-8 / Luke 9:28-36 / Matthew 17:1-8**, then known as Caesarea Philippi.

But it was no accident that Jesus took His disciples to a place called Caesarea Philippi. Jesus deliberately chose to take them to Caesarea Philippi because He knew he would get that much-needed quality time alone with His disciples.

But Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi for another reason. When you went up the hills of Caesarea Philippi, there were not only beautiful views, but there were also the ancient Syrian temples, which were used to worship Baal.

Not only were the Syrian gods worshipped there, but there was also a cavern nearby that was said to have been the birthplace of the Greek god Pan, the god of nature.

But that's not all that Jesus and the disciples could see up on the hills. Another huge temple would have stood there in Jesus' day, built out of white marble by Herod the Great and dedicated to the worship of Augustus Caesar.

In other words, Caesarea Philippi was like a one-stop shopping supermarket for religion. It was a cross-section of the religious claims of Jesus' day. Jesus stood in this place, which was literally crowded with temples dedicated to the worship of Syrian, Greek, and Roman gods, and He asked His disciples who they believed Him to be.

I believe Jesus deliberately set Himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and splendour and demanded to be compared with them and to have the verdict given in His favour.

In other words, with this setting as a backdrop, Jesus forced His disciples to wrestle with vital questions like, 'Who is the real God?' 'Who is worthy of adoration and worship?'

I can imagine Jesus saying, ‘Listen, look around at the magnificence of all these temples, to all these ‘gods’ and then look at Me. Who is right? Who is the truth, me or the ‘gods’ of one of these temples?’

Do you see the importance of this moment? Coming here helped force the disciples to deal with this issue, an issue they needed to deal with. All the things Jesus had said and done over the past two and a half years had been in preparation for this moment.

We could say that this question Jesus posed at Caesarea Philippi was, in effect, the disciples’ final exam, an exam that consisted of only one question, ‘Who do you say I am?’ which we will get to in a moment.

Jesus asked what the public thought about Him, **Mark 8:27 / Luke 9:18 / Matthew 16:13**, but He’s not asking this question because He doesn’t know the answer. Jesus knew the answer to this question; He knew what people were saying about Him. But he wanted the twelve to think carefully about those popular perceptions as a way of building a foundation for their own conclusions.

When Jesus asked this first question, He didn’t ask it to find out how He stood in the public opinion polls. No, it was a probing question designed to determine the extent to which His students had discovered the true nature of His ministry and His message.

I believe there would have been a moment of pause when Jesus asked them, ‘Who do the people say I am?’ **Mark 8:27 / Luke 9:18 / Matthew 16:13**. I can imagine the disciples thinking to themselves, ‘Well, we all know what the people are thinking, and it’s not all good.’

Remember, Jesus had been called a wine-drunkard, a glutton, a blasphemer, a false prophet and even a madman working for the devil. So, I can imagine them thinking very carefully before they answer this question.

The disciples didn’t share any of these negative reviews with Jesus, and so they exercised some sensitivity and only told Him the compliments which people were paying Him.

The disciples reported varying opinions, including John the Baptist, Elijah, etc, **Mark 8:28 / Luke 9:19 / Matthew 16:14**. One disciple pointed out that many believed Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnated, **Mark 8:27-30 / Luke 9:19 / Matthew 16:14**.

They believed that John had come back from the grave to continue his ministry of announcing the Messiah, while criticising the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, **Matthew 14:1-3**.

Another disciple shared the fact that many people believed Jesus was Elijah, **Mark 8:28 / Luke 9:19 / Matthew 16:14**, considered by some Jews to be the supreme Old Testament prophet, **Mark 6:15 / Matthew 17:10 / 2 Kings 1:1-12**.

The Book of Malachi, **Malachi 4:5**, says, ‘See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.’ And so, some thought this Jesus was Elijah, fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi.

And even today, in modern Jewish Passover celebrations, there is an empty chair reserved at the table for Elijah, in the hope of his one day coming to announce the Messiah’s arrival.

Another disciple shared that some people said Jesus was Jeremiah, but why would they think He was Jeremiah? **Matthew 16:14**. They held this opinion because, according to the 2 Maccabees legend, Jeremiah had taken the Ark of the covenant and the altar of incense out of the temple and hidden them both somewhere on Mount Nebo in order to preserve them from desecration and destruction by the Babylonians.

Some Jews thought that before the Messiah returned to establish His kingdom, Jeremiah would return to earth and restore the Ark and the altar to their proper places in the temple.

So, the people who said these things were paying Jesus wonderful compliments by comparing Him to some of the greatest prophets and teachers God had ever sent. They were giving Jesus high praise, but not enough high praise because in their minds, none of these three prophets was the Messiah.

Nothing has changed today concerning who Jesus is. A lot of people still speak highly of Jesus, but they don't recognise His Deity and His Lordship. Most people in our day will admit that Jesus was a great teacher, but they won't concede that He was the Christ, the Son of God, the only Way to Heaven.

Some admit He was a prophet and an 'admirable Jew' but not as the Son of God. So, the opinion of the multitudes of Jesus' day isn't that different from the opinion of many people today.

In Jesus' day, the people thought that John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah were just a few of the Messiahs' forerunners who had come back to life with God-given miraculous powers. They thought that Jesus was great, but not great enough.

At first glance, it looks like the disciples hadn't realised who Jesus was. Maybe when they mentioned John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah, they thought that Jesus was going to say, 'yes' to one of those suggestions, and say, 'your right.'

But Jesus must have answered without saying a word, and I can imagine there would have been an uncomfortable silence before Jesus spoke again. This isn't about the multitude's opinion anymore; this is a personal question.

These twelve men were more qualified than anyone else to answer the question. Unlike the multitudes, they had been with Jesus twenty-four seven for two and a half years.

They had heard Him teach, they had seen all His miracles, and they were the star witnesses of Jesus' life up until that point. Over the past two and a half years, at times He had shocked them, at times He thrilled them, at other times, He filled them with awe and wonder.

The time had come for them to confess their opinion as to what kind of man He was. It was time for them to take a personal stand. Jesus looked each of His students in the eye and asked this all-important final-exam question.

And I think that when He did, while the other disciples were still processing the question like scared schoolboys, Peter spoke up and answered the question. Peter boldly responded, 'You are the Messiah,' **Mark 8:29 / Luke 9:20 / Matthew 16:15-16**. Matthew adds the words, 'the Son of the living God', **Matthew 16:16**. It was a brilliant insight.

And when He said this, I imagine a glow of pride would have shown on Jesus' face. I can imagine Jesus saying, 'Yes! correct! You got it right, Peter!' Peter moved to the head of the class and got it right that day; he said the right thing, at the right time! He gave the correct answer because he confidently expressed two foundational Christian truths.

1. He identified Jesus as the Messiah, **Mark 8:29 / Luke 9:20 / Matthew 16:15-16**, the One Who was to reign forever on the throne of His great ancestor David.

2. And even more important, Peter identified Jesus as divine, the 'Son of the living God!' **Matthew 16:16**.

Literally, his words can be translated like this, 'You are THE Christ, THE Son of THE God, THE living One!' When Jesus calmed the stormy seas of Galilee in **Matthew 8**, the disciples proclaimed, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!' **Matthew 8:27**. When Jesus walked upon the waters of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples proclaimed, 'Truly you are the Son of God', **Matthew 14:33**.

Now, Peter proclaims the deity of Christ. Jesus tells Simon, son of Jonah, **John 1:42 / John 21:15-17**, that he is blessed, **Matthew 16:17**. The word 'blessed' in Greek is the word 'makarios', which is used in the beatitudes at **Matthew 5:3-10**, and it means happy.

How did Peter know that Jesus was the Christ? God revealed it to Him, **Matthew 16:17**. Peter had witnessed all the Lord's miracles and heard His teaching and preaching, **John 3:2 / John 5:36 / John 10:37-38 / John 14:11 / John 20:30-31**.

When anyone proclaims deity and then backs that claim up with sure miracles, there is no denying it, **Matthew 15:21-28**. Peter and the apostles believed that he was the Christ due to divine revelation.

After stating that Jesus was the ‘Christ, the Son of the living God’, **Matthew 17:17 / Matthew 14:33 / John 6:69 / John 11:27**. Jesus now responds to Peter’s confession by saying that ‘upon this rock, I will build my church’, **Matthew 16:18**.

Peter’s name, ‘Petros’ is a Greek word that is masculine in gender, the word means a stone or rock, **John 1:42**. The gender of this Greek word, ‘petra’ is feminine, and so, doesn’t refer to Peter whose name is masculine.

The rock here is the fact that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. The rock or foundation that the church will be built upon will be the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, **1 Corinthians 3:11 / Ephesians 2:20**.

Note that Jesus said, ‘I will build my church’, **Matthew 16:18**, indicating that it had not been built or established at the point of this conversation. This is the first mention of the word ‘church’, which is ‘ekklesia’ in the New Testament.

The Greek word means an assembly of the citizens regularly summoned to call an assembly. When the Lord’s church was built, Jesus said that ‘the gates of Hades will not overcome it,’ **Matthew 16:18 / Daniel 2:44 / Daniel 7:13-14**.

The gates of ancient cities were the most vulnerable part of the city, and so, when a city was attacked by an enemy, the enemy attacked the gates. If the gates fell, the city fell. The word ‘gates’ became a metaphor meaning power or strength. Hades is actually hell, **Luke 16:22-23 / Matthew 13:41-43 / Matthew 25:41**.

There is power in sin, and that is death, **Genesis 2:17 / 1 Corinthians 15:55-56**. This power, however, couldn’t hold Jesus when He was resurrected from the dead, **Revelation 1:18 / Revelation 6:8 / Revelation 20:13-15**. When Jesus rose from the grave, he went on to establish His church so that all others may have power over sin and death through His blood sacrifice.

The Lord proclaims to Peter, ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’, **Matthew 16:19**. The word ‘keys’ is the Greek word ‘kleis’, which means that which serves for closing, a bar or bolt. Notice that Jesus says ‘keys’, not key.

Peter used one of those keys to open up the way to heaven to the Jews in **Acts 2**, and He used the other key to open up the way to heaven for the Gentiles in **Acts 10**.

Keys are sometimes used as a metaphor which refers to privilege or authority, **Luke 11:52 / Isaiah 22:22 / Revelation 1:18 / Revelation 3:7 / Revelation 9:1**. The word ‘bind’ means to bind, tie, to put in bonds and the word ‘loosed’ means to loosen, unbind, unfasten, **Matthew 16:19**. In other words, the apostles would be given the Gospel message of repentance and forgiveness of sins through the blood sacrifice of Jesus.

Those who received this message would be loosed from the bondage of sin, yet those who rejected the message and would not repent remained bound in chains to their sin and destined for an eternity of torment. The ‘keys’ given to Peter and the apostles are clearly the Gospel message.

Jesus tells His disciples not to tell anyone at this time that He was the Christ, **Mark 8:30 / Luke 9:21 / Matthew 16:20 / Matthew 8:4 / Matthew 17:9**, because it was not His time to die yet, **John 10:17-18**.

Jesus still had much work to do; therefore, He didn’t want any unnecessary hindrance from those who tried to kill Him. This event took place around two and a half years into Jesus’ earthly ministry, which meant the cross was around six months away.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH

‘He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about

this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’
Mark 8:31-33

Jesus teaching to His disciples up to this point was mainly about His identity, but in Mark 8:31, Jesus’ teaching ministry changes. He now focuses on His upcoming death, burial and resurrection, Mark 8:31 / Matthew 16:12 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 18:31-33 / Luke 23:46 / Luke 24:46 / Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 17:22.

After Peter’s great confession, Jesus now turns His face to Jerusalem, and He goes on to warn His disciples about how He was going to be rejected and crucified, Matthew 17:9 / Matthew 17:12 / Matthew 17:22-23 / Matthew 20:18-19 / Matthew 27:63.

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the tragedy that was nearing. He warned them that He would be betrayed into men’s hands and be killed, but encouraged them by announcing that three days later He would rise again, Mark 8:31 / Matthew 16:12 / Luke 9:22.

The disciples didn’t understand why. Because the concept of an afterlife was foreign to them, it was Jesus who brought life and immortality to light, 2 Timothy 1:10. Mark tells us later that they were afraid to ask Him about it, Mark 9:32.

Why were they afraid to ask Him about it? They didn’t understand the purpose of Christ’s death, and when Jesus spoke of His death, the subject didn’t bring them any comfort, John 16:6 / John 19:30.

It’s obvious that Peter was horrified. He couldn’t imagine the Lord being killed, and so, he began to correct Jesus, telling Him that this would never happen! Mark 8:31-37 / Luke 9:22-25.

‘Peter took him aside’, Mark 8:32 / Matthew 16:22, means Peter literally grabbed Jesus, trying to protect Him. Then Jesus sternly rebuked Peter, Mark 8:33 / Matthew 16:23.

It’s interesting to note that Jesus doesn’t rebuke Peter but Satan. It’s obvious that Satan was trying to use Peter to distract Jesus from His mission, Genesis 3:15 / 1 John 3:8. Peter was tempting Jesus not to suffer. Temptations are often strongest when they come through people we are close to.

So, Jesus flatly rejected Peter’s advice. Isn’t it strange that one minute Peter proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the next, he was calling Jesus aside to inform Him that He was mistaken! If Jesus was truly the Christ, Peter had no business arguing with Him, nor do we.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

‘Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.’ Mark 8:34-38

After speaking about His own future sufferings, Christ now informs the disciples of their upcoming suffering, Mark 8:31 / Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:12. Jesus plainly explained what was required to become His disciple.

Over the years, I’ve seen many Christians fall away for a variety of reasons. Many churches in their eagerness to ‘make disciples’ have baptised people, without first sitting down with someone to explain what is involved in becoming a Christian, and then the church wonders why people don’t stay faithful for very long!

I believe that before anyone becomes a Christian, there should be some element of teaching about what they are getting themselves into, Mark 8:34-38 / Luke 9:23-26 / Matthew 16:24-27 / Luke 9:57-62.

Jesus said that you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him, **Mark 8:34 / Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:24**. These requirements are demanding; a person doesn't naturally deny himself; rather, he usually does what he wants. Death to self is painful, but that is exactly the meaning of taking up one's cross. The cross was an instrument of death; to take it up would be to die to oneself and one's own desires in order to serve Christ.

1. Give up.

First, Jesus tells us that we must deny ourselves, **Mark 8:34 / Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:24**. I've spoken to many people over the years, and many have been honest enough to say, 'They would become a Christian, but there are certain things they simply cannot give up.'

Now I understand that denying ourselves goes against everything the world says. We see something we like, and we go ahead and buy it. We do sinful things we enjoy, and we keep doing those sinful things we enjoy.

A person doesn't naturally want to deny themselves anything. That's why going on a diet is so difficult for some. That's why giving up alcohol and drugs is so hard to do.

When it comes to giving things up, we shouldn't think Jesus is just speaking about denying ourselves things like coffee and cakes. And we shouldn't think He is speaking about locking ourselves away in some kind of monastery for twenty years.

The word 'deny', literally means to deny utterly, and so, Jesus is speaking about a total surrender of self. We often think we know what is best for us, and we often think about which direction our lives need to go in, **Proverbs 14:12**. But we really need to allow Jesus to drive our lives in the direction He wants us to go. That's what denying ourselves means: we let go of our lives and trust that God knows best, **Isaiah 55:8**. Trust that God knows which direction our lives are to go.

When you speak to some people and mention the words 'give up', they often think that this means that they can't enjoy life anymore. Yes, self-denial isn't easy, but it doesn't mean we can't enjoy life.

In fact, the opposite is true; Jesus not only came to give us life, but He came so that we can live it to the full, **John 10:10**. In other words, He wants us to enjoy all the experiences of life; He wants us to get everything good out of life. Giving up certain things doesn't mean we can't enjoy life anymore, nor does it mean we must follow a bunch of manmade rules and regulations. It means we're continually trying to live our lives for Christ, instead of living our lives for ourselves. Denying ourselves isn't a one-time act; denying ourselves is a continual action. It's a total continual surrender of my will for His will.

2. Take Up.

The second requirement to be a disciple of Jesus is taking up our cross daily, **Mark 8:34 / Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:24**. Just as we are to continue to deny ourselves throughout our Christian lives, we must also continually take up our cross.

In the religious world today, the cross has become a piece of jewellery that people wear around their necks. It's become a lucky charm which people hold in their hands when times get tough. If we were around in the days of Jesus, you would know exactly what taking up your cross meant.

You would have witnessed a condemned criminal being forced to carry the very heavy wooden cross through the streets of Jerusalem as they made their way to the place where they would be crucified. Before entering Jerusalem, if you were a visitor, you would have seen criminals who had been crucified hanging on crosses on both sides of the road.

Carrying our cross daily means we trust in God regardless of what's happening in our lives. Anyone who ever says, 'Become a Christian and your life will be nothing but one blessing after another' has told you a lie, **2 Timothy 3:12**. Anyone who ever says, 'Become a Christian and your life will be free from trials and burdens' has told you a lie. The Lord doesn't promise that if we follow Him, our lives will be free from difficulties. He promises us that when times get tough, He will take us by our hand and walk through those dark times with us, **Psalm 23:4**.

Jesus didn't come to die on the cross so that He could bring an end to human suffering. We only have to look around in the world we're living in to understand that's not the case.

He came as a man and filled that pain and suffering with His eternal presence. In the darkest moments of our lives, or even the everyday struggles and temptations we face, Jesus is with us.

Just as Christ was crucified and gave Himself up for us, we too must crucify ourselves and give ourselves up to Him, **Galatians 2:20**. Just as He willingly took up His cross for us, we must willingly take up our cross for Him. The cross symbolises pain, suffering and death, and Jesus says if we want to become His disciples, then we too must be willing to die to self and go through pain and suffering for His sake.

3. Keep Up.

The third requirement to be a disciple of Jesus is to follow Him, **Mark 8:34 / Luke 9:23 / Matthew 16:24**. When it comes to denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily and following Jesus, the first person that came to mind was Simon from Cyrene.

When Simon was forced to carry Jesus' cross, he had to keep up with Jesus; he more or less followed in the steps of Jesus to Golgotha, **Matthew 27:32**. I can imagine him thinking to himself, 'I'm glad I'm not walking in His shoes'. But as Christians, we should be very glad that we're walking in His shoes.

Imagine if I were Simon, Andrew James, or John. Imagine you're going about your daily business of fishing, when all of a sudden, from nowhere, this man named Jesus calls you to follow Him, **Matthew 4:18-22**.

I'm sure you, just like these disciples, had no idea how much those two words changed their lives forever. Jesus asked them to leave their boats, their livelihood, their friends and family and their very lives.

Everything they had ever known, everything they were used to, was about to be left behind because they decided to follow Jesus. Think about it! They left the safety and comfort of their own homes for danger, uncertainty, and persecution.

That's what following Jesus means, it means to continually follow Him wherever He goes, even if that means to death. Keeping up with Jesus means we live as He lived, we think as He thinks, we love as He loves, and we treat others as He treated others, **1 John 2:6**.

It means we become fishers of men, we get out of our comfort zones to reach lost souls with the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus isn't demanding much from His followers; He's demanding all from His followers.

Let me try to illustrate why it is so important to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Jesus. When you look around you, you may see many other Christians carrying their crosses. This is you as a Christian, and your life is going really well.

Suddenly, life throws some challenges at you, and you ask God to lighten your load. And so, God hears your request and removes some of your burdens. Once again, life is great, and you are happily living a Christian life with less weight to carry.

You notice that other Christians appear to be struggling to carry their crosses, but they just carry on regardless. But once again, your life becomes burdensome, and once again you ask God to remove some of those burdens to make your cross smaller.

And once again, God hears your request and removes some of your burdens. Life is great again, and the cross you are carrying is much lighter and easier to carry. While others are struggling to carry their crosses, yours is much easier to carry.

Then, when your life is almost over, you come across a problem. You notice that others don't have the same problem because they are using their crosses to get to the other side.

You try to do the same thing, but your cross is simply too short; it can't read the other side. While the others have long gone, you are left on your own, hopeless and helpless. The point is, if we want to make it to heaven, we must deny ourselves as Christ did, take up our cross as Christ did and follow the example of Jesus.

Remember when Jesus was in the garden? He starts praying to the Father, and His sweat becomes like drops of blood. Jesus knew what was coming up; He knew He was going to be arrested, put on trial, and then be crucified. He knew He was going to be one of those who were hung on the side of the road.

Jesus knows that it is the Father's will that He dies on the cross, but He wilfully accepts this because of His perfect submission to God's will and His love for you and me, **Matthew 26:39**.

He knows that what He is about to go through will be painful, He knows how much He will suffer, but He also knows He must go through all of this if He wants to return to His Father in heaven.

Becoming a Christian isn't an easy decision, **Acts 14:22**, but it will certainly be the best and most important decision you ever make in your life. If you're not a Christian today, you might be wondering if it's all worth it. Well, instead of focusing on the things you need to give up, maybe you should think more about the things you gain.

Paul says whatever we might have to suffer here on earth, even as we deny ourselves, that those things are not worth even comparing to the eternal glory that awaits us, **Romans 8:18**. In Jesus, though we deny ourselves, we have all that we could ever hope for, **Romans 8:32**. Let me encourage you to 'Give Up, Take Up And Keep Up'.

If you're not a Christian today, then you need to ask yourself, how much value do you place on your soul? There is no profit in gaining the entire world, only to lose one's soul in the transaction, **Mark 8:35-36 / Luke 9:24-25 / Matthew 16:25-26 / Luke 12:20-21**.

It's worth everything to submit to God's stringent requirements for discipleship. Jesus highlighted the requirements for being a disciple because it's so easy to imagine that you are a follower of Jesus when, in fact, you aren't.

Discipleship isn't mere church membership or moral living; it's total devotion to Jesus Christ. It's to die to self and live one hundred per cent for the Lord. Am I really Jesus' disciple? **Romans 6:16-17**.

The confession that Jesus demands isn't a simple statement with our mouths that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. It's a confession that we make with our whole life that is totally committed to Him, **Galatians 2:20**.

Everyone who would seek to be a disciple of Jesus must commit themselves to follow Jesus above all things of this world, **Matthew 6:24 / Matthew 10:32-33 / Romans 1:16**. Becoming a follower of Christ means you will receive persecution of some kind, **2 Timothy 3:12 / 1 Peter 2:21 / 1 Peter 4:16**.

Jesus says, that if we are ashamed of him here, he will be ashamed of us there, **Mark 8:38 / Luke 9:26**. Jesus also said that He, the Son of Man is going to come, in His Father's glory, with His angels and reward people according to what they have done, **Mark 8:38 / Matthew 16:27 / Romans 2:6 / Romans 14:12 / 2 Corinthians 5:10 / Ephesians 6:8**. This is obviously speaking about the final judgment.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

'He will come in glory, the glory of his Father, the majesty with which God is accustomed to appearing, and which befits God. He will be attended by angels. He will judge all people. The word 'reward' means recompense. He will deal with them according to their character. The righteous he will reward in heaven with glory and happiness. The

wicked he will send to hell, as a reward or recompense for their evil works. This fact, that he will come to judgment, he gives as a reason why we should be willing to deny ourselves and follow him. Even though it should be now attended with contempt and suffering, then he will reward his followers for all their shame and sorrow, and receive them to his kingdom. He adds **Mark 8:38**, that if we are ashamed of him here, he will be ashamed of us there. That is, if we reject and disown him here, he will reject and disown us there.’

Some of Jesus’ immediate disciples would be alive when the kingdom reign of Jesus would be manifested from heaven, **Mark 9:1** / **Luke 9:27** / **Matthew 16:28** / **Acts 7:54-56**.

After His resurrection, Jesus would ascend to the throne of David in heaven, **Daniel 2:44** / **Daniel 7:13-14** / **Luke 1:31-33**. He would sit down at the right hand of the Father and rule over all things, **Ephesians 1:20-22** / **Philippians 2:8-11** / **1 Peter 3:22**.

It was a spiritual kingdom in the sense that men responded on earth in their hearts to the fact that He was Lord and Christ, **Acts 2:36-37**. The manifestation of Jesus’ reign in heaven was made known by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, **Luke 24:49** / **Acts 2:1-4** / **Acts 1:8** / **Acts 2:1-4**. The presence of the kingdom’s reign in heaven would be manifested on earth by the obedience of men and women who submitted to His reign.

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION

‘And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.’ **Mark 9:1**

Some of Jesus’ immediate disciples would be alive when the kingdom reign of Jesus would be manifested from heaven, **Mark 9:1**. After His resurrection, Jesus would ascend to the throne of David in heaven, **Luke 1:31-33** / **Daniel 2:44** / **Daniel 7:13-14**.

He would sit down at the right hand of the Father and rule over all things, **Ephesians 1:20-22** / **Philippians 2:8-11** / **1 Peter 3:22**. It was a spiritual kingdom in the sense that men responded on earth in their hearts to the fact that He was Lord and Christ, **Acts 2:36-37**.

The manifestation of Jesus’ reign in heaven was made known by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in **Acts 2:1-4** / **Luke 24:49** / **Acts 1:8**. The presence of the kingdom’s reign in heaven would be manifested on earth by the obedience of men and women who submitted to His reign.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

‘After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.’ **Mark 9:2**

Although Mark, **Mark 9:2**, and Matthew, **Matthew 17:1**, say after six days, Luke says eight days, **Luke 9:28**. The Jews counted any part of a day to represent a whole day, and so, by counting the partial beginning and end of two days, with six full days, we would have the eight days of Luke.

Jesus' 'inner circle', that is, Jesus took Peter, James and John, [Mark 5:37](#) / [Luke 9:28](#) / [Matthew 26:37](#), were privileged to be taken by Jesus to a high mountain. Peter, James and John were with Him in Jairus' house, the synagogue ruler, when Jesus healed his daughter, [Luke 8:49-56](#). Peter, James and John went with Him when He went to pray at Gethsemane, [Mark 14:33](#).

THE MOUNTAIN

The mountain, [Mark 9:2](#) / [Luke 9:28](#) / [Matthew 17:1](#), in question is either Mount Taber in modern-day Syria or Mount Hermon in Israel, which is the highest mountain in Israel, [2 Peter 1:17-18](#).

Robertson, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The tradition that places the transfiguration on Mount Tabor is beyond question false.’

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Robertson would appear to be correct for these reasons.

1. Tabor does not qualify as a ‘high’ mountain, being only 1,800 feet in elevation, compared with Hermon’s 9,000 feet.
2. Tradition favouring Tabor, first advocated by St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century, is much too late to have much weight.
3. Mount Tabor was populated, having a fortress on top, during the time of Christ, and was not suitable for such an event as the transfiguration.

To have ascended Tabor would not have taken them ‘apart’, as Matthew expressed it.

4. Mount Tabor was a three-day journey removed from the last-named geographical placement of Christ and his disciples, although a sufficient time interval of six or eight days had elapsed, none of the gospel narratives mentions a journey of any kind.

Hermon, on the other hand, was nearby and is the most likely site.

5. Furthermore, when the gospels again take up the narrative, they were still in the vicinity of Hermon.

Peter, in after years, called it the Holy Mount, [2 Peter 1:18](#), and in the words of A. L. Williams, ‘We may conclude that we are not intended to know more about it, lest we should be tempted to make more of the material circumstances than of the great reality.’

Why did they go up the mountain? [Luke 9:28](#) tells us they went up the mountain to pray. Why didn’t He take the other disciples with Him? Why did Jesus take only Peter, James and John up the mountain? [Mark 9:2](#) / [Luke 9:28](#) / [Matthew 17:1](#). He was simply preparing them for leadership.

Remember that Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Christ, [Mark 8:28-38](#) / [Luke 9:18-20](#) / [Matthew 16:13-20](#).

The transfiguration was the confirmation of Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It also points to a change from the law and the prophets to the One to whom the law and prophets pointed, [Luke 24:44](#). Peter was given the keys to the kingdom and Jesus says to him, ‘whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven,’ [Matthew 16:19](#). Which means he was given the right to teach the new law of forgiveness with its terms and conditions.

James was executed by Herod, [Acts 12:1-2](#), which tells us that James must have been a man of influence, or Herod wouldn't have bothered to kill him. John seems to be the quiet one, but at the cross of Jesus, he was given the responsibility of looking after Jesus' mother, which also tells us that by this time, Joseph, Jesus' stepfather, was dead, [John 19:26-27](#).

How do you think the other disciples felt when Jesus only took Peter, James and John to certain places? I can imagine they felt a little jealous; that's possibly why they started arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, [Luke 9:46](#) / [Luke 22:24](#). This could be possible because Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about what happened up on the mountain, [Matthew 17:9](#).

THE TRANSFIGURATION

‘There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)’ [Mark 9:3-6](#)

Jesus had taken three of His closest friends with Him to a high mountain, there, whilst Jesus was praying, [Luke 9:29](#), He began to glow with breath-taking brilliance, [Mark 9:2-3](#) / [Luke 9:29](#) / [Matthew 17:2](#).

The word transfigured, ‘metamorphoo’ means to be changed or transformed and so, in some way Jesus’ appearance was changed into a state of heavenly glory in order to manifest His deity, [John 1:14](#).

Matthew tells us that ‘His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light,’ [Matthew 17:2](#). This light was an outward appearance from within; the light came from within Jesus, [John 18:6](#) / [Exodus 34:35](#) / [2 Corinthians 3:13](#).

IMAGINE BEING THERE!

I can imagine James and John tugging one another's cloaks and saying to Peter, ‘Peter, Peter, is it just me or is Jesus’ head glowing a little?’ And the more he glows, the more they say, ‘He’s definitely glowing’.

We read these passages like they went and got a drink, and they went and got a burger and chips. Just as though it was the most normal thing in the world for Jesus’ head to begin to glow.

I can imagine the jaws of those men would have dropped, I can imagine them backing away, even from the Lord that they knew, and here is glowing as though God is ripping open the flesh of Christ and letting divinity itself peak out.

And as that bright light is shining and as Jesus is glowing, and what an amazing scene, it just gets better. For all of a sudden appearing with them are Moses and Elijah, and it seems the disciples knew and recognised Moses and Elijah, [Mark 9:3](#) / [Luke 9:30](#) / [Matthew 17:3](#).

MOSES AND ELIJAH

Elijah and Moses appeared, and the disciples were awestruck, [Mark 9:4](#) / [Luke 9:30](#) / [Matthew 17:3](#). We don't know how the disciples recognised Moses and Elijah. The only possible explanation is that God opened their eyes. Moses was the great Lawgiver, [Exodus 24:12-18](#) / [John 1:17](#), the one who had led Israel out of Egyptian bondage and through the wilderness. Elijah was a great prophet, one of two men in the Old Testament who went directly to heaven without dying, [2 Kings 2:11](#).

Notice they were talking to Jesus, [Mark 9:4](#) / [Luke 9:3](#) / [Matthew 17:3](#), but what were they talking about? Luke tells us that 'they spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem,' [Luke 9:31](#). The word 'departure' is the Greek word, exodus, which means going from one place to another, [2 Peter 1:15](#).

Luke tells us they were discussing the fulfilment of the purpose for which both Moses and Elijah came to do their work, and talking about the fulfilment of the promised 'head crusher' that started with the seed of the woman in Eve, [Genesis 3:15](#), and had continued to Jesus, [Luke 9:31](#).

After feeling sleepy, [Luke 9:32](#), the disciples were now fully awake, [Luke 9:32](#). Peter was profoundly moved by the occasion and suggested that they build three shelters, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah, [Mark 9:5](#) / [Matthew 17:4](#) / [Luke 9:33](#). Mark tells us that Peter didn't know what to say, they were so frightened, [Mark 9:6](#). There are times when we simply need to listen, rather than do. Peter's problem was that he needed to connect everything with something he needed to do. Peter always jumped up and said, 'Well, Lord, I guess I need to say something.'

Peter was always the one who would jump up and say, 'I'm not going to let that happen to you, Lord, well, I'll be the last one to leave you, Lord', [Mark 14:27-31](#) / [Luke 22:31-34](#) / [Matthew 26:31-35](#).

And the Lord finally had to say, 'Peter, will you just hush up, put that sword down, [Luke 22:49-51](#) / [John 18:10-15](#) / [Matthew 26:51-55](#), before the rooster crows three times you'll deny me', [Mark 14:29-31](#) / [Matthew 26:33-35](#) / [John 13:37-38](#).

And Peter is still doing it, he's here on the mountain, and James and John are saying, 'look at this', and Peter jumps up and what does he say? 'We're very glad to be here,' [Mark 9:5](#) / [Luke 9:33](#) / [Matthew 17:4](#).

That's literally what he says; he jumps up and says, 'Well, I'm glad I came here today.' 'It's good for us to be here, Lord. In fact, we need to do something about this; we need to build a shelter for Moses and a shelter for Elijah,' [Mark 9:5](#) / [Luke 9:33](#) / [Matthew 17:4](#).

No doubt he felt that it would honour Jesus to receive a shelter alongside Moses and Elijah, but it seems as though Peter wanted to stay on the mountain for a while and enjoy the company; there was work to be done in the valleys.

According to Jewish tradition, these shelters would have been temporary places of prayer and meditation, [Leviticus 23:34](#) / [Exodus 25:8-9](#). Peter may have been suggesting that places of honour be placed at the location for the honour of Jesus, Moses and Elijah.

GOD'S VOICE

'Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: 'This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!' Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.' [Mark 9:7-8](#)

As Peter was speaking, a cloud enveloped the disciples, and then God's voice boomed from heaven, 'This is My Beloved Son, listen to Him', [Mark 9:7](#) / [Luke 9:34-35](#) / [Matthew 17:5](#). The voice of God is very seldom heard in the New Testament, in fact, only three times, [Mark 9:7](#) / [Matthew 3:17](#) / [John 12:29](#).

Notice that when the disciples heard the voice of God, the natural reaction was worship, [Matthew 17:6](#). Falling facedown suggests that they worship God, [Daniel 8:17](#) / [Revelation 1:17](#) / [2 Peter 1:18](#).

Remember that prophets weren't worshipped. And so, because Jesus was God, all three disciples worshipped as a natural response to their realisation of the presence of God.

They had obviously fallen to the ground in reverence, and so Jesus reassuringly touches them and tells them to get up. I can imagine the disciples being very afraid after hearing God's voice; no wonder Jesus reassures them that they have nothing to be afraid of.

Matthew tells us When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid,' [Matthew 17:6](#). Jesus came and touched them and told them to get up and don't be afraid, [Matthew 17:7](#).

Moses and Elijah vanished, and only Jesus remained, [Mark 9:8](#) / [Luke 9:36](#) / [Matthew 17:8](#). The lesson was simple; they used to listen to Moses and Elijah, but now they must listen to Jesus, [Acts 4:12](#) / [Hebrews 1:1-3](#). No other prophet was assumed to be the Son of God.

THE DESCENT

'As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant.'
Mark 9:9-10

As they descended, Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about what had happened until after He was raised from the dead, [Mark 9:9](#) / [Matthew 17:9](#). Luke tells us the disciples kept what they had witnessed to themselves and didn't tell anyone, [Luke 9:36](#). Jesus told them not to say anything until, He, the Son of man was resurrected, [Mark 9:9](#) / [Matthew 17:9](#).

Why were they told not to say anything to anyone? One plausible reason could be that if the disciples spoke about what had just happened publicly, especially during this crucial point in Jesus' ministry, it may have caused a lot of unnecessary confusion among the people.

There's also the possibility which we alluded to earlier that the other disciples may possibly have become jealous of Peter, James and John for having the special treatment, [Mark 9:34](#) / [Luke 22:24](#).

Peter, James and John had no idea about what Jesus meant about rising again, [Mark 9:10](#). They didn't believe in the death of Jesus, at this time, never mind believing that He would rise from the dead, [Mark 9:10](#).

Remember, the disciples and the Jews as a whole had no concept of the resurrection; every blessing in the Old Testament was all about the land and long life.

This is why the disciples never really understood anything Jesus taught about the afterlife, or they were afraid to ask Him about it. The resurrection from the dead was a whole new concept because it was Jesus who brought immortality to light, [2 Timothy 1:10](#).

'And they asked him, 'Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replied, 'To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.' Mark 9:11-13

By the appearance of Elijah on the mountain, their thinking was focused on the prophecies of the coming of Elijah, [Mark 4:5](#) / [Matthew 9:10](#) / [Mark 9:11](#), but Elijah had already come in the sense that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, [Mark 9:12-13](#) / [Matthew 17:11-12](#) / [Luke 1:17](#).

The teachers of the Law had correctly understood and interpreted the Old Testament law concerning the prophecies that a messenger must first come before the coming of the Messiah, Matthew 17:10-12 / Isaiah 40:3 / Malachi 3:1 / Malachi 4:5 / Matthew 11:14.

These prophecies were of John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, Luke 1:16-17. He came preaching repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, Mark 1:1-4, but the teachers of the Law failed to understand and accept that these prophecies were fulfilled in John Himself.

As it is with most people who don't understand one thing, this leads to another misunderstanding about something else. The disciples understood that Jesus was speaking about John the Baptist, Matthew 17:13.

The Jews didn't recognise John as the fulfilment of prophecy in preparation for the Messiah, so they wouldn't recognise Jesus, John 1:11. This is clearly seen later because they will eventually want to crucify Christ, because of their refusal to believe who He was, the Son of God, the Messiah. Mark 9:12.

THE GREATNESS OF JESUS

God's refusal of Peter's suggestion to construct three shelters teaches us a lot of things. The problem with Peter's plan was that it put Jesus on the same level as Moses and Elijah; he isn't. Jesus is above everyone in this case, above the greatest figures of the Old Testament era.

Our problem is like Peter's; we often tend to build multiple shelters, one for Jesus and one for our parents or one for Jesus and another for our preacher, or a favourite activity. Jesus must be the only shelter; He must be the supreme authority in our lives; nothing else can be on a par with Him.

Through the years, people have built cathedrals to honour Jesus, people have fought wars to honour Jesus, people have gone on fasts to honour Jesus, people have thrown banquets to honour Jesus, people have married multiple wives, and people have remained celibate to honour Jesus.

But God calls out to us all and says, 'before you go building your booths, or making your plans before you do what you think will honour Me, will you please stop and listen to Him'.

The world would be a better place if it stopped to actually listen to Jesus' words and obey them, and our churches would be in better health if they stopped to listen to what Jesus actually teaches on any given subject. Our own Christian walk would be totally transformed if we stopped long enough to listen and apply Jesus' words to our very lives. Who are you listening to?

JESUS HEALS A BOY POSSESSED BY AN IMPURE SPIRIT

'When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.' Mark 9:14-15

Jesus, Peter, James and John had remained part of a day and night on the mountain of transfiguration, Luke 9:37.

While He was on the mountain, the scribes were entering into an argument with the other disciples, Mark 9:15-16. As Jesus descended the mountain, He noticed a great commotion in the valley. The crowd ran to meet Him, Mark 9:14-15 / Luke 9:37.

Notice that as soon as the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed, [Mark 9:15](#). Why? It's certainly possible that just like Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai, his face was radiant as he reflected God's glory, [Exodus 34:35](#). But here the glory of God is Jesus, and He's not reflecting God's glory; He is God's glory.

'What are you arguing with them about?' he asked. A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.' 'You unbelieving generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.' So, they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy's father, how long has he been like this?' 'From childhood,' he answered. 'It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' [Mark 9:16-22](#)

The father of the tormented boy asked Jesus to do something, if He could, the man obviously feels hopeless and helpless, [Luke 8:38](#). The demon caused this poor boy to lose his speech, threw him to the ground in convulsions, foaming at the mouth, his teeth gnash together, he screams and becomes rigid, [Mark 9:17](#) / [Luke 9:39](#).

Mark also says that the demon caused epileptic fits that would cause the boy to be cast into fires, [Mark 9:20](#). He begged the disciples to help, but they couldn't, [Mark 9:18](#) / [Luke 9:40](#) / [Matthew 17:16](#).

While Jesus had been with three of the apostles on the mountain, the others had been unable to cast a demon out of a boy. The apostles had normally been able to cast out demons, but here they couldn't, probably because of a lack of faith, [Matthew 17:19-20](#).

This failure puzzled them and surprised the bystanders. Jesus' enemies were taking advantage of this lapse to discredit Him; we can imagine how embarrassed the disciples must have felt as they were being ridiculed.

Jesus says to all who were present that they were an unbelieving and a perverse generation and asks, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? [Mark 9:19](#) / [Luke 9:41](#) / [Matthew 17:17](#).

Jesus asks that the boy be brought to Him, and when Jesus saw the effect the demon was having on the boy, [Luke 9:42](#), He asks how long he has been like this, [Mark 9:20-21](#).

It seems as though everyone was still having a hard time accepting Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, [John 9:3](#).

The father of the tormented boy asked Jesus to do something if He could; the man obviously feels hopeless and helpless.

'If you can'? said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who believes.' Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!' When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. 'You deaf and mute spirit,' he said, 'I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.' The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, 'He's dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.' [Mark 9:23-27](#)

Notice that the Lord turned the boy's father's statement back on him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes,' [Mark 9:23](#). The father said that he believed, but recognising the possibility that his faith wasn't as strong as it needed to be, he begged Jesus to help his unbelief, [Mark 9:24](#).

Everyone thought the boy was dead, and so, with that, Christ commanded the unclean spirit to leave the boy. The demon cried out and threw the boy into convulsions, but left, [Mark 9:25](#) / [Luke 9:42](#).

The Jews believed that no one could cast out a mute spirit unless you knew its name. Mark gives an extended account of the events surrounding the exorcism, [Mark 9:25-26](#).

Jesus rebuked the demon, [Mark 9:25](#) / [Luke 9:42](#) / [Matthew 17:18](#) / [Luke 4:41](#), which shows His power over the devil, [Matthew 4:24](#). The demon did what all demons have to do, the demon left the boy immediately, [Mark 9:26](#) / [Luke 9:42](#) / [Matthew 17:18](#).

Jesus said on this occasion that all things are possible to those who believe, [Mark 9:23](#). The Jews believed that no one could cast out a mute spirit unless one knew its name.

Jesus said on this occasion that all things are possible to those who believe; therefore, this healing was a test of Jesus' divine power in contrast to the lack of power in the disciples because of their lack of faith. Jesus had total control over the world of Satan and his works, and because of Jesus' command, the demon immediately left the boy.

Unlike what some people claim today concerning casting out demons, here there were no formulas, performances, money or ceremonies in order to exorcise this demon; Jesus simply spoke, and it was done.

‘After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer.’ [Mark 9:28-29](#)

Later, the disciples asked why they had been unable to cast out the demon, [Mark 9:28](#). Jesus explained that they weren't relying on God enough, but on their own power, [Mark 9:29](#). The KJV says, ‘this kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.’

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning prayer and fasting.

‘In order to work miracles of this kind to cast out devils in cases so obstinate and dreadful as this, faith of the highest kind is necessary. That faith is produced and kept vigorous only by much prayer, and by such abstinence from food as fits the mind for the highest exercises of religion and leaves it free to hold communion with God.’

Perhaps their prior success in expelling demons had caused them to be self-reliant, [Mark 6:13](#) / [Mark 6:30](#), and they had neglected to pray in faith to God so that He would cast out the demon, [John 9:31](#) / [John 11:41](#).

The disciples seem to be somewhat embarrassed over their inability to take care of the demon-possessed boy, and notice it was the disciples' unbelief, not the belief of the one who was healed, that was questioned. They could have cast out the demon because Jesus had given them such authority.

They had demonstrated a lack of faith, [Matthew 17:20](#) / [Matthew 19:26](#) / [Matthew 21:21-22](#) / [Luke 10:1](#) / [Luke 10:17](#), but if they had the faith as small as a mustard seed, [Mark 11:23-24](#) / [Matthew 17:20](#) / [Matthew 21:21-22](#) / [Luke 17:6](#) / [1 Corinthians 12:9](#) / [1 Corinthians 13:2](#), they could achieve much more, [Matthew 17:20](#).

Nothing would be impossible to them, for nothing is impossible for the One who actually does the miraculous work, [Mark 9:23](#) / [John 11:40](#). However, the qualification for being able to command the power of the supernatural demanded that they believe, [Matthew 19:26](#) / [Matthew 21:21-22](#) / [Luke 10:1](#) / [Luke 1:17](#).

Faith takes time to grow, and the disciples were no different, in fact by the time Jesus leaves them to return to the Father, they would indeed do great things for God. Please note that this kind of faith is supernatural, miraculous faith, [1 Corinthians 12:9](#). We must remember to keep these verses in their proper context.

Jesus wasn't talking to all the disciples, but only to the twelve, and so this isn't a promise for Christians today. He was promising them, the twelve, special authority in reference to their work as His personally chosen and sent apostles.

Time and again, the disciples demonstrated a lack of clear spiritual understanding; they saw Jesus multiply loaves and fish but failed to see that He could handle another food emergency. Peter affirmed that Jesus was the Christ but thought it best to give Him some needed ‘advice.’

He believed Jesus was great, but on the same level as Moses and Elijah. The nine disciples in the valley boldly attempted to expel a demon, but without relying on the Lord. They were like those formerly blind who even now saw men like trees walking.

We all take time to grow as Christians, and there are times we exercise a lack of faith, especially when we just go through the ‘routine’ of being a Christian, but when difficult times come, we quickly realise what we've been

neglecting in our spiritual lives. Maybe those difficult times come to remind us to ask God to increase our faith in Him. Have you asked God to increase your faith lately?

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A SECOND TIME

‘They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, ‘The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.’ But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ But they kept quiet because on the way, they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.’ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’

Mark 9:30-37

Jesus wanted to prepare His disciples for the tragedy that was nearing. He warned them that He would be betrayed into men’s hands and be killed, [Luke 9:44](#), but encouraged them by announcing that three days later He would rise again, [Mark 9:30-31](#).

The disciples didn’t understand, [Mark 9:32](#) / [Luke 9:45](#), why? They didn’t understand the purpose of Christ’s death, and when Jesus spoke of His death, the subject didn’t bring them any comfort, [John 16:6](#) / [John 19:30](#).

They didn’t understand the purpose of Christ’s death, and they were too busy arguing about who would be the greatest in Jesus’ coming kingdom. In other words, they were struggling with pride, and they even argued about this during the Supper, [Luke 22:24](#). Why were they afraid to ask Him about it? [Mark 9:32](#) / [Luke 9:45](#). As we saw above, the concept of an afterlife was foreign to them, [2 Timothy 1:10](#).

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, ‘it was hidden from them’, [Luke 9:45](#).

‘It was God’s will that the apostles, while being so thoroughly briefed on all that would take place, should also fail to ‘get it’, as we might say. This seems to be a hint here that they were providentially prevented from understanding it, but it is more likely that the very conception of human salvation as something which Almighty God alone could achieve, and that even he could not achieve it without the death of the Beloved on the cross, that such a colossal truth was utterly beyond the power of the natural man to understand it until after the fact. The concealment was not due to the design of God but to the limitations of men.’

This all happened at Peter’s house, [Mark 9:33](#). Can you imagine how Jesus must have felt? He’s about to go and die for the world, and all the disciples can do is argue about who is going to be the greatest. It must have disappointed Him greatly to see the disciples competing for power, [Mark 9:33](#), while He was preoccupied with His coming suffering.

THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Notice they were arguing about who was the greatest, [Luke 9:46](#) / [Mark 9:34](#). There’s no doubt that the disciples were still thinking that Jesus was here to establish a physical kingdom, [Acts 1:6](#), and they wanted to know who was going to be in charge.

Mark tells us that Jesus sat down, [Mark 9:35](#). In other words, Jesus adopts the position of a teacher, which signalled to the disciples that teaching was coming. It was then that the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ [Matthew 18:1](#).

It appears that selfish ambition is beginning to creep in among the disciples, [Mark 10:35-45](#). In fact, this subject came up four times when they were with Jesus: [Mark 9:33-34](#) / [Matthew 20:20-28](#) / [Mark 10:35-45](#) / [Luke 22:24-27](#). In Jesus’ kingdom, He Himself would be the One with all authority, [Matthew 28:12](#) / [Ephesians 1:20-23](#).

It must have disappointed Jesus greatly to see the disciples competing for power while He was preoccupied with His coming suffering. Can you imagine how Jesus must have felt? He’s about to go and die for the world, and all the disciples can do is argue about who is going to be the greatest! [Mark 10:35-45](#) / [Matthew 20:20-28](#) / [Luke 22:24-27](#).

THE CHILD OBJECT LESSON

Jesus didn’t need to ask what they were arguing about because He already knew, and so, knowing what they had been disputing, Jesus took a child into His arms and used the child as a model of the humility that should characterise the disciples, [Mark 9:36-37](#) / [Luke 9:47-48](#) / [Matthew 18:2-5](#).

Jesus tells them they must ‘change’, [Matthew 18:3](#), which means to change their thinking, change their lives, change their attitude, [Acts 3:19](#) / [Acts 28:27](#). The need for change by the apostles was because of their sin of worldly pride and ambition.

They must also become ‘like little children’, [Matthew 18:3](#). Children submit to their father’s rule, they trust their father will always do what is right and as a result, they will obey their fathers, [Ephesians 6:1-4](#) / [Colossians 3:20](#) / [Exodus 20:12](#) / [Deuteronomy 5:16](#) / [Proverbs 22:6](#).

As Christians, we need to have the same submissive attitude toward our heavenly Father if we want to receive eternal life, [James 4:6-7](#) / [1 Peter 5:6-7](#). The humility of a child should always be the characteristic of the disciple of Jesus; we should always be willing to serve and put others before us, not thinking too highly of ourselves, [Mark 10:35-45](#) / [Luke 9:48](#) / [Matthew 18:4](#).

Jesus wants disciples who are humble like a child, free from prejudice like a child, teachable like a child, lovable as a child, He wants His disciples to have the same simple faith of a child, trust like a child, He doesn’t want His disciples to worry about anything but trust their Father and He wants His disciples to be as innocent as a child.

Welcoming a little child in Jesus’ Name, [Mark 9:37](#) / [Luke 9:48](#) / [Matthew 18:5](#), refers to the complete acceptance of a child-like believer because of their innocent and unrestrained trust in the Lord. If we welcome a disciple of Jesus who is of the character which Jesus discusses in this context, we receive Jesus, [Matthew 10:40-42](#).

WHOEVER IS NOT AGAINST US IS FOR US

‘Teacher,’ said John, ‘we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop because he was not one of us.’ ‘Do not stop him,’ Jesus said. ‘For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.’ [Mark 9:38-41](#)

John related how he had seen someone expelling demons in Jesus’ name and had forbidden him to do so, [Mark 9:38](#) / [Luke 9:49-50](#). Evidently, John thought that no one should have been doing any work for the Lord who wasn’t following in their immediate company, [Philippians 1:15-18](#).

But Jesus had commissioned many to go out, preach, and expel demons. He was pleased with those who were faithfully serving Him in other places. There seems to be some arrogance on the part of the disciples here against one they considered unauthorised to work miracles in the name of Jesus.

This one may have been one of the disciples who was previously sent out by Jesus to cast out demons, [Luke 10:1-17](#). We aren't told who this person was; he was simply doing this work in the name of Jesus.

Whatever the case, the disciples weren't happy with his work. Because he wasn't in what the disciples considered to be the inner circle of disciples, [Luke 9:49](#), they thought that he should be discouraged from his work.

They thus manifested their sectarian attitude, thinking that this disciple should be a member of their party before he could truly represent Jesus. Notice, Jesus didn't condemn the work of the disciple who was casting out demons in His name. It was the enemy of righteousness about whom the disciples must be concerned, not someone who was giving glory to Jesus by his works.

Jesus wants the disciples not to discourage the good works of those who are not of their social group. It is interesting in this context to note that this exorcist was doing what the disciples couldn't do for lack of faith, [Mark 9:29](#) / [Mark 9:18-19](#). Therefore, the effective work of the unknown disciple may have intimidated the disciples concerning their weak faith.

Jesus' teaching on this matter went beyond good works. His teaching focused on acceptance, not rejection. The disciples of Jesus must be known for their willingness to accept, not eagerness to find occasions for rejection.

The disciples must learn how to receive those with whom they may disagree. Jesus says, for no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever isn't against us is for us, [Mark 9:39-40](#).

Jesus tells the disciples that whoever welcomes them, welcomes Jesus, [Matthew 10:40](#), that is, anyone who welcomes the disciples and accepts their teaching, is really welcoming Jesus and His teaching, [John 13:20](#) / [Acts 16:15](#) / [Galatians 4:14](#) / [2 John 9](#).

The word 'prophet', [Matthew 10:41](#), isn't used in reference to foretelling the future but in terms of teaching God's Word, [Matthew 5:20](#) / [John 13:20](#). The one who received the disciple would receive a reward from God suitable to one who had entertained one of God's representatives.

Gill, in his commentary, says the following.

'By 'a prophet' is meant, not one that foretells things to come, but a preacher of the Gospel, for as prophesying sometimes signifies preaching, so a prophet designs a minister of the word, and to 'receive' him, is not only to embrace his doctrine, but to entertain him in a kind, and generous manner, and he that does this, 'in the name of a prophet', not as coming in the name of another prophet, but upon this account, and for this consideration, because he himself is a prophet.'

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

'The disciples were righteous men who represented another righteous man, Jesus. God would give those who received the disciples as righteous men a reward in keeping with what a righteous man deserves, [Matthew 5:20](#) / [John 13:20](#).'

To give a cup of cold water in His Name, [Mark 9:41](#) / [Matthew 10:39](#) / [Colossians 3:17](#), even just a drink, to one of the least of Jesus' followers, is to be blessed, to receive a reward, [Matthew 10:42](#).

He is telling them how rewarding giving can be. Even that which we take completely for granted, when given in love, is a blessing to both giver and receiver.

The ‘little ones’ is a reference to the disciples of Christ, those who would suffer for Him. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to them, will certainly not lose their reward in heaven, [Mark 9:41](#) / [Matthew 10:42](#) / [Matthew 25:40](#) / [Hebrews 6:10](#).

Anyone who assists one of them by giving him or her even a cup of refreshing cold water in His Name will receive a reward from God. The point is that no act of kindness for one of Jesus’ suffering disciples will pass without God’s reward.

Bell, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Note the descending climax, a prophet, a righteous man, a little one; signifying that however low we come down in our services to those that are Christ’s, all that is done for His sake, and that bears the stamp of love to His awesome name, shall be divinely appreciated and owned and rewarded.’

CAUSING TO STUMBLE

‘If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where ‘the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ Everyone will be salted with fire. ‘Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.’ [Mark 9:42-50](#)

Jesus went on to warn of the danger of causing someone to fall. He said that it would even be better to tie a huge stone around a man’s neck and cast him into the sea than for him to cause another to stumble, [Mark 9:42](#). He also warned of the danger of allowing anything to cause us to stumble.

Jesus stresses how serious we must be about possibly causing ‘these little ones’ to stumble, [Mark 9:42](#). If disciples have an attitude of acceptance of others, they will be cautious about being an occasion for one to stumble.

Notice that the unquenchable fire isn’t focused on the duration of the fire, but on the certainty that it will exist to punish those who offend, [Mark 9:43](#). Jesus wants us to understand that the punishment for sin will not go away.

There will be a definite punishment for the wicked.

The Greek word ‘Gehenna’, [Mark 8:43](#), also finds its meaning in the continuous fire that consumed the rubbish that was dumped in the garbage heap of the valley of Hinnom.

Jesus used the word ‘Gehenna’ to emphasise the fact that offenders will face the punishment of the consuming worm and fire. His emphasis was on the fact that we cannot ignore the consuming fire; it will not go away.

However, that which is cast into the consuming fire will eventually be destroyed, [Matthew 10:28](#) / [2 Thessalonians 1:7-9](#). Therefore, it is best to cut off that part of one’s character that offends others. It’s best to cut it off lest one cause another to stumble.

If one’s life doesn’t act as a spiritual preservative for society, then he has lost his Christian influence. He is of no value for kingdom business and thus, not a proper candidate for an eternal heaven. Notice the footnotes on verses [Mark 9:4](#) and [Mark 9:46](#), which tell us that the words we find in [Mark 9:48](#).

The Lord encouraged radical, decisive action, cutting off a hand or a foot or plucking out an eye in order to avoid abandoning Him, [Mark 9:45-47](#). He wasn’t speaking literally, but He was forcefully declaring that we should sacrifice anything that is tempting us to sin. He described Hell as a horrendous place of maggots and perpetual fire that must be avoided at all costs.

In Mark 9:48, Jesus quoted Isaiah 66:24, where Isaiah said that ‘their’ fire isn’t quenched. It was the worm and the fire that consumed the dead bodies in the seemingly unending fire of the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. Isaiah’s ‘fire’ was taken from the historical event of the burning of the carcasses of dead Assyrian soldiers after God killed one-hundred and eighty-five thousand of them who sought to take Jerusalem.

The bodies of the Assyrians were burned in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. The event became the historical foundation for the metaphor that illustrated the final destruction of the enemies of God at the end of time, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

When Jesus speaks about salted with fire, Mark 9:49-50, He possibly reverts back to correcting in their lives that which needs to be brought under control. It’s the fire of persecution and trials that purifies our character, 1 Peter 1:6-7.

One’s work is also tried by the fires of life, 1 Corinthians 3:13. The fire, therefore, purifies the character of individuals in order to preserve them through life and prepare them for heavenly dwelling.

The purified character of the disciples would increase their effectiveness and impact on society, Matthew 5:13-16. As salt acts as a preservative, their Christian influence in society would preserve society, Mark 9:50.

To fully comprehend the Messiah’s statement, we must be aware of some qualities that salt possesses.

1. Salt is a flavouring agent.

This is perhaps the most commonly recognised use of salt. Who hasn’t used salt to improve the taste of food that is otherwise bland?

2. Salt is a preserving agent.

Salt that is added to fresh meat will act as a preservative; it will help delay the decay process. The practice of salting meat has been used for years.

3. Salt increases thirst.

Many people like Chinese food; however, after consuming a lot of Chinese food, our bodies will crave fluids for the rest of the evening! The salt contained in Chinese food cheese noticeably increases our thirst.

4. Salt melts ice.

During the winter months, many people use various mixtures of salt to melt ice on roads, driveways, and sidewalks.

5. Salt irritates.

Have you ever been working outside under the hot sun and had sweat running into your eyes? It stings, doesn’t it? The salt contained in sweat is an irritant.

6. Salt has destructive power.

We know that certain portions of our roads, due to concrete damage, have been severely damaged by heavy salting over many winters. Salt is certainly powerful stuff. Using a little bit, it will melt the ice, but using a lot can ruin an entire road! Too much salt will also harm or kill living things, such as grass, slugs, etc.

Admittedly, although we understand these attributes and usages of salt today, it is likely that the major thrust of Jesus’ point pertained to salt as a flavouring agent, note His use of the word ‘seasoned’ in the verse.

Notice that Jesus asks, How can you make it salty again? Luke 14:34 / Matthew 5:13 / Mark 9:50. He gives us the answer by telling us to be salt among ourselves, and be at peace with each other, Mark 9:50.

Anyone who is striving to follow Jesus will make the world a better place in much the same way that salt helps certain foods taste better. For instance, in [Acts 2:47](#), the disciples were described as ‘praising God and having favour with all the people.’ Without a doubt, they added something good to society.

It is possible for salt to lose its flavour. Normally, this should not happen, but it will if the salt becomes contaminated with impurities, e.g., dirt. Jesus is issuing a warning here.

A disciple can lose the qualities that make them valuable before God as ‘salt’ if they aren’t careful to remain separate from harmful impurities like sin, [Luke 14:35](#) / [Matthew 5:13](#) / [2 Corinthians 6:17](#).

If a Christian becomes contaminated with impurity, then they are ‘good for nothing’, [Matthew 5:13](#), in service to the Lord, at least not until they come back to Him and seek forgiveness on God’s terms.

Luke says it is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out, [Luke 14:35](#). A Christian ought to be pure and kind in thoughts, deeds, and speech, [Colossians 4:6](#).

Such a person will have a preserving effect on righteousness and godliness, as salt preserves food and helps prevent spoiling. They will endeavour, like salt, to remove or melt any hindrances that could cause others who are searching for Christ to stumble.

However, in the process, they, like salt, may irritate some people. Though this isn’t their purpose, when we live for God and stand up for His cause, some will undoubtedly be rubbed up the wrong way.

It is also true that followers of the Lord, like salt, have the potential to cause destruction if they come in contact with the wrong things, namely, sin. Christians should endeavour to destroy sin from their lives.

They should be a force against evil. Finally, a faithful disciple should also cause others to thirst for righteousness, [Matthew 5:6](#), as salt itself causes physical thirst. Jesus asks those who have ears to hear, let them hear, [Luke 14:35](#).

CHAPTER 10

INTRODUCTION

‘Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again, crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.’ Mark 10:1-2

MARK HERE RECORDS THE FINAL JOURNEY

At this time in His ministry, Jesus went south to the region of Judea, [Mark 10:1](#). Jesus once again teaches the crowds as was His custom, [Mark 10:2](#). In Mark’s writing of the ministry of Jesus, this was the only journey to Judea of the three possible journeys that Jesus made during His ministry to this area that was recorded by Mark.

From this chapter onward, Jesus focused on the cross. He prepared His disciples for His final confrontation with the religious leaders and His subsequent victory on the cross.

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE

“Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” “What did Moses command you?” he replied. They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.” “It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied. “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” Mark 10:2-12

The topic of marriage, divorce and remarriage is probably the most debated topic there is within the religious world. There are many sermons, lessons and books written on the topic, some of which are very useful, and others just make the topic even more confusing to understand.

Surprisingly, the Bible really doesn't have much to say about divorce and remarriage; there aren't a lot of references on the subject. You would think, by all the books that have been produced and all the uproar that has been made over it, that the Bible says a whole lot about it, but the Bible says very little.

I think it would be useful if we look at a few passages from the Old Testament where we can highlight some important points. We'll look at these passages again in the wider context later to make further points, but for now, I want to focus on some words in the immediate context. For the purpose of this study, I will be using the N.R.S.V. unless otherwise stated.

PROMOTING DIVORCE!

You might be wondering if I'm advocating divorce; no, I'm not. I believe that marriage is for life and shouldn't be entered lightly, but at the same time, I realise that sin can enter a marriage relationship like every other part of our lives, which may end up leading to a divorce. I'm simply trying to show that some of the doctrines being put forward on this subject are not as straightforward as we think.

CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND AWAY

In **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, we see that God, through Moses, was protecting the rights of women, and if one thing is clear, it's simply this: divorce and remarriage were happening back in Moses' day.

Moses gives an example of a woman who is married, but her husband isn't happy about something. We'll look at what the word 'objectionable' means later, so he divorces her. She then marries again, and sadly, the same thing happens.

Notice there are two separate actions required in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, 'write her a certificate of divorce' and 'send her out'. Notice again, there are two separate actions mentioned, **Jeremiah 3:8**, 'sent her away' and 'a decree of divorce'.

The Hebrew word for 'put away' is 'shalach', which means to send away, or out. And the Hebrew word for 'certificate or bill or decree of divorce' is 'kriythuwth', which means a cutting of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce.

Clearly, there are two separate words used to describe two separate actions. Just as there is a legal way to get married, there is also a legal way to get a divorce. **Deuteronomy 24:1-4 / Jeremiah 3:8.**

Any man who wants a divorce must give the woman ‘a certificate of divorce’ and then ‘send her away’, otherwise legally they are still married. They are still married because they haven’t got the legal paperwork, i.e, the divorce papers, to prove they’re legally divorced.

SEND AWAY

The word ‘shalach,’ ‘send away’ is used seven hundred and ninety times in the Old Testament. There are too many to quote, but below are a few examples. Please take the time to read each passage because it will help clarify the point. The English equivalent word is written in blue.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN GENESIS

In **Genesis 3:22-23**, we find the words ‘reach out’ and ‘sent’, which is the word ‘shalach’. In **Genesis 21:14**, we find the words, ‘sent her away’, which is the word ‘shalach’.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN EXODUS

In **Exodus 2:5**, we find the words, ‘sent her’, which is the word ‘shalach’. In **Exodus 8:32**, we find the word ‘go’, which is the word ‘shalach’.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN 1 SAMUEL

In **1 Samuel 4:4**, we find the word ‘sent’, which is the word ‘shalach’. In **1 Samuel 30:26**, we find the words ‘he sent’, which is the word ‘shalach’.

THE WORD ‘SHALACH’ USED IN MALACHI

In **Malachi 2:16**, we find the word ‘divorce’, which is the word ‘shalach’. The Hebrew word used in Malachi isn’t the word ‘divorce’ as the N.R.S.V. translates it; it should be the word ‘shalach’, which means to ‘send away’ or ‘put away’, the K.J.V. renders it correctly.

TWO SEPARATE WORDS

The word ‘shalach’, ‘send away’, has a different meaning from the word ‘kriythuwth’, ‘bill of divorcement.’ They don’t mean the same thing, and neither word certainly means divorce. I simply want us to see that there are two separate words which imply two different actions.

We’ll come back to the Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Malachi passages later and look at them in more depth. I believe this is important to understand and make the distinction between the two words used, as we go on to the New Testament passages which deal with this topic.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE WORDS

In **Matthew 5:31-32**, we find the words, ‘divorces, divorce, divorced’. We will look at these verses in more depth later, but for now, I want to focus on two words again to show that we’re dealing with two separate actions.

We saw earlier that the Hebrew word for ‘bill of divorcement’ is ‘kriythuwth’, which means a cutting of the matrimonial bond, i.e. divorce. Here in the New Testament passages, we have the Greek word equivalent. The Greek word for ‘writing of divorcement’ is ‘apostasion’, and it means something separative, especially divorce. The Hebrew word for ‘put away’ is ‘shalach’, which means to send away, or out.

Here in the New Testament passages, we have the Greek word equivalent. The Greek word used for ‘put her away’ is ‘apoluo’ which means to free fully, that is, literally relieve, release, dismiss, reflexively depart, or figuratively, let die, pardon, or specifically, divorce:- (let) depart, dismiss, divorce, forgive, let go, loose, put (send) away, release, set at liberty.

I included the entire entry from Strong’s definition of the word, but remember that anything after the ‘:-’ isn’t a part of the definition but is merely a listing of ways the word was translated in the KJV.

Also, remember that Strong stated that the first word is the most reliable word, in this case, ‘free fully’, while the most radical understanding is the last word, in this case, ‘specifically divorce’.

Notice again in **Matthew 19:1-9**, the Greek word used for ‘writing of divorcement’ is ‘apostasion’, and it means something separative, especially divorce. The Greek word used for ‘put her away’ is ‘apoluo’, which means to free fully. The K.J.V. again makes this clearer.

Notice also in **Mark 10:1-12**, the Greek word used for ‘a bill of divorcement’ is ‘apostasion’, and it means something separative, especially divorce. The Greek word used for ‘put her away’ is ‘apoluo’, which means to free fully. Note again that even in the New Testament, there are two separate words used to describe two separate actions. The K.J.V. makes this clearer.

I think it’s possible that some sincere people have kind of joined the two words together to make them mean the same thing. This is possibly because of some bad translations, as we shall see later, many times the word ‘divorce’ has been translated in the Scripture when the word should be ‘put away’, you see this, especially in the N.I.V., which we’ll look at later too.

The Greek word, ‘apoluo,’ ‘put away,’ cannot mean the same as ‘apostasion,’ ‘bill of divorcement.’ It cannot mean ‘divorce’, and here are a few examples of why it can’t. Here is a list of passages which use the word ‘apoluo’. Please take the time to read through them, as it will drive the point I’m trying to make across.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN MATTHEW

In Matthew 5:31-32, we find the words, divorces, divorced, this is the word ‘apoluo’. In Matthew 14:15, we find the word ‘away’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN MARK

In Mark 6:36, we find the word ‘away’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In Mark 6:45, we find the word ‘dismissed’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN LUKE

In Luke 6:37, we find the words, ‘forgive, forgiven’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In Luke 13:12, we find the words ‘set free’; this is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN JOHN

In John 18:39, we find the word ‘release’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In John 19:10, we find the word ‘release’ again, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN ACTS

In Acts 3:13, we find the word ‘release’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. In Acts 23:22, we find the word ‘dismissed’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

THE WORD ‘APOLUO’ USED IN HEBREWS

In Hebrews 12:23, we find the words ‘set free’, which is the word ‘apoluo’.

‘APOLUA’ TRANSLATED AS DIVORCE

As you have just read, the word ‘apoluo’ appears quite a lot in the New Testament, and hopefully, you noted that only one time in all of these verses was the word ‘apoluo’ translated ‘divorce’.

Please note that the **Matthew 5:32** passage is the only occurrence of the word ‘divorce’ in this list and should have been rendered ‘put away’. Other translations, such as the N.I.V., use the word ‘divorce’ and the words ‘send away’, which may be the cause of much of the confusion on the subject.

If ‘divorce’ is the only possible translation of ‘apoluo’ in **Matthew 5:31-32**, then it must be asked, why would it not be the only legitimate translation in all other uses of the word?

Though context might often affect the appropriate translation of a particular word, it does not necessarily preclude other possible translations. The word ‘divorce’ is a legal term.

In **Acts 19:41**, we find the word ‘dismissed’, which is the word ‘apoluo’. So, if it’s valid to translate ‘apoluo’ only as such, then we must admit that in **Acts 19:41**, for example, the entire assembly were married to the town clerk of Ephesus and then divorced by him.

It seems to me that many who support the idea that **Matthew 5** is addressing the matter of divorce are perhaps not making a distinction between being separated, without being divorced, and actually being divorced.

The problem Jesus was speaking about isn’t primarily focused on ‘divorce’ but on the ‘sending away’. Men were ‘sending their wives away’ without giving them the ‘certificate of divorce’, which had devastating results for the women of the time.

They couldn’t marry anyone else without this certificate, and if she did, she would end up committing adultery, hence causing the man who ‘sent her away’ to make her an adulteress. Why? Because legally she was still married, **Matthew 5:31-32**.

THE BRIDE PRICE AND THE DOWRIES

Jesus is dealing with the real problem, the problem of HOW they were ‘sending their wives away’. I believe it all had to do with the dowry. Let’s look at these passages, which speak about the dowry: **Genesis 29:18-27** / **Genesis 34:11-12** / **1 Samuel 18:25** / **Hosea 3:2**.

In eastern countries, the bridegroom was required to pay the father of his betrothed a stipulated portion, in money or other valuables, proportioned to the rank and position of the family to which she belonged; this was the dowry. This is still practised in many countries even today.

There were two forms of payment made on the occasion of a wedding: first, there was the bride price, and then there was the dowry **Exodus 21:10-11** / **Exodus 22:16-17**.

Both of which were designed to support a woman and her children, should she be left widowed or divorced. The Bible constantly commands God’s people to look after the vulnerable in society, especially widows and orphans, **Isaiah 1:17** / **Psalms 68:5** / **James 1:27**.

What was the bride price? The bride price was more than money; it was about protecting the woman. If a widow or a divorced woman wanted to be independent, she needed this money to help her in her current circumstances. Women didn’t want to be at the mercy of a husband who might or might not provide for her and her children.

The prospective groom gave the bride’s father a present, either a sum of money or its equivalent in goods, cattle, land, woven goods, work, etc, we see this in **Genesis 29:15-30**, where Jacob paid for Rachel’s sister Leah with seven years’ work.

We see this with David in **1 Samuel 18:25-27**, where David paid for Saul’s daughter Michal with the grisly gift of one hundred Philistine foreskins. We see this in **Judges 1:11-15**, where Othniel conquered a town as payment for Achsah.

The amount of this bride price was geared to the status and wealth of the girl's family. It was seen as compensation to the family for the loss of the girl, as well as the means of providing her with certain necessities.

We don't know what the Israelite custom was regarding the disposal of this money, but in Babylon, the goods belonged to the girl. The father was given the interest or other income on it for life, but he wasn't allowed to touch the capital, **Genesis 31:14-16**.

The purpose of the bride price was to ensure the woman would not be left unsupported if she were widowed. Without a dowry, they could end up destitute.

WHAT WAS THE DOWRY?

There are many passages in the Bible relating to dowries, but sadly, specific details are not given. However, in Babylon, a bride's parents had to make a settlement on her which remained her property even though the husband received the interest from the capital and was entitled to invest the money in business. If a woman was later widowed or divorced through no fault of her own, the capital reverted to her.

Pharaoh gave his daughter the city of Gezer as a marriage settlement when she married King Solomon, **1 Kings 9:16**. Rebecca, Leah and Rachel were each given a handmaid as a wedding gift from their parents. The sum of money or goods was registered in the marriage contract.

If it was money that the husband wanted to invest, he contracted to repay his wife the full amount, plus one-third interest. If it was something that would depreciate, such as clothing or household goods, the husband only had to repay one-fifth of the original value.

WHY DID THE JEWS SEND AWAY THEIR WIVES WITHOUT THE CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE?

Do you know why the Jews were 'putting their wives away' without giving them a 'certificate of divorce'? They didn't want to return the dowry; it was going to cost them, **Exodus 21:10**.

It was much easier to just abandon them, to put them away and allow them to go back to their home or fend for themselves and ignore them. If a man ever gave his wife the 'bill of divorce', then he had some obligations to their wife; he had to return the dowry, and he had to provide for his wife if they 'sent them away'.

This was the Jew's loophole, they 'put them away' without the official 'divorce'. If there is a 'legal divorce', then the husband would be required to return the dowry; the sad news is, he probably would have spent it.

What dowry are we speaking about? It's not the dowry the groom paid to the father, but the dowry that the bride's father gave his daughter as a gift for her marriage. This included servants, **Genesis 24:59 / Genesis 24:61 / Genesis 29:24 / Genesis 29:29**, land, **Judges 1:15 / 1 Kings 9:16**.

When the couple are married, the servants, the land, gold, silver, whatever gifts she was given by her father, now become her husband's property. However, if he were to legally divorce her, that is give her a certificate of divorce, he has a duty, not only to care for her but to return the dowry to her that she received from her father.

The 1901 Jewish Encyclopaedia says the following.

‘The dowry that the woman brought to her husband, whether real estate, slaves, or movable property, was recorded in the marriage contract (KETUBAH). Custom decided whether the sum mentioned in the marriage contract should be exactly the same as the dowry was really worth, or more or less. In some places the custom prevailed of recording an amount one-third or one-fifth more than the value of the actual dowry; in others, less than the value of the dowry (Ishut 23:11 / Eben ha-‘Ezer, 66:11). This sum then became a claim upon the husband’s property equally with the ketubah itself; so that when he died or divorced her, the woman could collect from his estate both the sum stipulated in the marriage contract and the value of her dowry. During the husband’s life, however, the dowry belonged to him, and he might derive all benefits from it. He might even sell it for the period of his lifetime. The laws governing the relation of the husband to the dowry vary with the manner in which the woman has acquired that property.’

Jesus is going to imply this later, He basically is going to say, ‘husbands have to honour and respect the rights of their wives’. It shocked them in a society where women had no rights because they didn’t have to think about this. Hence why the disciples were shocked at Jesus’ teaching, **Matthew 19:10**.

The ‘sending away’ without the ‘certificate of divorce’ was also liked by the wives because it didn’t require any court case, you didn’t need to prove negligence or any other embarrassing details in public, and unless the wife had been unfaithful, she would get her marriage dowry back.

This was often enough to live on, or it would help her get a new husband. Remember Joseph didn’t want to go down the court road, to ‘divorce’ ‘apoluo’ ‘send away’, Mary ‘quietly’, i.e. without a public hearing, **Matthew 1:19**.

THE EXCEPTION CLAUSE

What about the exception clause? Jesus said anybody who ‘apoluo’, ‘puts away’ his wife, commits adultery. **Matthew 5:32 / Matthew 19:9**. Why? Because he entered into a relationship with someone else, but doesn’t have the legal right to do so. Now Jesus says that one can ‘put away’ his wife without the ‘apostasion’, without the ‘written certificate of divorce’, in the case of marital unfaithfulness.

Now, why would that be true? Why does ‘unchastity’, ‘sexual immorality’, N.I.V., ‘fornication’, K.J.V., become the ONLY reason that a man can ‘put away’ his wife without the legal, official written document of divorce? I believe that the answer to that is very simple.

But to understand it, there is something of vital importance that we must remember. What Jesus is saying is written to a society that was governed and controlled by the Law of Moses. What could be done and would be accepted practice in Jesus’ day could never be done in our own culture.

THE DEATH PENALTY

Now under the Law of Moses, the penalty for adultery, for marital unfaithfulness, was death, **Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25**. Now, quite obviously, if a man ‘puts away’ his wife because of marital unfaithfulness, legally, she is to die.

Therefore, you DO NOT NEED an ‘apostasion’, ‘certificate of divorce’. You DO NOT NEED to divorce if your wife is stoned to death, just like if your wife were to die naturally, you would be free, **1 Corinthians 7:39**.

So, whether that death comes by natural causes or whether that death comes by a violation of the Law of Moses and the penalty is death, the man is free and wouldn’t need the ‘apostasion’.

But Jesus says, ‘I tell you if anyone puts away his wife, commits adultery,’ **Matthew 5:32 / Matthew 19:9 / Mark 10:11**, he puts her away without the ‘apostasion’, except for marital unfaithfulness, of course. Because then the woman comes under the penalty of death.

Now God’s original law was that a man marries a woman, and if that woman committed adultery, then that woman would be stoned to death, and the man would be free to marry again.

By the time Jesus came on the scene, they weren’t practising the stoning to death of people who committed ‘porneia’ or ‘marital unfaithfulness’, or ‘fornication’, and it appears they only wanted to stone someone when it suited their own evil purposes, **John 8:11 / John 8:48-49**.

The Romans had come in and taken over that facet of the law in the first century in Palestine and had taken away from them the right of the death penalty. That’s why the Jews had to take Jesus to Pilate to get Him officially condemned and executed, **John 18:28-38**.

Now, of course, there were some riot acts in the New Testament. Stephen was stoned to death, but that was the result of a riot, **Acts 7:54-58**, but it wasn’t a legal action.

Paul was arrested in the temple, and they were going to kill him, **Acts 21:27-40**, but again, that was a riot, that wasn’t formal legal action. The Romans had taken away from the Jews the right of formal, legal execution for any crime.

Jesus is talking about the Law of Moses. The Pharisees said, what about Moses? Moses commanded it, **Matthew 19:7-9 / Mark 10:3**. Jesus is saying that if they’re going to enter into a relationship with somebody other than the person that God intended for them to marry. They already have a relationship with a person that God expects them to honour.

If their mate is unfaithful to them, if they break this vow, the intimacy of this covenant, then, as far as the Law of Moses is concerned, technically, they are dead. Therefore, they don’t need an ‘apostasion’ because they have dissolved the relationship by virtue of their action; they have violated the covenant.

If you think about it, dead people can’t marry, dead people don’t marry, and here the guilty party, in the sight of God, is technically dead. That’s why God doesn’t give them the freedom to remarry; it’s a part of their penalty for having transgressed the marital covenant.

In that culture, in that day, Jesus says to a man, ‘If their wife is unfaithful to them, technically, she is dead, and you can remarry in that case’. But, if she isn’t unfaithful to them, then they have no right to ‘put her away’. They’ve entered into a covenant with her, they’ve entered into a contract with her, and they are to honour that.

If they ‘put her away’ without officially dissolving it, without going through legal channels, just like there must be legal channels to have a marriage, there must be legal channels to dissolve that marriage.

If they don’t go through the legal channels, if they don’t protect the rights of a woman, if they don’t see that her needs are met and give the legal document, ‘a certificate of divorce’, that proclaims to others that she is free of this marriage bond and is free to marry someone else if they just ‘put her away’, they’re committing adultery, that’s what He says in **Matthew 19**.

In **Matthew 5:32** and **Mark 10:12**, Jesus said that when the man who marries the woman who was ‘put away’ and the woman who is ‘put away’ remarries, they commit adultery because they aren’t in a legal, official situation where they are free to contract new relationships.

They thought they could just go ahead and ‘put away’ their wives for any old reason, but Jesus says, if they’re going to ‘put away’ their wives, they better make it legal. They’d better give her a ‘certificate of divorce’.

Otherwise, whenever any of them marry again, they will be committing adultery, and they know what the penalty is for that, stoning to death, **Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25**.

TWO DIFFERENT WORDS WITH TWO DIFFERENT ACTIONS

No one would ever argue when Jesus said, ‘you must believe AND be baptised to be saved,’ **Mark 16:16**, that Jesus meant the same thing and the same word was used for both. They are two different words which imply two different actions.

When we understand that there are two different words used, ‘certificate of divorce’, ‘apostasion’ and ‘putting away’, ‘apoluo’, which imply two different actions.

I believe we can see that the issue Jesus was addressing wasn’t about divorce but about how they were sending their wives away. They were sending their wives away without the certificate of divorce; this meant the divorce wasn’t legal, and they were still legally married.

Notice the word, and’ in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4** / **Jeremiah 3:8** / **Matthew 19:7**. This is what Jesus emphasised when He said, ‘It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE.’ **Matthew 5:31**.

If the ‘sending away’ and ‘divorce’ were two separate words used in the Old Testament, what makes the same Greek equivalent words in the New Testament, ‘sending away’ and ‘divorce’, mean the same? They don’t mean the same because they are two separate words with two separate actions implied.

The point is that the Jews had to do both; they had to give their wives the divorce certificate and then send them away. That’s what Moses said in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, and that’s what God did with Israel, **Jeremiah 3:8**.

In other words, just as there was a legal way to get married, there was also a legal way to get divorced. They were just sending their wives away without making it legal, and this is what Jesus was emphasising. Jesus was doing what Moses was doing, protecting the rights of vulnerable women.

DIGGING DEEPER

Let’s go ahead and have a deeper look at all these passages mentioned above to emphasise the point further and try to answer some questions. Let’s turn to **Matthew 19** and **Mark 10**, that’s where we want to start and begin to set the stage.

MOTIVES BEHIND THE QUESTION

1. Let’s look at the attack.

There’s an attack made here on the Lord Jesus. ‘Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him,’ **Matthew 19:3** / **Mark 10:2**. They didn’t come because they were looking for honest answers; they didn’t come because they had some serious questions about marriage, divorce and remarriage.

They came because they wanted to test Jesus, they wanted to attack what He was teaching, and they had two underlying motives in doing that. One of them was to ‘discredit’ Jesus so that He would lose popularity; they see Jesus as a threat.

Here is a rabbi who has no official training. He hasn't been to any seminars, and He doesn't have a certificate. He's not a qualified, certified rabbi, and yet He has a tremendous following.

That concerns the establishment, so they are seeking to discredit Jesus, to try to get him to say something that would cause Him to lose favour with the populace, so they would stop following Him. So, they are seeking to discredit Him.

2. They are seeking to 'destroy' Jesus.

They are trying not only to get Him to lose favour with the people, but they are trying to get rid of Him. So those are their underlying motivations; they aren't honest in the pursuit of the question that they raised. We have to remember that as we listen to what Jesus has to say to these men.

The Pharisees did have a particular view of divorce; divorce was a volatile issue in the first century, even as it is today. That was very common, very widespread, even among the Jewish people, but there were a lot of disputes over divorce and what would be satisfactory and what wouldn't be satisfactory to God.

SHAMMAI AND HILLEL

Just before Jesus was born, there were two rabbis living who became the most influential rabbis of the day; their names were Shammai and Hillel. Pretty much in the first century, in the time of Jesus, people lined up behind Shammai or Hillel on any given issue. It's kind of like in some churches today, you are either conservative or liberal.

You're either with Hillel or Shammai, one or the other. Who do you stand behind? Fundamentally, what these Pharisees are asking Jesus is, 'Okay, buddy, who do you line up behind?' We can see how they put the people behind them because some will be with Shammai, and some will be with Hillel.

Shammai was the conservative one. Let's read a section from the Mishnah, which is the collection of the oral traditions of the Jews, the oral law that you hear so much about.

A couple of hundred years after the time of Jesus, one of the rabbis realised that they were forgetting all this accumulation of oral knowledge, all the oral laws that the people were expected to keep. Because Jerusalem had been destroyed in 70 A.D. and the centre of Judaism had been destroyed, so they began to write it down.

'The School of Shammai says a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, because he has found in her indecency in anything.' Giteen, chapter 9, section 10. And the School of Hillel says, 'He may divorce her even if she spoils a dish for him, for it is written that he has found indecency in anything'. Rabbi Akebah says, 'even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written if she has found no favour in his eyes.'

This is a discussion these rabbis had based on **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, and we will get to that later, but the point is that Hillel and Shammai had two opposing points of view. They also mentioned Rabbi Akebah, who doesn't live until after 100 A.D., so what he said doesn't bear on the discussion here.

Rabbi Shammai says, 'The only reason for divorce is if you find unchastity, if there is marital unfaithfulness on behalf of your partner. If you find sexual infidelity on behalf of your marriage partner, then you may divorce.'

Hillel, on the other hand, said, 'No, it says in **Deuteronomy 24**, if you find indecency in her in anything.' You notice the text said, 'she had prepared a dish that he didn't like. Oh, dear, you scrambled these eggs. I wanted them fried, divorce her!'

In other places, it's said that Hillel said, 'if she talked to a man in the street, that was a legitimate reason for divorcing her'. 'If she turned around too quickly so that her legs became exposed, that was a reason for divorcing her'. 'If you didn't like your in-laws, good enough reason, divorce her.'

Hillel has a much more generous interpretation of what the Old Testament said about the basis for divorce. So, people of the first century were lining up behind one or the other, and the Pharisees came to test Jesus, to find out with whom he stood, Shammai or Hillel, and in so doing, they could turn the people against him.

After all, the majority of the people followed Hillel, who had the liberal interpretation that any old reason you could think up was an adequate reason for divorce.

Now they have already heard Jesus address the subject of divorce and remarriage before, in **Matthew 5:31-32**, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made a statement about it.

They have already heard about this; that's why they can come up with this test question, because they know Jesus has taken a conservative approach, and they can turn the majority of the population against Him. Remember, that is their motivation.

We need to see what it was that Jesus said back in the Sermon on the Mount that became the basis of what the Pharisees are going to use against Him or try to use against Him. When you read **Matthew 5:31-32**, ask yourself, which of those two rabbis does that sound like? Sounds like Shammai, doesn't it?

DO THE TWO WORDS MEAN THE SAME?

I think it is important to understand the distinction that I believe existed in the first century. The N.I.V. follows many other translations in using the word 'divorce', which I believe is a mistranslation and leads to an erroneous conclusion.

Remember what we learned earlier: there are two distinct words used in the Bible that we need to be familiar with. In the Old Testament, there is the word 'shalach' and it means, 'to send away, to drive away, to drive out'. We saw that its corresponding word in the New Testament would be the word 'apoluo' which means to let loose, to set free, to send away, to drive out.

The other word we looked at earlier in the Old Testament is the word 'keriythuwth' which means, 'a divorcement'. We saw that its corresponding word in the New Testament will be 'apostasion'.

Now, here we have 'send away' or 'put away' for the first word I mentioned, 'shalach' or 'apoluo'. The second one, 'apostasion' means 'divorcement'. What happens is that these two words, both Old and New Testament words, become sort of blended, and we accept them as meaning one and the same thing.

Part of the problem comes from the fact that if we were to read all of the passages in the New Testament that deal with divorce and remarriage, and we found the parallel passages, the ones that read the same, as just one test, we would find that Jesus uses the word 'apoluo' ten or eleven times.

The King James Version translates it every time when it is 'apoluo' as 'put away' with the exception of one time. Here in **Matthew 5:32**, the word occurs twice and the second time they translate it as 'divorce'. Every time the word 'apostasion' occurs in the New Testament, it will be rendered 'divorce'. Now there is a difference; they aren't the same.

In the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, there is only one divorce recorded. Did you know that? For all we have talked about it, for all the instruction in the Bible, in the word of God, there is only ONE divorce recorded. Do you know who it is?

In **Jeremiah 3:8**, God says, 'I have divorced Israel,' which is the only time. You have information about divorcing and remarrying, but that is the only time that we know of in Scripture when somebody divorced somebody, when God says, 'I divorced Israel.' In **Jeremiah 3:8**, it's the word 'keriythuwth', the word that in the New Testament is rendered 'apostasion'.

But we know from reading the Old Testament, for example, that men put away their wives. Men had more than one wife, and David had several wives. Abraham is another example, he was married to Hagar as well as Sarah, **Genesis 16:3**. Now look at what he did, 'he sent her away', **Genesis 21:14**. She was still married to him, technically, but he didn't fulfil any husbandly responsibilities to her.

What we have in effect then is that our word 'apoluo', which means 'to send away' or 'put away', becomes 'practical divorce.' But 'apostasion', which literally means 'a bill of divorcement', becomes 'legal divorce', and this is an important distinction.

We need to see this in Scripture. There were men who were putting away their wives and marrying somebody else, but they never gave their wives a legal divorce; therefore, she had no legal right to marry again.

In each instance, with one exception, **Matthew 5:31-32**, the word is 'apoluo' or 'to put away', or maybe we would say 'abandon' on some occasions. A man abandons his wife and then goes out and marries somebody else. What would we call that? Bigamy, right?

He technically, legally has two wives. Jesus says, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce,' **Matthew 5:31**. Now, see what I'm saying? Here were men who were putting away their wives, not legally, they weren't finalising it. They didn't go to court; they didn't give her the written certificate that legally sets her free. Jesus says, 'Anyone who puts away his wife must finalise that process. He must give her a certificate of 'apostasion', a certificate of divorcement. I tell you, anyone who puts away his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery.

And anyone who marries a woman who has been put away commits adultery.' **Matthew 5:32 / Matthew 19:9**. Why? Because it hasn't been legalised, the man put her away; he sent her out. He didn't want anything else to do with her. Why didn't he want to legalise it?

As we noted earlier, he might have to pay dowry. It's just easier to put her on the back shelf and not have anything to do with her and marry someone else he liked more. Polygamy in the Old Testament is a big problem; even in the first century, there is evidence of polygamy.

Jesus understood that there were practising practical divorce, but if they are going to practically divorce somebody, they better legally divorce their wives. Because if they marry somebody who has been practically divorced, but not legally divorced, they are committing adultery.

It's not just a matter of divorce; it's a matter of whether this thing has been made official or not. I believe that this is an important distinction to make between these two words.

They were proclaiming that they don't commit adultery, but Jesus tells them that they are propagating adultery all over the land, **Matthew 5:27-28**. Do you know how you do it? They put away their wives without giving her a bill of divorcement, they put her away without making it official, and then they go out and marry someone else.

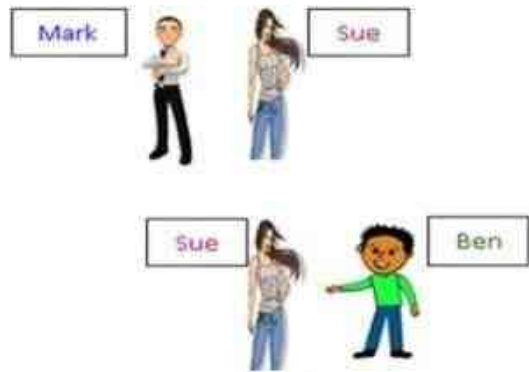
They needed to know that when they marry someone else without officially having separated from their first wife, they commit adultery, and anybody who marries her, who has been put away without having been officially separated

with a bill of divorcement, commits adultery. Because they would now have two legally binding marriages for one person, and that's wrong. That's what He is talking about, Jesus uses a different word.

IS DIVORCE SINFUL?

Or is it the sending away without the divorce papers? If a couple divorces for adultery reasons and the 'guilty' party then remarries, do they have to leave their new wife and return to their former wife? **Matthew 5:31-32** / **Matthew 19:9**.

A simple diagram may help us out here.



Here we have a man, let's call him Mark and a woman, let's call her Sue.

Right here in this chapter, Jesus says if this woman, Sue, is sent away and she marries another man, let's call him Ben, the result is adultery. Why? Because she was abandoned or sent away, and she wasn't given a bill of divorcement. It's not legal.

Another diagram may be useful.



Now, we would assume also that if Mark, then, marries a woman who we will call Beth, the same thing would be true, but that's an assumption that would be adultery, based on this verse because Jesus doesn't say that in **Matthew 5:31-32**, or **Matthew 19:9**. We'll get to that later, but here in **Matthew 5:31-32**, and **Matthew 19:9**, He doesn't say that Mark and Sue is a case of adultery.

This position that we just looked at here in **Matthew 5:31-32** and **Matthew 19:9**, is a teaching that Jesus made, you can't put your wife away unless it was for marital unfaithfulness.

That sounds a whole lot like what Shammai said; it's very unpopular, and that spread like wildfire. The Pharisees heard that back in **Matthew 5**, and they came to Jesus in **Matthew 19**, knowing they could use this teaching to turn the people against Him.

One time, John the Baptist had something to say about divorce and remarriage, and it cost him his head, **Matthew 14:3-4**. It's here that we see the Pharisees thinking that they could probably do the same thing with Jesus. They thought they could get people turned against Him if they could just test Him and expose Him and get Him to make a commitment on this thing.

JESUS' RESPONSE

They have come with the question, 'Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife 'apoluo' for any old reason?' Can he send her away? **Matthew 19:3** / **Mark 10:2**. And Jesus responds to their question.

Jesus, in making His defence, goes back beyond Himself, He goes back beyond Hillel and Shammai, He goes back beyond Moses, and He goes all the way back to the creation, **Matthew 19:4-6 / Mark 10:6-9**. And he's going to make four points of defence as to why you shouldn't put away your wife.

All they bothered about was divorce, divorce, divorce; they were always talking about divorce. Why and how can they get a divorce? Jesus tells them that God didn't even think about divorce when He made man and woman.

And we can imagine Him thinking to Himself, why don't they talk about permanency? Why don't they talk about what they can do to keep this thing together? Why are they always talking about why and how we can put her away?

FOUR REASONS

These are the four reasons that Jesus gives why they shouldn't even be concerned about this issue.

1. Because in the Genesis account, there was one man for one woman.

Jesus was very clear. In the Garden in Eden, God didn't create Adam and Eve and Ethel. He didn't say, try it with Eve, and if that doesn't work, try it with Ethel.

If Adam had put away Eve for any old reason, if he had said, 'You ate from the tree, I'm going to put you away,' the Bible would have ended on page two; that would be the end of it. One man created for one woman, that was God's original design.

2. He says that there is a strong bond made.

He says, 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,' **Genesis 2:24 / Matthew 19:5 / Mark 10:7**. A strong bond, the word for 'united' means to be stuck fast, to be glued to, it's a bond that is being made.

The Jews were always talking about ways to break the bond. They should have been talking about how strong the bond is to stay together. Here again, we are talking about the ideal.

We talked about the permitted; we'll talk about the exceptions later, but right now, Jesus is calling these Jews back to a discussion of the ideal. There will be a uniting of husband and wife, a strong bond.

3. He said, 'They will become one flesh', **Genesis 2:24 / Matthew 19:5 / Mark 10:8**.

In the sight of God, there formerly were two personalities, but Jesus says in marriage, those two become one. One is the indivisible number; if you divide it, you get a half, and that's not a number. One is a whole number; it's the first whole number, you can't get any less than that.

Jesus says that when God made Adam and Eve, He made them to be one. For that reason, you shouldn't try to break that bond because you end up with something less than a whole person in the sight of God; that's the way God meant it.

4. The last reason that Jesus gives is that this whole marriage business is the work of God.

Notice, He says, 'therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate,' **Genesis 2:24 / Matthew 19:5 / Mark 10:9**. It's not just some registrar official, it's not just something that a minister does, it's not even a decision that you make.

In the final analysis, when a marriage takes place, that marriage is the work of God; in the mind of God, they are one. In the mind of God, that oneness should not be broken; God intends for that oneness to be formed and to stay oneness.

It is the work of God, and to divorce is to wreck the work of God without His permission. He is the one who bound them together; if He wants to set them free, He sets the rules for setting them free. He does it. The Jews want to talk about divorce, practical divorce, but Jesus won't let them get away with that. Jesus talks about marriage.

He goes all the way back to the beginning to stress the permanency of this relationship. All they talked about was reasons to divorce, instead of speaking about reasons to stay together. Jesus refuses to deal with the issue that they want to deal with.

WHEN IS A MARRIAGE A MARRIAGE?

I think it is important to ask the question when a marriage is a marriage because there seems to be a lot of confusion on this. What makes a marriage? How do I know that a marriage has taken place?

There is a point of view that says, 'when a man and a woman have a sexual relationship, at that point, they are married'. Because people believe that, then they say that if a single man out there goes to bed with a single girl in the sight of God, they are married because they had sex, and sex makes a marriage.

If that were true, you couldn't have 'fornication'. You could have a marriage, but you couldn't have 'fornication'. The Bible does recognise fornication; it does recognise sexual activity outside the marriage relationship that God says is illegal. If simply having sex made one married, God would talk about marriages, but He wouldn't talk about fornication, so the Bible does recognise it.

More evidence comes from Exodus in the giving of the law to Moses. **Exodus 22:16-17** says if a man finds a woman who isn't even engaged to be married and he sleeps with her, he has a moral obligation to go to her dad, pay the bride price and marry her.

If her father says, 'No way! We don't want to be hooked up with your family. You still have to pay the bride price because you've dishonoured her, but no wedding takes place.'

We must remember that it's not just a daughter marrying a man; it was the union of two families back then. This man couldn't turn him down if the marriage had already taken place automatically because of the sex act. That gives me evidence that marriage isn't made by sexual activity.

Furthermore, adultery doesn't dissolve a marriage. Some people think that if they're married and their husband or wife goes out and sleeps with someone else, that means the marriage has ended.

That's not the case; it may give the innocent party freedom to divorce, but that doesn't mandate it, nor does it automatically end a marriage. It's important to recognise that.

In **Malachi 2:14-16**, we find that the Israelite men had been adulterers, but they still had the wives of their youth. God calls on them to be faithful to the wives of their youth. If adultery destroyed marriage, they would not have the wives of their youth anymore. God says you need to be faithful to your wives.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A MARRIAGE?

In the Old Testament and the New Testament, and even today, marriage is constituted by the covenant. Marriage is the coming together of two people who pledge a lifelong commitment to each other. God says, ‘Remember the wife of your youth with whom you entered into a covenant,’ **Malachi 2:14**.

It’s the entering into a covenant; it’s the intentional choice to blend your life with hers. Whatever that covenant is will vary from culture to culture. In some countries, there are different things that you do.

Maybe you take a pig and give it to the girl’s father, so he’ll give you the girl and a written contract is made, and it’s official. In other cultures, you can buy a wife; that’s a part of a covenant.

Whatever it is, when you meet those agreements, then in the sight of God and in the sight of the law of the land, you are married; you have intentionally entered into that arrangement. Jesus says that marriage should be viewed as permanent, that’s the way God intended it, that’s the ideal.

THE IDEAL

What happens if we don’t measure up to the ideal? What happens when there is a failure? What does God say about that? What are we to do? The Pharisees come to Jesus, and they ask him, ‘Is it lawful to ‘apoluo,’ is it lawful to put away your wife for any and every reason?’ **Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:3**. After all, that was the practice in their culture. We know from the Talmud that polygamy was exceptionally widespread among the Jews in the first century; it was being practised. The Talmud is very clear that it was expected of a rabbi that he have only one wife. The high priest, specifically stated in the Talmud, ‘a man could only have one wife, but the average person could have more than one’.

So, polygamy was practised; a man would find something he didn’t like about a wife and become displeased with her, so he would simply send her back to her father. There would be no legal divorce, and, in that culture, he could do that.

In our British culture, that can’t be done, there are specific legal specifications that must be met for a divorce to be recognised in this culture and for remarriage to take place without there being bigamy or polygamy. But, not so in Jesus’ time.

In Biblical days, a man could simply send his wife away; he could stop meeting her emotional needs, her sexual needs, her financial needs; he could send her back to her home and go out and contract a new marriage, and it really didn’t matter.

So, ‘apoluo’ became ‘practical divorce’, while ‘apostasion’ was ‘legal, official divorce’. Jesus had commented on this back in **Matthew 5**. ‘It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce ‘apostasion,’ **Matthew 5:31**.

Jesus was saying, ‘anyone who divorces his wife, ‘apoluo’ except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced ‘apoluo’ woman commits adultery,’ **Matthew 5:32**.

How does He do that? Because he hasn’t given her the ‘apostasion’, he hasn’t given her a ‘legal certificate of divorce’ and anybody who marries that woman who has been put away, who didn’t get the legal divorce, who didn’t have that ‘written bill of divorcement’ in her hand, anyone who would marry her also commits adultery because he’s forming a relationship with a woman who, in the eyes of God and, technically, in the laws of the land, is still married to someone else.

The Pharisees heard that Jesus took a very conservative point of view, so they came here in **Matthew 19:3 / Mark 10:2**, on the attack. They are looking to discredit Jesus; they are looking perhaps to destroy Him, to turn the masses against Him and perhaps to use His teaching against Him, as John the Baptist found his teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the situation with King Herod to work against him.

Jesus gives a reply, which we read in **Matthew 19:4-6 / Mark 10:8-9**, where Jesus goes back beyond their culture, back beyond the Law of Moses, back to the creation. They were always looking for loopholes; they were always looking for ways to get around things.

But God has a design, and that design is permanency in marriage. They were always looking for ways to break things. They always wanted to know how they could put their wives away for any and every cause, but God said they should stick together with their wives; they ought to be united as one, be one flesh in the sight of God.

THEIR ARGUMENT

The Pharisees began to press Jesus, and they came up with an argument. Their question to Jesus is, ‘What does the Law of Moses say?’ **Matthew 19:7 / Mark 10:4**. Why did Moses command us to give our wives a certificate of ‘apostasion’ and then send her away?

Jesus had been teaching that permanency in marriage is the most important thing. They ask, why did Moses talk about divorce? Why did he talk about this certificate, this legal, official thing of divorce?

Jesus will have an answer for this argument in just a moment, but let’s think about what’s behind the words of the Pharisees. The Pharisees didn’t practice divorce; rabbis were discouraged, as I mentioned earlier, but as a general rule, people in the first century, including the Pharisees, did practice the putting away of their wives.

Their rationale was based on **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. That is the only place in the Law of Moses that speaks of divorce. Let’s go for a moment to **Deuteronomy 24** and find out what Moses said.

MISTRANSLATION

There is a great misunderstanding; the Pharisees misunderstood it, and that misunderstanding continues even today. If you have the King James translation of the Bible, you will find that it has a mistranslation. In fact, its mistranslation is so bad that it leads to a misunderstanding of the passage altogether.

Now, the problem here comes in the fact that the word ‘then’, which occurs in **Deuteronomy 24:1**, in the King James translation, doesn’t occur in the Hebrew text.

The word ‘then’ draws a conclusion, and it makes it sound like Moses is saying, ‘If a man marries and finds something that he doesn’t like about his wife, THEN let him divorce her’. But a point of fact is that it isn’t what Moses said; the word ‘then’ doesn’t occur in the text until **Deuteronomy 24:4**.

In the New International Version, the New American Standard Version, and perhaps in others, it’s correctly translated in **Deuteronomy 24:1**. So, if you aren’t using the N.I.V. or the N.A.S.V. or a translation that has correctly translated this passage, read these four verses very carefully together. Moses is speaking to the people. In fact, this is the only place where he gives them insight into this situation of divorce and remarriage.

Now, notice the King James Version has this saying, ‘If a man marries and if he becomes displeased with his wife, THEN let him give her a bill of divorcement’, but that’s not what Moses said. **Deuteronomy 24:1-2** is written without any comment, without any editorialising, without any approval or disapproval.

Moses simply says, ‘If a man marries, if he becomes displeased with that wife, if he gives her a certificate of divorce (Moses didn’t say whether that was right or wrong, he simply said if he does that), if she goes out and marries husband number two and if husband number two divorces her or if husband number two dies, THEN, (here is the conclusion). God said that a woman cannot go back to her first husband; she cannot remarry her original mate, it’s an impossibility. Moses goes on to say it is an abomination in the sight of God. So, Moses didn’t command a ‘bill of divorce’.

He simply assumed that a ‘bill of divorce’ was being given. If it were given, if the woman were legally divorced and she goes out and marries again, then she cannot under any circumstances ever go back to her first husband. God said that it is morally objectionable to Him; it’s an abomination in His sight.

WHAT DOES UNCLEANLINESS MEAN?

But what does ‘uncleanness’ mean as the King James renders this? What does ‘indecent’ mean in **Deuteronomy 24:1** as the N.I.V. has it? It’s the Hebrew word, ‘ervah’, and that’s really where the Pharisees got hung up, they tried to figure out, what is this ‘indecent’ that allows him to give her a bill of divorce and send her away so he can marry someone else.

Again, the debate between Hillel and Shammai comes in here. Shammai took a very conservative point of view; he believed it was fornication or adultery. Hillel, on the other hand, took a much more liberal view; if he finds any uncleanness in her, any indecent in her, then he may put her away.

Hillel said that indecent could be something like talking to men in public, spinning around so that her legs could be seen when she was out in public, or maybe cooking a meal that he didn’t like, maybe she scrambled his eggs when he wanted them fried, anything about her that she did, whether it was actions, appearance, attitude, if it displeased the husband, Hillel said that was enough justification to get rid of her. He said you can put her away, you can give her a bill of divorcement and send her out.

Well, what is this uncleanness? What did Moses have in mind? I’m not exactly sure, and to be honest, nobody knows; nobody is positive. The Pharisees debated it, and we debate it today.

However, there is something very interesting back in **Deuteronomy 23**, just prior to what Moses said here in **Deuteronomy 24**. It’s interesting because we find this same Hebrew word used, ‘ervah’, in **Deuteronomy 23:14**. The word ‘indecent’ is the same word that is used in **Deuteronomy 24:1**. In **Deuteronomy 23**, in context, it’s a reference to human excrement. God says that He is going to come down and walk in the camp of the Israelites, and He doesn’t want to be stepping into that. When they go out, He wants them to dig a hole, relieve themselves and cover it over. He doesn’t want to see that indecent.

Moses now says, ‘Now if a man marries a wife and he finds some indecent in her (something shameful, something vile, something corrupt, something that is a tremendous embarrassment to the husband) and he writes her a bill of divorcement and sends her away.’ **Deuteronomy 24:1**. N.I.V.

Even Moses doesn’t pretend that it’s a light-hearted matter; it’s something vilely immoral to the man, something terribly offensive. But may I say, with all confidence, that it’s not adultery.

Shammai contended that it was adultery. I don't believe it is for the simple reason that in **Deuteronomy 22**, two chapters earlier, God said that the penalty for adultery is death, not divorce, **Deuteronomy 22:22-24**.

If a husband found some indecency in his wife and God meant by that, indecency in adultery, the solution wouldn't be divorce under the Law of Moses; it would be death.

This implies the indecency must be something short of adultery, something short of marital unfaithfulness. Whatever it is, it was something vile and terribly offensive to the husband.

Moses says if a man marries and his wife does something horrendously vile, offensive, and embarrassing to him, and if he gives her a bill of divorce and sends her away and if she marries somebody else, then he never, never, never can remarry that woman again.

No matter if he comes to forgive her and love her and wants to return to her, God says that it would be an abomination in His sight. Now that's what is behind what the Pharisees had to say when they started talking about Moses commanding them to write a certificate of divorce.

JESUS' ANSWER TO THEIR ARGUMENT

Remember, we are talking about 'apoluo', putting away a wife without giving her an official, legal certificate of divorce. They want to know, can we put them away for any reason?

The Pharisees are thinking, if God is so interested in permanency in marriage, why did Moses command us to divorce our wives? **Matthew 19:8-9 / Mark 10:5 / Mark 10:11-12**.

Notice what Jesus says in **Matthew 19:8**. Jesus is going to tell them that Moses 'allowed' it, Moses never 'commanded' it. You will not find anywhere, not even in **Deuteronomy 24**, nor anywhere in all the Law of Moses, where Moses commanded people to divorce. In **Matthew 19:8**, Jesus replied, 'Moses ALLOWED you to divorce.' In **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, Moses assumes that was what was happening, that there already was a certificate of divorce, but Moses didn't command it. Moses did recognise it, though, he did allow it.

Jesus said, 'Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard,' **Matthew 19:8 / Mark 10:5**. In other words, they wouldn't consent to live with the same woman; they wouldn't consent to honour God's arrangement in the marital relationship.

It's the hardness of their heart that kept God from forcing the ideal on them, so there is the ideal of permanency, but then, there is the divorce, which is 'allowed'.

God did tolerate them putting away their wives with a legal certificate of divorce and then marrying someone else. But, Jesus said, 'it was not this way from the beginning', **Matthew 19:8 / Mark 10:6**. God didn't tell Adam, if you don't like Eve, then give her a bill of divorcement.

From the beginning, God's intent was for permanency, but as through sin men became corrupt, as men became hardened and rebellious, as they were determined not to honour the ways of God, God gave them the arrangement of divorce, that is, He 'allowed' it, permitted it. It wasn't His pleasure, and it didn't please Him. It wasn't what He really wanted, it wasn't the ideal, but God did recognise divorce, He did allow it.

Notice carefully what Jesus says. Anyone who puts away his wife has committed adultery, **Matthew 19:9 / Mark 10:11**. Why is he putting her away? Possibly because he wants to marry someone else, yet he doesn't have the right in the eyes of God to marry that other person because he hasn't given his first wife the certificate of divorce, 'apostasion'. He hasn't taken care of her.

They didn't want to return the dowries their wives were given by their fathers. The certificate of divorce was going to cost them. It was much easier to just abandon them, to put them away and allow them to go back to their home or fend for themselves and to ignore them.

If they ever gave them the certificate of divorce, then they had some obligations; they had to provide for their wives and children's needs if they sent them away, but this was their loophole; they put them away without the official divorce.

THE DISCIPLES REACTION

The very thought that what Jesus was saying brings the disciples to a very surprising conclusion; it shocks them, **Matthew 19:10**. Is it possible that a person who has a 'bill of divorcement' is really free to marry again? Now, traditionally, some have said, 'No!'

The only reason you could divorce your wife, or your husband, was because of 'marital unfaithfulness'. That doesn't seem to be what Jesus is saying, Jesus, is saying if they 'put them away', they must make it an official divorce for them to be able to marry again.

It seems to me that if our traditional position is the correct one, then we have jeopardised the integrity of God because God is the only one in all of the Bible who is ever said to have divorced someone and given them a bill of divorcement. Israel had chased after pagan gods, they had chased after false gods, and they had entered into a covenant with God.

They said, you'll be our God, we'll be your people, but they opposed that, not just once, but many, many times. They were unfaithful to God, and so God said, 'I gave them a certificate of divorce,' **Jeremiah 3:8**. When he sent her away then, he had the freedom to marry another.

The bride of Christ today is the church, but if divorce is wrong, if giving a certificate of divorce and marrying someone else is wrong, then we have jeopardised God, it would appear to me, because God Himself is the only illustration in Scripture of anybody who divorced.

He didn't do it just one adultery, He did it for many adulteries, **Jeremiah 3:8**, many, many occasions. He held on as long as He could with the people, but they wouldn't come around. This again is about the hardness of the people's hearts, their inability, and their lack of desire to be loyal and faithful to God.

We saw earlier, **Matthew 19:1-9 / Mark 10:1-12**, that Jesus uses two different words in the text, one word that could properly be translated as 'putting away', which is 'apoluo', meaning 'to send away' or 'to abandon'. Then he uses the word 'apostasion', which is the legal document, certificate of divorce, granting a divorce.

On the basis of the fact that there are two different words used to describe two different actions, the distinction should be maintained. Jesus says, if they put their wives away if they don't make it legal and they go out and marry somebody else, they commit adultery because they have married a second person when they are still married to the first person.

Therein lies the problem. Back in **Matthew 5:31-32**, we saw the other side of the coin: if a man sends away his wife without granting divorce and she marries somebody else, then she commits adultery, and the man who marries her commits adultery because, legally, technically, she is still married to her first husband.

WHY WERE THE DISCIPLES SHOCKED?

All of this raises a question on the part of the disciples; they are in absolute shock in **Matthew 19:10**. What is it that shocks the disciples when Jesus says to them, ‘you can’t just send your wife away’? There has to be a legal procedure before you are free to marry someone else.

If there is a legal divorce, then the husband would be required to return the dowry his wife was given by her father. Jesus is saying they have to honour and respect the rights of their wife, **Exodus 21:10**.

It shocked them in a society where women had no rights because they didn’t have to think of that. They could just send their wives away for any old cause as far as they were concerned.

Now Jesus says, no, they can’t do that; they have to respect their wives. They have taken her into their home, they have married her, and they can’t just dismiss her.

If they’re not going to live with her, they must give her an official, legal divorce, whatever that might cost them, whatever they have to struggle with, whatever consequence that brings into their lives, they have to respect their wife as a woman and meet her needs and meet her rights and legally set her free so she can marry someone else without incurring the charge of adultery.

I think there is something else here that shocks the disciples. Jesus says, if they send away their wife without giving her a legal divorce and they marry somebody else, they commit adultery.

What does the Law of Moses say about committing adultery? The disciples realise what Jesus was saying: death is the penalty for adultery! **Leviticus 20:10 / Deuteronomy 22:22-25**. They realise that if that’s the situation between a husband and wife, it’s better not to marry.

When we read **Matthew 19:11-12**, we must bear in mind that Jesus isn’t talking here about the person who has never been asked to be married. Nor is He talking about the person who asked someone to marry them but was turned down when He talks about singleness here. He’s talking about people who are single for three different reasons.

1. Congenital.

They were born that way; their sexual organs were dysfunctional, so they have no sexual drive. They have no real need to be married to satisfy that desire, so they don’t get married. Jesus says some people are born that way.

2. Castration.

They were made that way by men; kings in ancient society used to do that a lot. They had their harems, and they didn’t want the man in charge of the Harem messing around with the women, so they castrated them so they would lose sexual desire, and they could do their business without being attracted to the women.

3. Commitment to God.

They want to serve the kingdom of God without being tied down to a wife and the responsibilities and time commitment that would take. So, by choice, they remained single. Jesus said, ‘not everybody can accept that’, **Matthew 19:11**.

God designed man to be married, but when a man marries, here are the requirements that Jesus says he must meet. He cannot dismiss his wife for any old reason in the book and go out and marry someone else.

If they dismiss their wife, they must give her a certificate of divorce. If they don’t legally divorce her, they commit adultery when they remarry; she commits adultery when she marries, and the one who marries her commits adultery because they have never legally been divorced.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PUTTING AWAY AND DIVORCE

If this distinction stands up between ‘putting away’ and ‘divorce’, then the only conclusion that I can come to is that God has NO regulations about reasons for divorce.

Jesus is saying, if they put their wives away, they better give them the ‘apostasion’, they better make it legal, so she can have the certificate and show anybody else that she has the right to marry again.

If they put their wives away, if there is separation, if there is abandonment, then they must give them the legal certificate of divorce, or they are going to incur adultery, and she will incur adultery when there is remarriage.

IS DIVORCE A SIN?

I think we can also come to the conclusion that Jesus doesn’t condemn ‘divorce’ as a sin. Many people teach that divorce is a sin, but the Bible doesn’t say that. Where does the problem come from in this text? Does it come in the divorce? No! It’s in the remarriage that the problem is; the problem comes in the remarriage. Jesus says they can’t remarry unless there has been an official divorce.

I’m sure some people will still ask, what about that passage in **Malachi 2:16**, in the Old Testament, where God says, ‘I hate divorce’? He said, ‘I hate shalach’, which we now know means ‘putting away’. I hate putting away, God says. Why? Because they hadn’t granted their wives the ‘apostasion’, they hadn’t given them the ‘keriythuwth’, they hadn’t given them the legal certificate.

God says He hates it when they just abandon their wives. He hates it when there is separation, and they don’t meet her financial needs, her emotional needs, her sexual needs, and her psychological needs.

They just put her on the shelf and forget about her. And she doesn’t have the right to go out and marry anybody else who will meet those needs. God says I hate that.

If the husband is going to separate from her and abandon her, give her a divorce, make it official, so she can remarry. God says, ‘I hate the putting away’, not I hate divorce.

Even if Jesus is talking about legal divorce all the way through, He says the problem comes when one divorces his wife and then marries another. The person who divorces and marries another commits adultery. Isn’t that what He said? However, by default, we could say if a person divorces and never remarries, they have not sinned in the sight of God; therefore, divorce is not a sin.

IMAGINE!

We know that there are women out there who are severely abused by their husbands; they beat them unmercifully. He’s not a Christian and has no desire to treat her right.

He has literally broken her bones at times while abusing her. And finally, after having struggled through all that and trying to make that marriage work for the sake of her own emotional and mental health, she divorces him.

Would God say to her, ‘That’s wrong, that is sin’! There are some who would say, ‘yes’, and some would say, she must stay with her husband, or if she does leave him, she can’t divorce him! I don’t believe for one moment that God penalises a person who is trying to do what is right.

Some suggest that a person who was married but got divorced, not for unfaithfulness or adultery, must go back to her original husband. This would go against what God said through Moses back in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**; this would be detestable in God’s eyes.

It’s really difficult speaking to anyone about divorce because we know that God wants permanency, but I believe that Jesus recognised that at times, sin enters into people’s marriages as it does into people’s lives.

Divorce is not what God wants; it’s less than ideal, but God allows it. God permits it, but to say that they aren’t free to marry again is reading into the text something which Jesus never said, **Matthew 5:31-32 / Matthew 19:9 / 1 Corinthians 4:6**.

CONCLUSION

I believe that the two words ‘apoluo’ and ‘apostasion’ mean different things and that Jesus is talking about ‘abandonment’ or ‘separation’ and remarriage without legal divorce from the first person. To do that means that one commits adultery when they form a second union to which they have no right because the first union still exists.

You see, slavery wasn’t what God wanted. He didn’t create slaves in the beginning, but He allowed it. He didn’t want a man to have more than one wife. He created Adam and Eve, and that’s all, but He did permit it, right?

Abraham had several wives, David had several wives, and Solomon had several wives. Others had several wives. God never came to David and said, ‘All right now, David, you have to give up all your wives except the first one that you married.’ He never said that, it wasn’t what He wanted, it wasn’t the ideal, but it was permitted. God never wanted divorce, but He did permit it.

Jesus spoke to people who were under the law of Moses, in a covenant relationship with God and as a part of that covenant, they had certain terms, certain conditions that they were to meet that flowed over into their marriage.

What about the Gentiles who weren’t under the Law of Moses, who didn’t have any special specifications laid out? Does God have any directions for them? I believe He does, and Paul addresses those questions in **1 Corinthians 7**. In **Matthew 5:21-32 / Matthew 19:1-9 / Mark 10:2-12**, Jesus deals with the problem of ‘abandonment’. He says, ‘If a man puts away ‘apoluo’ his wife, ‘if he abandons her’, he must give her a certificate of divorcement ‘apostasion’.’ The man must make it legal. If he puts her away, but he does not make it legal, and she marries somebody else, she is committing adultery. If he marries another woman without having put her away legally, he commits adultery. There must be a legal, official termination of the marriage for there to be freedom to remarry.

Paul comes along and says in **1 Corinthians 7:1-7** that it would be better to stay unmarried for several reasons. In the present crisis, they can give devotion to the Lord, and it will keep them from getting trapped in a relationship with an unbeliever who would make it difficult for them to function properly.

But he says if the pressure is there, the sexual, emotional, and psychological needs are there to be fulfilled, and they must have them fulfilled, and he says to get married.

In **1 Corinthians 7:8-9**, he tells the divorced and the widows that they can get married, and he tells the virgins in **1 Corinthians 7:25-35** that they can get married.

He tells the man who is engaged to the virgin that he can get married, that may not be the best thing to do because of the present crisis, but they can do it and do it in a way that will honour God, have a marriage that will uphold His ideals.

Then he says that where both are believers, they mustn't contemplate divorce; they must do all they can to maintain that marriage. If they are married to an unbeliever, if they become converted after they are married, they are to maintain that marriage because it's an acceptable marriage to God.

If the unbeliever terminates it, it's terminated; it wasn't what they wanted. They didn't pursue it, they didn't ask for it, they terminated it. Therefore, they aren't bound in such circumstances.

This is the height, breadth, length, and width of what the Bible has to say about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. The Christian has an ideal to uphold; the Christian looks to save the marriage, strengthen the marriage, and make the marriage last.

But sometimes marriages break down, sometimes sin enters the marriage relationship, and Jesus gives us the guidelines for what to do when that does happen.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN AND JESUS

'People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.' Mark 10:13-16

The disciples never seemed to want Jesus to be bothered, so they were constantly trying to keep certain kinds of people away from Him, Mark 10:46-52. In this case, it was children and notice the disciples actually rebuked those who brought the children to Jesus, Mark 10:13 / Matthew 19:13 / Luke 18:15.

When the disciples hindered those who brought the children from coming to Jesus, Mark records that Jesus was greatly displeased, Mark 10:14. When Jesus saw that they were hindering the children from approaching Him, He was indignant and rebuked them, Mark 10:14.

He was greatly displeased because the children represented the nature of those who would accept His kingdom's reign in their hearts, Mark 10:14-15 / Matthew 19:14 / Luke 18:17. He said that the kingdom of God itself belongs to people who become like children, Mark 10:14-15 / Matthew 19:14 / Luke 18:16-17.

He took the young people into His arms and began to bless them, then left, Matthew 19:15. He always had time for children, Mark 10:16 / Matthew 19:15. When these children were brought to Jesus, He took them into His arms and blessed them, Mark 10:16 / 1 Corinthians 14:20 / 1 Peter 2:2.

These children were simply brought to Jesus for blessing and prayer, a practice which was common in Israel, Matthew 19:13. As Christians, we need to have the same submissive attitude toward our heavenly Father if we want to receive eternal life, James 4:6-7 / 1 Peter 5:6-7.

The humility of a child should always be the characteristic of the disciple of Jesus, we should always be willing to serve and put others before us, not thinking too highly of ourselves, Matthew 18:4 / Mark 10:35-45 / Luke 9:48.

Jesus wants disciples who are humble like a child, free from prejudice like a child, teachable like a child, lovable as a child, He wants His disciples to have the same simple faith of a child, trust like a child, He doesn't want His disciples to worry about anything but trust their Father and He wants His disciples to be as innocent as a child.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN

‘As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.’
Mark 10:17-18

This event is recorded in **Mark 10:17-31 / Luke 18:18-30 / Matthew 19:16-30**, but it’s in Mark’s account that we find the most detail concerning the event. Jesus and His disciples were leaving the region of Judea and heading towards Jerusalem when a young man ran up to Him and fell before Him, **Mark 10:17**.

The young man who addressed Jesus was rich, **Mark 10:22 / Luke 18:23 / Matthew 19:22**. He was doing well for himself; he was the kind of man everyone in society would look up to and strive to be like.

We must remember that he was a ruler with some position in society, **Luke 18:18**. He was a young man with responsibilities and status. This is important to understand because these positions were what James and John sought, **Mark 10:35-45 / Matthew 20:20-28**. This is what this young ruler had but could not give up.

There must have been something about his religion which was lacking; he knew something wasn’t right with his religion. Later, we see that he had been obedient to the law, **Mark 10:20 / Luke 18:21 / Matthew 19:20**, and he was a ‘good’ person, but still something wasn’t missing from his life.

He was honest with himself and humble enough to call Jesus a ‘good teacher’, **Mark 10:17 / Luke 18:18**, which was a sign of respect. We know He was concerned about his own spiritual welfare because he ran up to Jesus requesting information on how to receive eternal life, **Mark 10:19 / Luke 18:18 / Matthew 19:16**; he was honestly looking for answers.

JESUS ANSWERS THE QUESTION REGARDING ETERNAL LIFE

Mark’s and Luke’s accounts leave out something very important. In Matthew’s account, notice the young man asked Jesus, Which commandments? **Matthew 19:17-18**. This is very important to understand, as we shall see in a moment. Before we get into the text, let’s address a question which is often raised.

IF JESUS WAS GOD, THEN WHY DID HE SAY, ‘NO ONE IS GOOD EXCEPT GOD ALONE?’

The young man who addressed Jesus was rich, **Mark 10:17-32 / Luke 18:23 / Matthew 19:16-30**. However, we must also remember that he was a ruler with a position in society. The positions for which James and John sought in the following case of **Mark 10:35-45** are what this young ruler had but could not give up.

The young man wanted to know how to receive eternal life, **Mark 10:17 / Luke 18:18 / Matthew 19:16**. In other words, he was asking, ‘What must he do to be saved?’ Which is the question the disciples asked, **Mark 10:26 / Luke 18:26 / Matthew 19:25**.

He did everything right since he was a young man, including keeping the last six of the ten commandments, **Exodus 20:12-17**. However, he failed to keep the first and greatest of the commandments to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength,’ **Matthew 22:37-38**.

The one thing he lacked was giving up his wealth, Mark 10:21 / Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:20-21. He loved money more than God, Colossians 3:5. His wealth had become his security, Mark 10:23-25 / Luke 18:24-25 / Matthew 19:23-25.

Everett, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Jesus wanted this man to understand that no one could achieve salvation through good works, not even a Jewish “teacher.” Thus, Jesus said that there was no one who was good except God, Isaiah 64:6.’

The question, if Jesus was God, then why did He say, ‘no one is good except God alone’, is often used by people to try to disprove the deity of Christ. There are two possibilities for how to answer this question. Jesus could be saying, don’t call me good because He isn’t good or at least not as good as God the Father, or He means something a lot deeper than we think.

Notice that Jesus never says He is not good, but the rich ruler recognises He is. The rich ruler calls Jesus ‘good teacher’, Mark 10:17 / Luke 18:18. Jesus asks the rich ruler, ‘Why do you call me good’, and then He says, ‘No one is good, except God alone’, Mark 10:18 / Luke 18:19 / Matthew 17:19.

Jesus is saying either I am God and good or I am neither God nor good. Or put another way, Jesus was saying if you address me as a ‘good teacher’, then I can’t help you, for no man is good. Only as God can I do anything to help you, Mark 10:27 / Luke 18:27 / Matthew 19:26.

Jesus wanted the young man to acknowledge Him as God. He wanted the rich ruler to see Jesus as God, who is good, not a mere good teacher. Jesus’ question was designed not to deny His deity, but rather to draw the rich ruler to recognise Christ’s divine identity.

It’s clear that Jesus was testing the young man when He said, ‘no one is good, except God alone’, Mark 10:18 / Luke 18:19 / Matthew 17:19. Jesus wasn’t denying His deity; He wanted the man to acknowledge His deity.

If he genuinely believed Jesus is God, Hebrews 1:3, instead of walking away sad, he would have followed Him to secure his eternal inheritance, Mark 10:21-22 / Luke 18:22-23 / Matthew 19:21-22.

Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

‘What He is doing is trying to awaken the consciousness of this man to the fact that he has received a divine revelation. He is getting close. “Why did you call me good?” The reason why you called me good is because you, though you don’t realise it, have recognised something about me.’

CONCLUSION

How can Jesus be God if no one is good except God alone? Think about it this way. Jesus claims only God is good, but the rich ruler and Jesus also claim that Jesus is good, and so, common sense tells us that Jesus is claiming to be God.

If Jesus is good, what does that make Him? It makes Him God, 1 Chronicles 16:34 / Psalm 25:8 / Psalm 119:68. After all, He is the Word, who became flesh and dwelt among us, John 1:1-3 / John 1:14 / Philippians 2:5-11. He said, ‘I AM the Good Shepherd’, John 10:11.

‘You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother,’ Mark 10:19

Notice, at this point, Jesus doesn’t answer his question regarding eternal life, but what He does do is address the man’s comment about Jesus being ‘good’, Mark 10:18 / Luke 18:19 / Matthew 19:17. We see that the real problem

which people were facing was simply this: how can sinful people approach an all-good God? **John 14:6 / Romans 7:24-25.**

Erdman, in his commentary, says the following concerning Jesus' response to the young man.

'The perfect goodness of God was a universal doctrine of Judaism, and it is evident that the Lord was here building the young man's thoughts toward the recognition of Jesus as God. It is the equivalent of our Lord's saying, 'Look, don't you know that if I am good, as you say, then I am therefore God?'

Notice that Jesus only quoted the last five of the Ten Commandments: **Mark 10:19 / Luke 18:20 / Matthew 19:18-19 / Exodus 20:12-16 / Deuteronomy 5:16-20.** Why did He not quote the first five commandments?

It's clear that Jesus was trying to lead this young man into a deeper understanding of the truth, by not quoting, 'love God with your heart, mind, soul and strength', **Matthew 22:37-40 / Mark 12:30-31 / Luke 10:27 / Deuteronomy 6:4-7,** implies that the young man wasn't obedient to these commandments, but had no real problem keeping the others. In other words, the young man won't receive eternal life simply by keeping only part of the law, he couldn't receive eternal life by law-keeping, and he couldn't save himself, no matter how obedient to the law he was, **James 2:10.** What's the point in keeping any of the law, if you don't love God with everything you've got.

'Teacher,' he declared, 'all these I have kept since I was a boy.' Jesus looked at him and loved him. 'One thing you lack,' he said. 'Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' **Mark 10:20-21**

Matthew gives us more information at this point. The young man asked Jesus a very important question. 'What do I still lack?' **Matthew 19:20.** If his question tells us anything, it tells us that he's honest with himself and sincere regarding his question about eternal life.

Notice the young man ticked all the boxes, 'yep Jesus, I haven't broken any of the commandments you've quoted to me', **Mark 10:20 / Luke 18:21 / Matthew 19:20.** I can imagine Jesus looking at this young man with a smile on His face, He loved him, He loved his honesty, and He loved his sincerity. What a refreshing change from those who were always trying to oppose Him.

ONE THING LACKING

Jesus loved the young man enough to tell him the one thing he lacked in his life, **Mark 10:21 / Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21.** He still lacked one thing, **Philippians 3:6-7,** he was good, but he knew that he still lacked something, **Acts 10:1-6 / Galatians 3:21.** The problem with the young ruler wasn't with his outward appearance of religiosity, but with his heart.

In order to come into a right relationship with God, this particular rich person had to relieve himself of that which emotionally kept him from dependence on God.

He was self-sufficient in his riches and self-confident in his performance of the law from youth. He, therefore, felt that he didn't need to trust in the grace of God.

If he wanted to receive eternal life, he first needed to be right with God and for him to be able to do that, he had to give up the very things which he treasured most in his heart, his possessions, **Mark 10:21 / Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21.** He had to learn to depend on God rather than being self-sufficient and self-confident to receive eternal life.

Because Jesus tells him to ‘go and sell everything he has and give it to the poor’, Mark 10:21 / Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21, this tells us that Jesus saw in this man’s life the very thing which was lacking from this man’s life. It suggests that Jesus saw that this guy was greedy and all he cared about was himself and his wealth, Matthew 6:19-21. He was to sell all that he owned, give the proceeds to the poor, and start following Him, Luke 12:33 / Acts 2:45 / Acts 4:34-35 / Acts 12:12 / Acts 21:8. He must be willing to sacrifice to follow Jesus, Mark 10:21 / Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21, in the same way the other disciples did, Mark 10:28 / Matthew 9:9.

TOTAL SUBMISSION

Anyone who wants to be a follower of Christ must submit to God’s will to receive eternal life. For the young man, this would mean not only giving up his possessions but giving up his position as ruler, and as we read next, these sacrifices were just asking too much of him.

‘At this, the man’s face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.’ Mark 10:22

Jesus always knew what was in the hearts of people. He knew them better than they knew themselves, and for this young man, his problem was in his heart. Notice that he didn’t get angry with Jesus, he didn’t get all self-righteous with Jesus, he simply dropped his face and went away sad, Mark 10:22 / Luke 18:23 / Matthew 19:22.

FACING THE REALITY

I can imagine this young man coming to Jesus thinking he was right with God, thinking he had been obedient to God all his life, thinking that he only had to make a few small adjustments to his life to receive eternal life, only to come face to face with the reality of the condition of his own heart. The man really wanted eternal life, but not at this great price.

Incidentally, this is the only account in the whole of the Gospels where Jesus commands someone to ‘follow Him’, and the command is rejected. Like so many people who come to Jesus for salvation, they long to be saved, but when Jesus points out the costs involved, they too leave sad because they just can’t bring themselves to sacrifice so much in order to follow Him, Mark 10:21 / Luke 18:22 / Matthew 19:21 / Luke 14:25-33.

THE DISCIPLE’S REACTION

‘Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’ The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?” Mark 10:23-26

Notice that Jesus didn’t say ‘it’s impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God’, He said it’s ‘hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God,’ Mark 10:23 / Luke 18:24 / Matthew 19:23.

The reason it is hard is simply because of what has just happened with the rich young ruler. The rich had a tendency to trust in material possessions and not in God.

They believed that one's wealth was a sign that God was working in one's life; they were wrong. The earthly treasures are more important to them, and their wealth and position in society are just too much to sacrifice, **Luke 18:24-25 / Matthew 6:20 / Matthew 13:22 / 1 Corinthians 1:26 / 1 Timothy 6:9-10.**

Notice also He calls them 'children', **Mark 10:24**, and then gives them an illustration which even a child can understand the impossibility of it, a camel going through the eye of a needle, **Mark 10:25 / Luke 18:25 / Matthew 19:24.**

No one is sure where this figurate phrase originated, but some do believe it may have been taken from a gate in the walls of Jerusalem that were so small that it was difficult for a camel to enter. Whatever the source of the metaphor, the principle is still the same: it's difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

The disciples ask Jesus a question, 'Who then can be saved?' **Mark 10:26 / Luke 18:26 / Matthew 19:25.** It seems the disciples were in shock, not so much with the rich young ruler's leaving but with Jesus' teaching to the rich young ruler.

Remember, the Jews believed that if someone was rich, then that meant that they were highly favoured by God, but they were even more highly favoured by God if they kept the commandments. The disciples must have looked at the rich young ruler and thought, 'Wow, God has richly blessed him, he must be a prime candidate for eternal life!'

They must have thought, as many of the Jews did, if this young, rich ruler couldn't be saved, then who on earth can be saved? Now obviously the Jewish thinking was wrong, the disciples' thinking was wrong because no one can be justified before God by keeping the law, because all sin, **Galatians 2:16.**

It's a sad fact that many people follow in the rich young ruler's steps; they desire eternal life, as long as they don't have to make too many sacrifices. Jesus referred to these people when He remarked about how difficult it is for those who are rich to enter heaven.

'Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man, this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.' Then Peter spoke up, 'We have left everything to follow you!' 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus replied, 'no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.' **Mark 10:27-**

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Jesus tells them that God and God alone has the power to let people see the foolishness in trusting in their wealth instead of trusting in God, **Mark 10:16 / Luke 18:27 / Matthew 19:26 / Romans 1:16.** Even some of the Old Testament heroes who were abundantly rich had to trust God instead of their riches, **Luke 13:28.**

Peter also asked a question, 'What then will there be for us?' **Matthew 19:27.** Peter and the others indeed left everything to follow Jesus, **Mark 10:28 / Luke 18:28 / Matthew 4:20 / Luke 5:11**, but here Peter is wondering what he will receive for such a sacrifice as leaving everything behind to follow Jesus.

The shock of Jesus' teaching really got Peter thinking about his and the disciples' situation. They obviously didn't understand what Jesus was teaching, and so, Jesus answered him with three promises.

They will be blessed with numerous earthly possessions, their families will multiply a hundredfold, and they will receive the greatest reward of all, eternal life, **Mark 10:29-31 / Luke 18:29-30 / Matthew 19:28-30.**

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the disciples sitting on thrones and becoming judges of the twelve tribes, **Matthew 19:28.**

'From the parallel place, **Luke 22:28-30**, it is evident that sitting on thrones, and judging the twelve tribes, means simply obtaining eternal salvation, and the distinguishing privileges of the kingdom of glory, by those who continued faithful to Christ in his sufferings and death.'

Jesus says that those who leave these family relationships and possessions in order to follow Jesus will receive a hundredfold in this life, **Mark 10:29-30 / Luke 18:29-30 / Matthew 19:29**. Jesus says, ‘many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first’, **Mark 10:31 / Luke 13:30 / Matthew 20:16 / Matthew 19:30**.

This simply means that just because you choose to follow Jesus before others, it doesn’t mean you’ll stay faithful to Jesus to the end; others who come later may well remain faithful to the Lord.

A good example of this is Judas, who was one of the first among the apostles and Paul, who was the last of the apostles. Judas didn’t remain faithful to the end, but Paul did, and so in this example, we see that Judas actually ended up being last and Paul ended up being first.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the first and last, **Mark 10:31 / Matthew 19:30**.

‘The Jews, who have been the first and most distinguished people of God, will, in general, reject the Gospel of my grace, and be consequently rejected by me. The Gentiles, who have had no name among the living, shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth, and become the first, the chief, and most exalted people of God. That this prediction of our Lord has been literally fulfilled, the present state of the Christian and Jewish Churches sufficiently proves. To illustrate this fully, and to demonstrate that the Jews and Gentiles were now put on an equal footing by the Gospel, our Lord speaks the following parable, which has been unhappily divided from its connection by making it the beginning of a new chapter.’

CONCLUSION

As Jesus talked to the rich man, He observed that he lacked only one thing; he only needed to get rid of his possessions. It became obvious that Jesus had properly diagnosed the man’s need because the man was unwilling to do so; he indeed was valuing his possessions over the Lord.

To follow Jesus, we must give up anything in our lives that is more important to us than He is. Interestingly, this man lacked only one thing. Some people have the idea that one sin is not all that bad; they think that while they may be failing in one area, at least they serve the Lord faithfully in all the others. This story shows clearly that even one thing can keep a person from being accepted by God.

I can only imagine what the rich young ruler must have thought if he had heard Jesus’ three promises to the disciples. Maybe he would have thought twice, maybe he would have followed Jesus, but sadly, it was these three blessings he actually turned away from. He forfeited his soul for wealth and his position of power, **Mark 8:36**. Is there one thing in your life that’s stopping you from following Jesus?

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH A THIRD TIME

‘They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again, he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. ‘We are going up to Jerusalem,’ he said, ‘and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later, he will rise.’ **Mark 10:32-34**

For the third time, Jesus warned the disciples about what was going to happen when they got to Jerusalem. On the road to Jerusalem Jesus prepared the disciples for what was about to happen in all their lives, **Mark 10:32 / Matthew 10:17 / Luke 18:31**.

He tells the disciples that in Jerusalem, He would be delivered over to the chief priests and teachers of the law, and it would be them who would condemn Him to death, **Mark 10:33 / Isaiah 53 / Matthew 20:18-19 / Luke 18:32**.

Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen to Him, **Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 17:22-23**. He knows that He will be handed over to the Sanhedrin, **Matthew 26:15**, and He knows He would be handed over to the Gentiles, **Mark 10:32-33 / Matthew 17:22-23 / Luke 18:32**, that is, the Romans, to be mocked, spat upon, flogged and crucified, **Matthew 27:2 / Acts 2:23 / Acts 3:13-15 / Acts 4:27 / Acts 21:11**.

Jesus knows He suffers all the humiliation of a common criminal. Flogging was a means of a whip, which was made up of broken bones or sharp stones that were tied at the end of a binding of numerous strips of leather. He talked here about His death and resurrection, **Mark 10:33-34 / Matthew 20:18-19 / Luke 18:32**.

The good news is that Jesus also knows that He will rise again on the third day, **Mark 10:34 / 1 Corinthians 15:1-5**, despite His disciples being saddened by Jesus even speaking about His death, **Matthew 16:21-28 / Luke 9:22 / Luke 18:31 / Luke 24:46**.

In Luke's account, notice that the disciples didn't understand what Jesus meant by His word because it was hidden from them, **Luke 18:34**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘It was not hidden in that Jesus did not want them to understand. It was hidden because of their reluctance to accept it.’

THE REQUEST OF JAMES AND JOHN

‘Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask.’ ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ he asked. They replied, ‘Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.’ ‘You don’t know what you are asking,’ Jesus said. ‘Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?’ ‘We can,’ they answered. Jesus said to them, ‘You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.’ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ **Mark 10:35-45**

Jesus had just finished giving the disciples a detailed description of the suffering He would experience there in Jerusalem, but meanwhile, James and John were imagining a different scenario.

The future of the disciples still rested in their misunderstanding concerning the kingdom's reign of Jesus. They were still thinking that the kingdom would be something of this world, **Acts 1:6**. And because they were thinking of the reestablishment of national Israel, their understanding of leadership in the kingdom was twisted.

The occasion sparked an opportunity for James and John to reveal what was in their hearts. Since Jesus spoke of His departure from this world, James and John realised that leadership must be assumed, **Mark 9:33-34**. They are seeking positions of power and influence in this physical kingdom, **Luke 17:20-21 / John 18:36**.

WHO MADE THE REQUEST?

It seems that their mother, Salome, **Matthew 20:20 / Matthew 27:56 / Mark 15:40 / John 19:25**, accompanied James and John and made the request as if were her own but in reality, it was from James and John because Jesus goes on to address his answer towards James and John and they, in turn, continue to demonstrate it was actually their request as we will see later, **Mark 10:37**.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the request mentioned in **Mark 10:35**.

‘**Mark 10:35**, says that James and John made the request but Matthew says, **Matthew 20:20**, the request was made by Salome their mother; the two places may be easily reconciled thus: The mother introduced them, and made the request as if from herself; Jesus knowing whence it had come, immediately addressed himself to James and John, who were standing by; and the mother is no farther concerned in the business, **Matthew 20:20**.’

Remember that James and John’s father was Zebedee, **Matthew 20:20**, who was a very influential man and the reason we know this is because when Jesus was going through His trials.

John 18:15 tells us that John was known to the high priest and went with Jesus into the courtyard. Not everyone had access to the Jewish leadership, but because John did have access, this tells us that his family must have been influential in Jesus’ day.

The reason for mentioning Zebedee and his influence is simply to suggest that this may be the reason why James and John come to Jesus with the request in the first place.

In their mind, they know what it’s like to be influential; they know people in ‘high places’ so to speak, maybe they thought out of all the disciples, they were the best two for the leadership role when this new kingdom is established.

Notice also that they’re wise enough to come to Jesus privately, as they knew the other disciples wouldn’t be too happy about it, **Mark 10:41**. Jesus gave a detailed description of the suffering He would experience there in Jerusalem, **Mark 10:32-34**, but James and John were imagining a different scenario. They asked Jesus to agree to do whatever they would request, **Mark 10:35**.

The request is made, **Mark 10:35**, probably by their mother on their behalf, **Matthew 20:20**. James and John’s mother’s name is Salome, **Mark 15:40 / Mark 16:1**, she is the wife of Zebedee, **Matthew 4:21 / Matthew 10:2**. She came to approach, possibly on behalf of her sons, to ask Jesus about special positions of power in the kingdom, **Matthew 20:20**. They wanted to know if Jesus would agree to their request, **Mark 10:31 / Matthew 20:21**. Jesus asked what they wanted, **Mark 10:36 / Matthew 20:21**.

Jesus already knew what was on the two disciples’ minds, as He knows all things, **John 2:25 / Matthew 9:4**, but He asked them what He could do for them because their request was going to demonstrate to them what was going on in their own hearts. It was going to demonstrate that once again, they didn’t understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom. Jesus wasn’t going to sign a blank cheque by agreeing before they made the request. They replied that they wanted to sit on Jesus’ right and left hand, that is, they wanted the chief positions in His administration, **Mark 10:37 / Matthew 20:21**. The place of honour was the seat on the right and the place of second honour was the seat on the left, **1 Kings 2:19 / Psalm 110:1**.

Coffman makes some important points here regarding the disciple’s request.

1. It showed a lack of faith in what Jesus had just said regarding his being raised ‘after three days.’
2. It was founded on human vanity and conceit.
3. It represented an effort on their part to gain ascendancy (power) over the other apostles.
4. It showed a fundamental misconception of what God’s kingdom would be.

5. It was a selfish manoeuvre prompted by the Lord's repeated announcement of His forthcoming death and resurrection, in which they appeared as desiring the chief places in the presumed absence of the Lord.

6. It was a request founded in ignorance, **Mark 10:38**.

Sadly, like so many men who are in leadership positions today within the church, it's all about power, and it's all about them sitting down, whilst getting others to get up and do the work for them.

TOO HARD ON JAMES AND JOHN!

I think it's easy to come down too hard on James and John because we focus so much on their misunderstanding of the nature of Christ's kingdom. Let's pause for a moment about what they are requesting in their minds.

They are thinking of a physical kingdom, a physical kingdom which is going to get rid of these Roman dictators once and for all. For this to happen, many people would have to die to fight for this freedom. James and John seem to be willing to do just that, **Acts 12:1-2**.

They were obviously ambitious, courageous and far from being weak men who couldn't handle a leadership position, **Mark 3:17**. In other words, if they were going to help establish a physical kingdom, it wasn't going to be easy, it was going to be full of struggles, and they seemed to be up for the task.

Notice that Jesus responds to their request with the spiritual kingdom in mind. Jesus responded by asking if they could drink the cup He was going to drink, or be baptised with His baptism, **Mark 10:38 / Matthew 20:22 / Psalm 11:6 / Psalm 75:8 / Isaiah 51:17 / Jeremiah 25:15**.

Jesus was referring to His sufferings which were often spoken of as a cup of agony that He would have to drink, **Mark 14:36**, and as a baptism of pain, **Mark 10:39 / Luke 12:50**.

Jesus asked them these questions because He knew they were going to have to face even greater struggles in this spiritual kingdom than they would in a physical kingdom.

They would need useful spiritual weapons, **Ephesians 6:10-20**; they would need to be courageous, they would need to be strong, and they would need to be willing to die.

Christ went through immense pain and suffering and demonstrated what real sacrifice was all about, especially when He went to the cross to die. Jesus is basically asking them if they are willing to go through what He's been going through and will go through at the hands of the Jews and the Romans.

They had no clue as to His real meaning, but they enthusiastically accepted the challenge, **Mark 10:39 / Matthew 20:22**. On the negative side, this shows their ignorance because they were still thinking of a physical kingdom, but on the positive side, it shows their courage and their strength. It shows their willingness to lead, and it shows their enthusiasm to lead if it costs them their lives.

These two simple Galilean fishermen have come a long way in their personal journey with Christ, **Mark 3:17**, despite their misunderstanding of Christ's kingdom.

They would suffer, **John 15:18-19 / John 21:18-19**. James would even be the first apostle to be killed for the faith, **Acts 12:1-2**, though John, his younger brother, would be the last to die, **Revelation 1:9**.

Interestingly, Jesus makes no attempt to clarify the nature of His kingdom to the disciples; this is possibly because He knew that they would need similar courage and strength to be leaders in this spiritual kingdom.

They've just said, 'we can' and Jesus says, 'oh you guys can just count on that, you will go through the pain and suffering that I've been going through and will go through,' **Mark 10:39 / Matthew 20:23**.

They will go through all the struggles that leaders have to go through when they go into battle, they will go through all the highs and lows involved in leadership.

Jesus then replied that He didn't have the authority to grant their request because He wasn't the One who assigned the positions of honour in the kingdom, **Mark 10:40 / Matthew 20:23**. Jesus couldn't give such honours, except to them for whom they were prepared.

The ten weren't simply unhappy with James and John; they were furious. The word 'indignant' means greatly displeased, **Mark 10:41 / Matthew 20:24 / Mark 9:34 / Mark 10:31 / Luke 22:24**.

The other disciples were indignant, why? It seems that James and John had jumped ahead of the game; it appears they wished to have the highest positions and resented the fact that the sons of Zebedee had requested them first.

As a result of this, it seems another dispute broke out among them concerning who was the greatest and got the positions of 'power', and Jesus had to once again step in to sort it out.

This is not the first time Jesus had to address this issue of greatness with His disciples, **Luke 9:46**, and it won't be the last, **Luke 22:24**, and on all three occasions, Jesus has just been speaking to them about His upcoming death. This must have been so disheartening for Jesus. He's speaking about His upcoming death, and all the disciples could think about was who was going to take over when He leaves.

Jesus took some time to define what greatness in the kingdom really meant. He said that in human affairs, whether government or business, the greatest have the most authority, **Mark 10:42-45 / Matthew 20:25-28**.

In other words, they weren't to be like the Gentiles, who lord it over people and exercise authority over the people, **Mark 10:42 / Matthew 20:25**. In Christ's kingdom, they need to be serving, not lording it over people, **Mark 10:43 / Matthew 20:26 / 1 Peter 5:3**.

Jesus contrasts the leadership style of the world with that which would be among His disciples. The disciples need to learn, instead of 'lording it over' the people, they need to bear the burden of the needs of the people, they were to become slaves and be reminded that there is no authority among slaves.

There won't be any 'lords' among the disciples, there won't be any 'high officials' among His disciples. Leaders within the body of Christ must remember that Jesus has all authority, **Matthew 28:18**, and that He is the only Lord and Head, **Ephesians 1:20-23 / Ephesians 4:4-6**. Since Christ is all these things, then every other Christian must be a servant.

He explained that in God's kingdom, it's different; the greatest is the one who humbles himself most and serves most, **Mark 10:44 / Matthew 20:27 / Matthew 18:1-4 / Matthew 23:11 / Mark 9:35 / Mark 10:43-45**.

He pointed to Himself as the model, **Mark 10:45 / Matthew 20:28 / Matthew 26:28 / John 13:1-17**. He hadn't come to be served, but to serve and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for others, **Isaiah 53:10-11 / Daniel 9:24-26 / John 11:51-52 / Romans 5:15 / Romans 5:19 / 1 Timothy 2:5-6 / Titus 2:14 / 1 Peter 1:19**. He would lay down His life as a ransom, **Exodus 21:30 / Numbers 3:49-51 / Numbers 35:31**.

Lane, in his commentary, says the following.

'The ransom metaphor sums up the purpose for which Jesus gave his life and defines the complete expression of his service. The prevailing notion behind the metaphor is that of deliverance by purchase, whether a prisoner of war, a slave, or a forfeited life is the object to be delivered. Because the idea of equivalence, or substitution, was proper to the concept of a ransom, it became an integral element in the vocabulary of redemption in the Old Testament. It speaks of a liberation which connotes a servitude or an imprisonment from which man cannot free himself.'

If anyone had the right to demand service and lord it over people, it was Jesus Himself, but He didn't exercise that right. He points to Himself as the model of servitude. He hadn't come to be served, but to serve and to offer Himself as a sacrifice for others, **Matthew 20:45 / John 10:17-18**.

To lead men to redemption, Jesus had to give Himself. He had to ransom Himself for the sake of buying us out of the bondage of sin because we couldn't do it ourselves. He is the ultimate example of what spiritual leadership looks like, **1 Peter 2:21**.

Jesus didn't say it was wrong to desire to be great in His kingdom, but He did say we have to go about it the right way, with the right attitude. Leaders must lead by following Christ's example of serving because there are way too many Christians who want to lead but aren't willing to serve.

TRUE GREATNESS

We still desperately need these lessons of Jesus. Many, even in religion, are seeking to be great by trying to gain honour, glory and power. Churches are infested with 'politicians' who want the limelight and who compete for positions of maximum control and authority. They should be ashamed.

Jesus was born in a stable outside a small town. He lived His life as a village carpenter and itinerant preacher. He accumulated neither riches nor worldly power.

Yet today, many of His self-proclaimed followers seek and promise the very things He rejected, as they pursue higher and higher positions in churches. It is hard to imagine that Jesus would feel at home in their costly cathedrals and church buildings.

It is impossible to believe that He would preach the 'gospels of health and wealth' which is so popular today. Jesus said the way to true greatness was the road of service and suffering. Jesus said the way to true greatness was the road of service and suffering.

As His followers, we must learn how to serve the Lord, we must learn how to serve each other, and we must learn how to serve those around us, those who so desperately need to not only hear Jesus in our words but see Jesus in our actions.

TWO BLIND MEN RECEIVE SIGHT

Before we get into the text, there are some people who suggest that the record of the two blind men in **Matthew 9:27-31** is somehow related to the recording of the blind man Bartimaeus in **Mark 10:46-52 / Matthew 20:29-34 / Luke 18:35-43**.

However, there is no evidence of this from the Scriptures, and it also wouldn't make any sense. Just because the blind men essentially say the same thing in both passages doesn't mean they are the same event.

In **Matthew 20:29-34**, the healing of Bartimaeus takes place as Jesus the King is beginning to make His way to Jerusalem, **Matthew 20:17**. The event in **Matthew 9:27-31** took place as Jesus left the home of Jairus after raising the little girl and returned to the place He was staying, **Matthew 9:18-26**.

If it were the same event, this would imply that Jesus failed to heal these two men and somehow, He would have to heal them again later. Also, it would make no sense for Matthew to record the same blind healing event twice. I believe that these are two different blind men in two different places.

WHEN DID THIS HAPPEN?

According to **Mark 10:46-52** and **Matthew 20:29-34**, the miracle took place when they were ‘leaving’ Jericho. According to **Luke 18:35-43**, it appears the miracle took place as the Lord was ‘approaching’ Jericho. At that time, there were two cities named Jericho, the city destroyed by Joshua, **Joshua 6:24-26**, which was rebuilt and destroyed several times, and one was subsequently built a little further west by Herod the Great. The ruins of these are still evident. The curing of the blind men could have taken place after the Lord had passed through the toll of old Jericho and before he entered Herod’s Jericho.

Bible critics point out that the accounts of the healing of the blind men at Jericho, as recorded by Matthew and Mark on the one hand, and Luke on the other, reveal ‘an apparent discrepancy’. The verses we should read are **Mark 10:46 / Matthew 20:29**, and **Luke 18:35**.

This appears to be a very clear contradiction. Is it possible to reconcile the two accounts? Well, I suggest that if we spend a short time looking at Jericho’s history and geography, we shall find it easier to resolve the problem.

OLD JERICHO

Although this event is one of only two references to Jericho found in the Gospels, we must remember that it was a city that, by that time, had already existed for many centuries. This is a fact firmly established by archaeological research.

The first excavation of the Jericho site was carried out by a team of German archaeologists in the years 1907 to 1909, and their work was followed by an expedition by the British School of Archaeology led by Professor John Garstang, which lasted from 1929 to 1936, and which was followed in 1952 by that of the American archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon.

The latest and, I believe, the last work on what is known as ‘The Garstang Trench’ was done in 1957, after which the political climate in Palestine virtually ended the archaeological work of foreign nationals.

MANY JERICHO’S

However, the most important result to emerge from this work was the discovery of the earliest stratified levels revealing human occupation, ever found at any archaeological site anywhere in the world.

The mound at Ancient Jericho has revealed periods of human occupation down to a level of forty-five feet, and scholars now believe that the top, most evidence of human occupation of the site occurred about 1700 B.C., whilst the lowest remains, found on the bedrock of the trench, are thought to date from 7000 B.C.

Remember that the current site of ancient Jericho is actually a mound that ‘grew’ through thousands of years. It ‘grew’ simply because when the original settlement built on the bedrock was abandoned, those who later resettled the site did not clear it but merely built upon it.

In this way, the level of the occupied site was raised, strata upon strata, until it became the mound it is today. The various levels can be clearly seen on the sides of the forty-five-foot deep trench.

This means that Jericho was an ancient Canaanite city long before it was destroyed by Joshua, **Joshua 4:24**, and there is evidence that, after its destruction by the Israelite army, in the course of its long history, the city was destroyed several times. After the city had been conquered, it was given to the tribe of Benjamin, **Joshua 18:21**.

Later, during the time of the Judges, it was occupied by the Moabites, led by their King Eglon, at which time it was known as ‘The City of the Palms’, **Judges 1:16 / Judges 3:13**.

Later still, we read in **1 Kings 16:34**, that it was ‘rebuilt’ by Hiel of Bethel, in the time of King Ahab. And it was yet again destroyed at the time of the Babylonian Captivity, and later rebuilt once more.

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

It was during the Inter-Testamental Period that Jericho came under Roman control and was governed by a ‘Captain’, ‘Strategos’, in Latin, and during its time under the Romans, the city was given to Cleopatra by Mark Anthony, and she ‘leased’ it to Herod the Great for two hundred talents.

King Herod then built a new city south of the old one, complete with a castle, an amphitheatre, a hippodrome, and beautiful gardens with various water features, and Jericho became his winter residence. In fact, this is where he died in 4 B.C.

This city, known as ‘Herodian Jericho’, later suffered the fate of earlier cities. It was destroyed by Emperor Vespasian in 68 A.D. But the important fact is that this city, virtually adjoining the old site, was the city that Jesus knew.

We could continue to follow Jericho’s turbulent history through succeeding centuries, turbulent because it was destroyed and rebuilt several times. Muslims destroyed it in 638 A.D. Egyptian soldiers destroyed it in 1840. In 1871, it was destroyed by fire. And after each destruction, it was rebuilt.

JESUS AND JERICHO

Although it would be interesting to study this later history, what concerns us at the moment is the fact that the miraculous healing occurred when Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem for the last time, after leaving Galilee in the north, **Matthew 19:1**.

Jericho was the last halt for pilgrims when they travelled to the City of David from Galilee and Perea. They came by way of Jericho, to avoid passing through Samaria, and Jesus, descending from the north, would first enter and pass through what archaeologists call ‘Canaanite Jericho’, that is our ‘old Jericho’, where the ‘Garstang Trench’ has been excavated, and he would then enter ‘Herodian Jericho’.

In other words, there was a point at which he left the ruins of the ancient city and passed into the modern city built by Herod. When we take into consideration the geographical proximity of the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ cities, it is not difficult to reconcile the statements made by the Gospel writers: He was ‘leaving’ Canaanite Jericho and ‘entering’ Herodian Jericho.

The Gospel records, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, contain no contradictions when we take into consideration such matters as their geographical and historical setting.

HOW MANY BLIND MEN WERE THERE?

Matthew mentions that there were two blind men, **Matthew 20:30**. In Mark’s account of this healing, he mentions only the outspoken blind man of the two who approached Jesus, that is, Bartimaeus, **Mark 10:46**. Luke records that there was one blind man, **Luke 18:35**.

I have no difficulty accepting that there were as Matthew states, two blind men healed, **Matthew 20:30**. This is stated so plainly that there can be no argument. The reason why Mark specifically names just one of them, Bartimaeus, is that he was apparently well-known in the Jericho region.

This is suggested by the fact that the Greek text of **Mark 10:46** translates quite literally as ‘the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus the blind beggar’. The naming of the father in this way probably indicates that he was a man of some standing in Jericho.

Notice, also, the use of the definite article, ‘the blind beggar’, not ‘a blind beggar’. There would be little point in naming the father and son in this way if they were unknown in the community.

This also suggests that the healing of Bartimaeus was given more prominence than that of his blind, anonymous companion because he was a familiar figure in Jericho.

It was quite common for beggars, whether blind or otherwise disabled, to become familiar figures in the towns and cities in which they lived. We have examples of this in **John 9:1-41**, which records the healing of another blind man, and also in the account of the curing of the lame man, mentioned in **Acts 4:22-24**; both were clearly very familiar figures.

Again, it may even be that Bartimaeus was the more vociferous, more vocal, of the two blind men in clamouring for the attention of Jesus. This seems to be suggested in Mark’s account.

BLIND BARTIMAEUS RECEIVES HIS SIGHT

‘Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means ‘son of Timaeus’), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So, they called to the blind man, ‘Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.’ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’ ‘Go,’ said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you.’ Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.’ **Mark 10:46-52**

BLINDNESS

We know that blindness is a horrible disability today, but in Bible times, it must have been so much worse. There was no way you could work and no benefit system to help you, which meant you had no way to sustain yourself.

There was no Braille available. A blind man in Bible times wasn't permitted to approach the altar or give offerings to the Lord, which meant they could never become priests, **Leviticus 21:18-23**.

God, however, instituted some measures so that the needs of a blind person could be met and ensured that no one would mistreat them or take advantage of them, **Deuteronomy 27:18**. It's probable that these two blind men were beggars who looked for help from anyone who passed by.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following concerning being blind.

'From various Old Testament passages, it is clear that blindness is a type of sin, **Deuteronomy 28:29 / Isaiah 59:10 / Job 12:25 / Zephaniah 1:17 / Isaiah 29:8 / Ephesians 5:8 / Matthew 15:14**. Several examples of Jesus' restoring sight to the blind are recorded and were prophetically included as a positive mark of the Messiah's power when he should be revealed. Isaiah said of the Messiah and his times, 'then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,' **Isaiah 35:5**.'

As Jesus and His disciples passed through Jericho, two blind men were begging by the side of the road. Mark specifically names one of them.

A blind man named Bartimaeus, whose name means 'son of Timaeus', was sitting by the roadside begging, **Mark 10:46 / Matthew 20:29-30 / Luke 18:35**. When they heard it was Jesus of Nazareth, as opposed to any other Jesus, he began to shout out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' **Mark 10:47 / Matthew 20:30 / Luke 18:36-38**.

The crowds tried to silence him, **Mark 10:48 / Matthew 20:31 / Luke 18:39**, thinking that the Lord should not be bothered with such unimportant people, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' **Mark 10:47-48 / Matthew 20:31 / Luke 18:39**. 'Son of David' was a common Jewish term that was used in reference to the Messiah, **Luke 1:31-32**.

He cried out his belief that Jesus was the Messiah. His outcry would be the work of all disciples after the events of **Acts 2**. Since Jesus fulfilled all prophecies concerning the Messiah, He is the Messiah.

Their plea would be that Israel accepts Him as the Messiah. On His way to the cross, Jesus received this proclamation of who He was. He was the Prophet, the Seed of the woman who was the fulfilment of all messianic prophecies, **Genesis 3:15 / Luke 24:44**.

It's interesting to note that these blind men recognised who Jesus was, but the theologians of Jerusalem, who claimed to know the Scriptures, couldn't understand what they clearly saw.

They recognised that Jesus was the Son of David, the Messiah, **Isaiah 9:7 / Matthew 6:7 / Matthew 6:11 / Matthew 6:20 / Matthew 6:28 / Matthew 6:24 / Revelation 22:16**.

Clarke, in his commentary, says the following concerning the words, 'Son of David.'

'Son of David was the same as if they had called him Messiah. Two things here are worthy of remark: One. That it was a generally received opinion at this time in Judea, that the Messiah should be the son of David, **John 7:42**. Two. That Jesus Christ was generally and incontestably acknowledged as coming from this stock, **Matthew 12:23**.'

Jesus stopped and called for the blind men to come to Him, **Mark 10:49 / Matthew 20:32 / Luke 18:40**, understandably Bartimaeus was really excited about this as he throws his cloak to the side and runs to Jesus, **Mark 10:50**.

Jesus asks them what they want, and their request was simple, they wanted to be able to see again, **Mark 10:51 / Matthew 20:32-33 / Luke 18:41**. Jesus has compassion on them and tells them to go; their faith has healed them, and immediately they received their sight, **Mark 10:52 / Matthew 20:34 / Luke 18:42-43**. Notice also that they began to follow Him, **Mark 10:52 / Matthew 20:34 / Luke 18:43**. Few rich men followed the Lord, **Mark 10:17-22**, but many of the poor and downtrodden did. It's not surprising that the many people who witnessed the miracle praised God, **Luke 18:43**.

LIFE CHANGING

Imagine being transformed from a life of darkness to a life of light, **Luke 4:18**. Assuming they were blind from birth, imagine these blind men going home and seeing their families or children for the first time.

Imagine seeing colour for the first time. Imagine them being eligible to become priests, approaching the altar and giving their offerings to the Lord, **Leviticus 21:18-23**.

I have a good friend who is physically blind, and when I spoke to him about his disability, he said, 'Don't feel sorry for me because I'm physically blind, feel sorry for those who are spiritually blind.' His words are very true. Jesus often spoke to the religious leaders of His day and called them blind, **Matthew 15:14 / John 9:39**.

We may not be able to miraculously heal people of blindness today, but we should continue to preach the Gospel to all people whose minds have been blinded by the evil one, **2 Corinthians 4:3-4**. Jesus doesn't want to just heal us of our sin; He wants to transform our lives, **Romans 12:2 / 2 Corinthians 3:18 / 2 Corinthians 5:17**.

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION

The triumphal entry is recorded in all four Gospels, **Mark 11:1-11 / Luke 19:24-44 / Matthew 21:1-11**, and John's account is the briefest, **John 12:12-19**. The fact that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, **John 11:38-44**, was well known by now, and the people of Jerusalem and other surrounding villages heard that both Jesus and Lazarus were to be seen together, **John 12:9**, so typically they flocked to see this 'show'.

The chief priests realised that Lazarus's presence now also constituted a threat to their power, **John 12:10**, so in their ruthlessness, they decided to rid themselves of this problem.

The fact that Lazarus had died and then had been resurrected was now a great source of embarrassment to the Pharisees and other Jews of high religious standing. They wanted to put Him to death in order to prove, to themselves, that they were greater than Jesus.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

'As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there,

which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’” They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”” Mark 11:1-10

It is about five days before the Passover feast, [Exodus 12:3](#) / [Nehemiah 8:15](#) / [Zechariah 14:4](#). The ‘next day’, [John 12:12](#), we know from the Gospels that this was the first day of the week.

The crowd, already excited at his potential arrival, [John 11:56](#), now hear that Jesus is on His way to the feast, as Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem and arrived at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, [Mark 11:1](#) / [Luke 19:28-29](#) / [Matthew 21:1](#).

THE DONKEY

Jesus tells His disciples to go to a nearby village and get a colt, which was tied, which no one has ever ridden, [Luke 19:29-30](#). [John 12:14](#) tells us that ‘Jesus found a young donkey.’ [Matthew 21:2](#) tells that He sent two disciples to find and bring an ass and a colt. [Luke 19:30](#) says, ‘a colt on which no one has ever yet sat’, as does [Mark 11:2](#).

Why would a donkey and a colt both be needed if Jesus only rode one into Jerusalem? The simple answer is that the colt was young and still attached to the mother, and vice versa.

They would travel together as a mother and offspring naturally would among many animal species. The donkey was traditionally ridden by kings who came in peace; if He had come on a horse instead, that would have reflected a more aggressive tone.

Jesus said to His disciples, ‘if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly’, [Mark 11:3](#) / [Matthew 21:3](#) / [Luke 19:31](#).

According to Matthew all this was done to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, [Matthew 21:4-5](#) / [Zechariah 9:9](#). The disciples go and found things just as Jesus said, and united the donkey, [Mark 11:4](#) / [Luke 19:32](#) / [Matthew 21:6](#).

Some standing by asked what they were doing, as did the owner, [Mark 11:5](#) / [Luke 19:33](#). The disciples told them and the owner what Jesus told them to say, [Mark 11:6](#) / [Luke 19:34](#). This implies that Jesus possibly already knew the person who owned the donkey, hence why the owner gladly did as Jesus asked, [Mark 11:6](#).

Jesus was the first on the back of this donkey. The disciples laid their garments over the donkey to make a saddle upon which Jesus could comfortably ride, [Mark 11:7](#) / [Luke 19:35](#) / [Matthew 21:7](#) / [2 Kings 9:13](#). The horse was the symbol of war and conquest, and the donkey was the symbol of peace.

The disciples only made this connection between Jesus, the King of peace, the donkey and the Scriptural quotation after Jesus had ascended and they had received the Holy Spirit, [John 12:13](#). Much became obvious to them at that time.

JESUS COMES TO JERUSALEM AS KING

As Jesus goes, they spread their cloaks in the way, [Luke 19:36](#), and as He was getting nearer to Jerusalem, [Luke 19:37](#), ‘a great crowd’ appeared, [Luke 9:37](#) / [John 12:12](#). In Jerusalem crowded with Passover pilgrims, many of whom would be disciples of Jesus, [Luke 19:37](#).

A whole multitude of Jesus’ disciples rejoiced and praised God for all the mighty works they had seen and said, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest! [Luke 19:37-38](#) / [Psalm 118:26](#).

In [Luke 19:39-40](#), we read that the Pharisees objected, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples,’ but Jesus tells them, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!’

The Pharisees objected, but Jesus tells them that the very things we would assume could never speak or respond, that is, the stones, [Habakkuk 2:11](#), would actually give testimony to the Sonship of Jesus.

If the stones of the city of Jerusalem were in the mind of Jesus when He made this statement, the meaning again would be obvious: Jerusalem would be levelled by the Romans in A.D. 70. [Matthew 24:1-35](#).

Jesus was basically saying to the Pharisees, ‘you can’t hide from what is happening right now, even if you could silence everyone, these very stones would have shouted glory to God because even they recognise that it’s God’s Son who is entering Jerusalem’.

The Pharisees didn’t greet the arrival of Jesus with all that much enthusiasm, and they wanted Jesus dead. This crowd would make it all the more difficult, [John 12:19](#).

They seem somewhat frustrated by these goings-on, and their difficulty in finding Jesus in a quiet, dark alley where that could finish all this ‘foolishness’.

The Pharisees saw Jesus as a serious threat to their position as leaders in the religious community. Even if they did have some idea that He was the Messiah, it was now too late to acknowledge Him, for that would lose too much. The ‘Pharisees’, who were the Sanhedrin officials, were extremely worried, and they had reason to be because huge crowds were involved, [John 12:19](#).

JESUS’ SORROW OVER JERUSALEM

As Jesus drew near to the city and He wept over it, He foresaw and described the disaster coming to a people who rejected the Messiah, [Luke 19:41-44](#) / [Matthew 23:37-40](#). We can almost feel the emotions of Jesus’ words here. Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If thou had known, says he, even thou, with all thy guilt, the things that make for thy peace, if thou had repented, had been righteous, and had received the Messiah, if thou had not stained thy hands with the blood of the prophets, and shouldn’t have with that of the Son of God, then these terrible calamities would not come upon thee. But it is too late. The national wickedness is too great; the cup is full: mercy is exhausted and Jerusalem, with all her pride and splendour, the glory of her temple, and the pomp of her service, ‘must perish!’

The days did indeed come when Jerusalem fell, and the temple was destroyed, the days indeed come when not one stone was left on another, [Matthew 24:1-35](#). This was done by Titus in 70 A.D., about thirty years after this was spoken.

All this was done, says Christ, because Jerusalem knew not the time of its visitation, that is, did not know, and ‘would not’ know, that the Messiah had come. ‘His coming’ was the time of their merciful visitation.

That time had been predicted, and invaluable blessings promised as the result of his advent, but they would not know it. They rejected him, they put him to death, and it was just that they should be destroyed.

Matthew and Mark give us details about what happened when Jesus approached Jerusalem. As He approached the city, a crowd accompanied Him, and another crowd went out who met Him, [Mark 11:8](#) / [Matthew 21:8](#).

The crowd, already excited at His potential arrival, [John 11:56](#), now heard that Jesus was on His way to the feast. Great excitement overtakes them; they have heard of the raising of Lazarus and all the other miracles He had done before. Many must have believed that He was the Messiah and was about to restore the Kingdom to that which was in David's time.

A KING'S WELCOME

A welcome for a king is being written of here, as they, 'spread their garments on the road, also spread leafy branches before Him, [Matthew 21:8](#) / [Mark 11:8](#) / [Psalm 118:25-26](#) / [Leviticus 23:40](#).

Many carried branches of palm and spread them over the road, [Mark 11:8](#) / [Matthew 21:8](#) / [John 12:13](#). These were symbols of victory, [Revelation 7:9](#), and of the righteousness and vigorous spirituality of God's children, [Psalm 92:12](#). They point to the joy of victory, the feeling that everything will now be better. The people were expecting something to change.

People were continually shouting that Jesus was the Messiah, the King of Israel. Jerusalem was packed with Passover pilgrims, 'was thrown into confusion', [Mark 11:9](#) / [Matthew 21:9](#) / [John 12:13](#). A popular uprising looked possible, and that would bring savage reprisals from the Romans, [John 11:48](#).

THE SAVIOUR

'Hosanna!' they cry, [Mark 11:9](#) / [Matthew 21:9](#) / [John 12:13](#) / [Psalm 118:25-26](#). This was a joyous call meaning 'save' or 'save us now'. It hadn't become a simple exclamation of surprise, such as we use 'hurrah' today. The call had a great deal of meaning to it.

THE MESSIAH

Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, His coming is in fulfilment of [Zechariah 9:9](#) / [Isaiah 62:11](#) / [Matthew 21:4-5](#). The crowd of disciples wanted Him to assert publicly that He was the Messiah, and He did, but in such a way as to assert the peaceful nature of His kingdom, [Zechariah 9:10](#).

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' [Mark 11:10](#) / [Matthew 21:9](#) / [John 12:13](#) / [Luke 19:38](#) is an extract from [Psalm 118:25-26](#). This Psalm was part of the 'Great Hallel', [Psalms 113-118](#), recited at the Feast of Tabernacles. They now acclaim Jesus as the Messiah, [Mark 11:9-10](#) / [Matthew 21:9](#) / [Luke 19:38](#) / [John 12:13](#). The context of the Psalm is of a Messianic tone, indicating that they considered Jesus the Messiah, still expecting Him to establish some sort of earthly kingdom. The balance of the call that rang out seems to confirm this idea, 'Blessed is the King of Israel,' [John 12:13](#).

Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat on it to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, [John 12:14-15](#) / [Zechariah 9:9](#). John records that Jesus' disciples didn't understand what was going on, but they eventually would after Jesus was glorified, [John 12:16](#).

THE REACTION

Look at the reactions to all of this: 'All the city was stirred', 'agitated', 'went wild with excitement,' [Matthew 21:10-11](#). Remember that most in the crowd had seen Lazarus raised from the dead, so they would be witnesses to this, [John 12:17](#).

The local people informed the visitors to Jerusalem who Jesus was, [Matthew 21:10-11](#). He was the prophet, [Deuteronomy 18:18](#) / [John 1:21](#) / [John 1:25](#) / [John 6:14](#) / [John 7:40](#) / [John 9:17](#) / [Acts 3:22-26](#) / [Acts 7:37](#). But Jesus was more than a prophet; He was the Messiah, He was the Son of God.

CONCLUSION

We're living in a society where Christians are being told to 'shut up' by the 'politically correct' brigade. If we speak out against sin, any sin, we get told we're judging and need to 'shut up'.

It's almost like we're allowed to have our faith, but we're not allowed to express our faith in any shape or form, as some people will find it offensive. Society is permitted to speak out against Christians, but it seems that as time goes on, Christians aren't being permitted the same freedom of speech to defend their beliefs.

The world can try and silence Christians because they find their faith offensive, but the truth is, God would be even more offended if Christians didn't share their faith with others.

Let's continue to praise Him and lift up His Holy Name before the world because the time is coming when every being in heaven, everyone on earth, and every demon in hell is going to bow down and confess what Christians have been confessing for years, [Philippians 2:9-11](#).

'Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.' Mark 11:11

Jesus entered Jerusalem and the temple to look around, because it was late. He went on to Bethany with His disciples, [Mark 11:11](#). He went to Bethany to the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus as a final retreat before entering Jerusalem, [John 11:1](#) / [John 11:18](#) / [John 21:1](#).

JESUS CURSES A FIG TREE

'The next day, as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.' Mark 11:12-

Early in the morning, as Jesus was heading towards Jerusalem, He was hungry, [Mark 11:12](#) / [Matthew 21:18](#), and He saw a fig tree, [Mark 11:12](#) / [Matthew 21:19](#). There were a variety of fig trees in and around Jerusalem in Jesus' day, but this particular fig tree grew leaves first and then produced fruit.

I don't believe we are to think that this was the only fig tree in the orchard, but it was certainly a tree which stood out, and the reason it stood out to Jesus was that this fig tree had leaves on it but no fruit, although it wasn't fig season, [Mark 11:13](#).

WHY DID JESUS CURSE THE TREE?

Out of all the miracles Christ did, this is the only miracle which involved a curse, but why curse the tree? Certainly not for the fun of it! He cursed the fig tree and used it as an object lesson for the disciples.

The lesson was simple enough, Israel as a nation was producing an outward show of righteousness, [Matthew 15:1-9](#) / [Mark 7:1-9](#), it was all pretence, and the religious leaders didn't produce fruit by accepting Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus is telling us that Israel would no longer produce fruit because they had rejected the Son of God, and so God is going to reject them as a nation, [Mark 11:14](#). Jerusalem and the Jewish nation would come to an end in A.D. 70.

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

'On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers. The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.' [Mark 11:15-19](#)

Mark tells us that every evening of that week, Jesus withdrew from the city, because it was evening, the city gates were closed, [Mark 11:11](#). Jesus returned the next day and went straight to the temple and cleansed it again. Jesus entered Jerusalem at the commencement of the final week of His earthly ministry.

THE TEMPLE

The Temple had taken forty-six years to build, [John 2:20](#). It was started around 20 BC, and the main work was finished in 10 BC, which gives us the date of this statement at AD 26. The Temple was still being worked on when it was destroyed in 70 AD. Some of the blocks used in building the temple were fifteen feet square by four feet high. The original temple was built on ground purchased by David and built by Solomon, [2 Samuel 24:18-25](#) / [2 Chronicles 3:1](#). It was by a long shot the grandest and richest of the temples, and once it was destroyed, its grandeur was never recaptured. It was destroyed in 586 B.C. by the rampant Babylonians.

A new temple, Zerubbabel's temple, was built in 520 B.C. after its foundations were laid in 536 B.C. [Zechariah 4:9](#). This was rebuilt by Herod in 20 B.C., and the work was paid for before a start was made, and the sanctuary took just eighteen months to complete; however, it was still going on in Jesus' time, about forty-six years later.

It is thought that work wasn't yet complete in the outer areas when this last temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. The site is now being used by Muslims who have built a Mosque, the Dome of the Rock.

Much is currently being said in Israel about rebuilding a temple. However, political considerations regarding the current Mosque on the site prevent this. The internal area was thirty-three and a half acres.

Some wall blocks were fifteen by four feet. Built with cream-coloured stone, with spikes on the roof. It was topped off with gold. There was also a plaque on the wall which read, 'a no enter sign', warning of death to all non-Jews who enter in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Arabic.

The Temple was divided into two parts, the Holy Place, with the altar of incense, golden candlestick and table of shewbread. The second part is the Holy of Holies, the heart of the temple, entered into only once a year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

The different courts emphasised the strata of religious society; the more important you are, the closer you get to the Holy of Holies. The two parts were separated by a veil, made of thick cloth.

This is the veil that separated man and God, and it was torn in two at the point of Christ's death. The Inner court or priests' court was reserved only for priests, and the sacrifice was burnt on the altar located there. The Antonia Fortress was a Roman fortress that they used to keep an eye on the happenings on the Temple grounds.

When Jesus reached Jerusalem, He entered the temple courts and drove out those who were buying and selling. He also overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those who were selling doves, [Mark 11:15](#) / [Luke 19:45](#) / [Matthew 21:12](#).

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, [Mark 11:15](#) / [Matthew 21:12](#), and then quotes [Jeremiah 7:11](#) / [Matthew 21:13](#) / [Luke 19:46](#).

He also stopped trade from coming through the temple courts, [Mark 11:16](#), and He quotes [Isaiah 56:7](#) / [Jeremiah 7:11](#). What was it that angered Him? The abuse of the temple courts and total lack of reverence and respect for both the temple and the law is what angered Him.

THE MARKET HELD IN THE COURT OF THE GENTILES

This had become a recognised institute and was protected by the temple guard on behalf of their superiors, the priests. The market was known among the Jews as 'The shops of Annas,' because it was under the patronage of the High Priest and his family.

They took the franchise, so to speak, the monopoly and took their profit from everything that was sold. The market was not supposed to be a place for general merchandise but only for things needed for the temple ceremonies, i.e. sacrifices, wine, oil and salt used in the ceremonies.

Buyers were largely pilgrims who had travelled far but were also used by local Jews who could afford to spare themselves the inconvenience of bringing their own animals for sacrifice. Not only this, but they could avoid the uncertainty of the 'Official Inspection', which was compulsory.

Priests examined animals for sacrifice, for flaws or imperfections or disease, and I imagine that, in order to boost flagging sales, they would refuse to accept certain animals. Probably many animals failed their spiritual M.O.T.

MONEY CHANGERS

The money was needed because of the duty of every male Jew who came to the temple to worship, to pay half a shekel for the upkeep of the temple. This was called 'Temple Tax'. A half-shekel was equal to a third, or a fourth of a Denarius, or a penny and could only be paid in the temple or Jewish money.

But many coinages were in use in the Roman Empire at that time, and pilgrims from abroad usually only had Greek, Roman or Syrian money, which could not be used.

Obviously, Jewish money was not likely to be used in the wider Roman Empire. So, their foreign money had to be exchanged into coins that the temple treasury would accept.

We must note that Mark's and Luke's accounts of Jesus clearing the temple took place in the last week of the Lord's ministry; John puts the account at the commencement of His ministry, [John 2:13-22](#).

This is important to understand because some believe it's the same account of Jesus cleansing the temple. One of the arguments, probably the strongest argument they are able to advance in favour of this theory, is that John does not mention the second cleansing, nor do Matthew, Mark and Luke.

I suggest to you that, far from being an argument against the genuineness of these accounts, this is an argument in favour of their genuineness. There is obviously no attempt on the part of these writers to make their accounts harmonise, and you might have expected such an attempt if they had not been genuine.

On the contrary, if you examine the three records carefully, you see that there are several differences, which should make it plain that we are dealing with two separate events.

John tells us that Jesus dealt with those who 'sold' in the temple, [John 2:14](#), as does [Luke 19:45](#), but Mark, for instance, tells us that he turned out those who 'bought and sold', [Mark 11:15](#).

Not just the sellers but also the 'buyers' who evidently had taken no notice of the first warning. Similarly, John says that Jesus told those who sold doves to take their birds and their cages out of the temple court, [John 2:15-16](#).

But the second time, again because his warning had gone unheeded, he condemned the sellers of doves along with the rest and overturned their chairs, [Mark 2:15](#).

John says that the Jews challenged Jesus as to His authority and His right to do this, [John 2:18](#), but the second time, there is no such challenge or question from the Jews.

John does not report that Jesus dealt with those who carried objects through the temple, [Mark 11:16](#), or the cries of the children, [Mark 10:13-16](#), and the healing of the blind, [Mark 10:46-52](#), and the lame and the apparently favourable reaction from the people, [Mark 11:18](#).

Of course, the first time He cleansed the temple, he was virtually unknown, and His action was resented. But after three years and particularly with the presence of the Galileans, He has more popular support.

John does not quote [Isaiah 56:7](#), and the mention of the temple as a 'House of Prayer for all nations'. Nor that Jesus quoted [Jeremiah 7:11](#), 'Den of robbers', [Mark 11:17](#). Nor the fear of the Jewish authorities for the people, [Mark 11:18](#).

In fact, to really accept that there was only 'one' cleansing of the temple, which the writers have put into two different ends of the Lord's ministry, I think you have to come to the Scriptures with your mind already made up.

If these two accounts were submitted to unbiased critics, with the question, Do these records deal with the same event? I am sure they would see many differences that they would say, 'the situation in the temple had grown worse', this is suggested by the words, 'you have made it into a den of robbers', [Mark 11:18](#).

Pilgrims in particular, of course, were at the mercy of these temple traders. What went on was ‘not’ honest trade, which itself would have been wrong in the temple anyway. This was a dishonest trade. No! more than that, Jesus said it was a downright robbery, [Mark 11:18](#).

For instance, one record tells that those who sold doves in the temple court were at one time demanding a piece of gold for every bird they sold to the poor women who came to the temple for cleansing.

And Rabbi Simeon Ben Gamaliel urged them to be satisfied with a piece of silver. Now, if the poor local women were subject to this kind of exhortation, what do you suppose happened to the wealthier Jews, coming in from Rome or from other provinces?

And in this way, because they imposed an exchange fee, a great deal of profit was made, a part of which found its way to the priests. The doves are mentioned, [Mark 11:17](#) / [John 2:14](#), because they were required by the law for ceremonies concerned with cleansing, women after childbirth, [Leviticus 12:1-8](#), lepers, [Leviticus 14:1-32](#), and others. So, they too provided a good profit.

Mark reports that Jesus stopped the people from using the temple as a public thoroughfare, [Mark 11:16](#). The people often carried things through the temple court, coming in at the East Gate and going out at the West, or vice versa. In fact, the temple was used as a shortcut between the city and the Mount of Olives.

The Jewish authorities had condemned this practice, according to some scholars. They had said that a sign of reverence for the temple was that no one went up into the Mountain of the temple, with his staff, or shoes, or purse, or dust of the road on his feet; and that no one made it a common thoroughfare.

But it seems that they had not enforced this ruling, and so the people were defiling the temple and showing disrespect for it. So, Jesus took the unpleasant action that the authorities neglected to take.

Notice the quotation Jesus uses to cover His actions, [Mark 11:17](#) / [Luke 19:46](#). ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’, [Isaiah 56:7](#). This is because the only place that the Gentiles were allowed to enter, the only part of the temple open to them and the only place where they were allowed to pray, was the ‘Court of the Gentiles.’ But how could they pray in a place which had been turned into an open cattle market, a money exchange and a public thoroughfare? [John 2:14](#). So, Jesus points out that in allowing these things, the priests were defeating the fulfilment of Scripture.

Notice the strong language He uses, ‘A den of robbers’, [Jeremiah 7:11](#) / [Mark 11:17](#) / [Luke 19:46](#). Remember that Jesus had just travelled to Jerusalem from Jericho, coming along that notorious Jericho road, where the man fell along with thieves and was helped by a Samaritan, [Luke 10:25-37](#).

Judea in those days was full of thieves and robbers, and they occupied the limestone caves in the hills. But Jesus says that what went on in the temple was every bit as bad as what went on outside.

So, He quotes from Jeremiah’s temple sermon, [Jeremiah 7:11](#). Notice first the reaction of the people, they gathered for Jesus to teach them, [Mark 11:17](#). In fact, these last words were spoken to the people during that teaching, ‘you have made it a den of robbers’, [Mark 11:17](#) / [Luke 19:46](#).

Certainly, the priests were to blame for permitting this traffic to go on, but the people were also to blame for encouraging it by ‘buying’, and they were to blame for using the temple as a shortcut. But there was also healing; the blind and lame came to Him, [Matthew 21:14](#).

These poor, sick people usually remained outside the temple altogether, because many of them would not be permitted to enter. But they were emboldened by the presence of Jesus, and they came to Him, and He healed them, [Matthew 14:14](#).

And notice the shouts of the children in the temple gates. Hosanna! Matthew 21:15. When the leaders asked Jesus if He heard what the children were saying, Matthew 21:16, Jesus quotes Psalms 8:2. Jesus allowed the people to exalt Him to the status of king. So, the reaction to Jesus was favourable, at least from the people.

The reaction to Jesus was favourable, at least from the people, but the reactions from the authorities were violent, ‘that they might kill Him’, Mark 11:18 / Luke 19:47.

In any case, they would not stone Him in the temple itself, so they had to plan to put Him to death elsewhere, Luke 20:1-6. However, the priests had to exercise caution, ‘for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching,’ Mark 11:18 / Luke 19:48.

Any of those who had come with Jesus to the city had also come with Him to the temple. In other words, there were many good Galileans present, not just people from the city, who would be under the thumb of the priests and with such enthusiasm being shown for Jesus, it might be dangerous for the priests themselves if they dared to lay hands on Jesus, Luke 20:1-6. Any of those who had come with Jesus to the city had also come with Him to the temple.

In other words, there were many good Galileans present, not just people from the city, who would be under the thumb of the priests and with such enthusiasm being shown for Jesus, it might be dangerous for the priests themselves if they dared to lay hands on Jesus. Jesus then goes to Bethany to spend the night. He possibly stayed with Lazarus, Martha and Mary, Mark 11:19 / Matthew 21:17 / John 11:1 / John 11:18 / John 12:1.

‘In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!” Mark 11:20-21

The disciples were amazed at how quickly the fig tree withered, Matthew 21:20. Peter remembers what Jesus did to the fig tree the day before, Mark 11:20-21. It appears that the tree was cursed on Monday morning as Christ was on the way to the cleansing of the temple.

Matthew indicates that it withered immediately, but the following morning, Peter noticed that it was withered completely from its roots upward and totally dried up. They probably didn’t notice this on Monday evening as they returned to Bethany, because it was evening time, and it would have been dark.

MOUNTAIN MOVING FAITH

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”
Mark 11:22-26

Barclay, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The phrase about removing mountains was a quite common Jewish phrase. It was a regular, vivid phrase for removing difficulties.’

Jesus replies to His disciples and teaches them a lesson on faith, Matthew 21:22-23. We must remember that faith isn’t the source of power; God is the source of that power, and the disciples had to learn to trust their source, who is God, Matthew 17:20 / James 1:6 / James 5:16.

If these words of Jesus concerning ‘a faith which can move mountains’, Mark 11:23, are to be taken literally, then they literally have to apply to His disciples, not Christians today. This kind of faith was of the miraculous kind; this wouldn’t be the faith of Romans 5:1.

This is a miraculous faith that enabled one to ‘remove mountains’, [1 Corinthians 13:2](#) / [Matthew 17:20](#) / [James 5:14-15](#). This kind of faith, along with all the other miraculous gifts, has ceased to exist, [1 Corinthians 13:8-12](#).

When Christians pray in faith, we need to trust that God will answer our prayers, there may be times our prayers aren’t answered in a way which we would like or as quickly as we would like but we must trust that He will answer them, [Mark 11:24](#).

We must also remember that there are times our prayers won’t be answered simply because we don’t ask, or we don’t believe God can do what we request of Him and there are times our prayers aren’t in line with God’s will, [1 John 5:14](#) / [James 4:3](#).

Jesus tells them when they stand praying, if they hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that their Father in heaven may forgive them their sins, [Mark 11:25](#).

The footnote for [Mark 11:26](#) tells us that some manuscripts reference [Matthew 6:15](#). Here are the terms and conditions for forgiveness, [Matthew 6:14-15](#). We must be willing to forgive others, as we received forgiveness from God at our baptism, [Acts 2:38](#).

Having a forgiving spirit identifies us as possessing the nature of God who forgives, [Ephesians 4:32](#) / [Colossians 3:13](#). If we cannot forgive our people, then certainly we aren’t of the nature of God, and thus, not a candidate for heaven, [Matthew 9:2-6](#) / [Matthew 18:21-35](#) / [Luke 17:3-4](#) / [James 2:13](#).

The cross doesn’t make forgiveness easy, but it does make it possible, [Luke 23:34](#). We must learn to root out any bitterness we have towards others, [Ephesians 4:26-27](#) / [Ephesians 4:31](#) / [Hebrews 12:14-15](#). We must learn to bless those who hurt us, [Romans 12:14](#). We must forgive others as God forgave us, [Matthew 6:14-15](#) / [Matthew 6:12](#) / [Matthew 6:13-14](#).

Jesus knew that over the next few days, the disciples would need to have their faith increased because of the great trials and persecution they were about to go through, and they were about to face some huge obstacles of their own, and it was going to take great faith to overcome them.

CONCLUSION

The whole purpose of a fig tree was to produce fruit, and as Christians, we too must produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, [Galatians 5:22-23](#) / [John 16:16](#) / [James 3:17-18](#). But if we don’t produce the Spirit’s fruit in our lives, we too will end up like the fig tree Jesus used as an object lesson; we become useless, [Matthew 7:19](#) / [John 15:1-2](#).

We may not have the miraculous faith which can move mountains today, but we certainly should have a faith which trusts that God can remove any giant obstacles which come our way.

Jesus was hungry and saw a fig tree in leaf. When He approached, He observed that it had no fruit. He cursed it, and by the next day, it was withered up. Jesus’s action taught the amazed disciples some lessons.

1. People who bear no fruit will be cursed by God.

This principle applied to the Jewish nation as a whole because it was bearing no fruit for the Lord.

2. Jesus noted that God has the power to wither fig trees and move mountains; in short, to respond to prayer.

What we must do is trust Him and turn to Him with our needs. The incident of the fig tree was to offer a visual illustration for the disciples to have faith in God. Their faith would move them to trust in God, who would work in their lives in order to confirm them to be His messengers, [Mark 16:17-20](#).

Their faith must produce fruit in the years to come, James 2:14-26. Fruit would be produced as the disciples went forth into all the world and preached the Gospel.

Jesus reminds us that we can't hold grudges against others, we must be willing to forgive others, if we are to be forgiven by God, Mark 11:25 / Matthew 6:12 / Romans 12:18.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED

'They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you authority to do this?' Jesus replied, 'I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!' They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin' (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So, they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Jesus said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.' Mark 11:27-33

Remember that at this time, it was the aggression of the religious leaders that developed the confrontation between themselves and Jesus, Mark 11:27-12:12 / Luke 20:1-19.

Jesus had violated their system of religious regulations. He didn't conform to their system of institutional religiosity. He didn't fit in with their idea of who the Messiah should be.

Jesus' bold actions in clearing out the temple stirred opposition, Mark 11:15-18 / Luke 19:45-48 / Matthew 21:12-16. The Jewish leaders thought that the temple belonged to them, so they questioned Jesus' right to come into it and make such drastic revisions, Mark 11:27-28 / Luke 20:1-2 / Matthew 7:28-29 / Matthew 21:23.

Jesus replied to their challenge with a question. He asked whether John's baptism came from God or men, Mark 11:29-30 / Luke 20:3-4 / Matthew 21:24-25. John had confessed that Jesus was the Son of God, John 1:34, and by doing so, he confessed that Jesus was greater than he was, Matthew 3:11-15.

They consulted among themselves and decided that it would be politically unwise to answer, Mark 11:31-33 / Luke 20:5-7 / Matthew 21:25-27. Their refusal demonstrated that they were not sincerely seeking the truth. Therefore, Jesus refused to answer their question, Mark 11:33 / Luke 20:8 / Matthew 21:27.

JESUS' QUESTION IS A MODEL

Anyone can ask questions, but Jesus was the Master at asking THE question. Jesus asked the Jewish leaders an outstanding question, Did John's baptism come from God or man?

This is the question that we should ask about every religious practice. Anything that originates in man should be rejected; all that God commands should be carefully observed.

There is an easy way for us to determine whether a given teaching or activity comes from God or man. Everything that comes from God is in the Bible. If a particular doctrine or practice is not in the Bible, it is not from God. We should verify everything we do by this simple test: Does it come from God or from man?

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION

Some people like to say that this is a parable about ‘The wicked tenants’, but by the time we have finished, you’ll see that it’s more like the parable of ‘The rejected Son’.

We all know what the Pharisees and Sadducees were like; they hated Jesus, and they were always plotting for a way to get rid of Him. And there were many reasons for this, but one of the main reasons they wanted Jesus out of the way was because they couldn’t or wouldn’t accept who Jesus was.

They were always questioning His authority, [Mark 1:21-22](#) / [Mark 11:27-33](#). They wouldn’t answer Him because they feared the people. And it’s with this final rejection of the source of the Lord’s authority that Jesus goes on to tell them the parable.

This parable tells us a lot about our God, mankind and Jesus Himself. First, let’s look at what it says about our God. This parable tells us four things about our God.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS

‘Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.’ [Mark 12:1](#)

1. Our God is a gracious God.

The Jewish leaders forgot to look back into their history and recognise just exactly who they were and where they came from. In [Ezekiel 16](#) we find a very graphic picture of what the nation of Israel was like when God took them under His care, [Ezekiel 16:4-7](#). And then God goes on to describe how they grew up into something beautiful and how they were like a queen.

But what a pathetic, helpless and hopeless picture this is. These religious leaders had forgotten just who they were and where they came from. They were God’s people, and God owned them. It was God who made them into the nation that they were. It was God who cared for them when they were lying by the side of the road, hopeless.

And when Jesus says that a man planted a vineyard, [Mark 12:1](#) / [Luke 20:9](#) / [Matthew 21:33](#), He’s telling us that man was God, it was God who planted the vineyard.

And notice that the vineyard was given everything it needed to do its work. It was given a wall around it to mark out its boundaries, to keep out robbers and to defend it from wild boars, [Mark 12:1](#) / [Matthew 21:33](#).

There was also a winepress in the vineyard where people would trample all over the grapes with their feet, [Mark 12:1](#) / [Matthew 21:33](#). And underneath the winepress, there was a wine vat, and that’s where all the juice from the grapes would flow.

And they were given a tower, [Mark 12:1](#) / [Matthew 21:33](#), and it’s in this tower that the wine would be stored, and the people would also live there. And it’s from there that they could look out for robbers at harvest time, that’s why it’s called a watchtower, [Isaiah 5:2](#). The vineyard owner gave the vineyard everything it needed to make their work easy and profitable.

And notice that God didn’t just give them a task to do, He also gave them the means by which to do those tasks, [1 Peter 4:10](#). When Jesus is talking about those who were given talents, He said one had five talents another had two talents, and yet another had one talent.

But Jesus clearly tells us in Matthew 25 that all were given a talent. But He says, we have a talent, and we need to use and develop that talent the best we can because if we don't, He will give it to someone else who will use it, Matthew 25:28.

2. God trusts us enough to do the work at hand.

The owner of the vineyard went away on a journey, Luke 20:9. God trusted the tenants to run the vineyard by themselves while He was away. The responsibility of sharing the good news about Jesus Christ with people is in our hands, Matthew 28:19-20.

God trusts us enough to do that, and He trusts us enough to give us freedom of choice about how we do that and how we live our lives. God has entrusted us to look after His work here on earth but unlike those tenants, we don't have any rights. We don't have any right to abuse the Word of God.

We don't have any right to compromise the Word of God. We don't have any right to abuse any of the gifts He has given us. But God trusts us enough to allow us to make mistakes and do so much for ourselves.

‘At harvest time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.’ Mark 12:2-5

3. Our God is patient.

Notice how the master sent servant after servant, Mark 12:2-5 / Luke 20:10-12 / Matthew 21:34-37. We know that Jeremiah was a prophet of God who was beaten up time and time again by the so-called leaders of God's people, Jeremiah 37:15.

Uriah is another prophet who was killed by the so-called leaders, Jeremiah 26:23. Zechariah was another prophet who was killed by the so-called leaders, 2 Chronicles 24:21.

Hebrews 11:37 tells us that many of God's servants ‘were stoned; they were sawn in two, they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated.’

These servants of God were God's holy prophets who were treated like this. And even after the first one was abused and ill-treated, God still didn't get angry with them and come after them with vengeance. Oh no! He gave those tenants chance after chance to respond to His appeals.

And He does the same with people today. He doesn't cast us away after we sin as Christians. He gives us chance after chance to live holy lives and gives those who aren't Christians time to become Christians, 2 Peter 3:9.

‘He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ “But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.’ Mark 12:6-8

Notice that Jesus doesn't call Himself a servant here, Mark 12:6-8 / Luke 20:13-15 / Matthew 21:37-38. He deliberately removes himself from the succession of prophets.

He says they were servants, but He is the Son. And so, because Jesus was always being questioned about His authority, He tells them right to their face that He is the Messiah.

They knew that He was the heir; they knew they were going to kill Him, Mark 12:7-8 / Luke 20:14-15 / Matthew 21:38-39. He says they were servants, but He is the Son, Matthew 28:18 / John 13:3 / John 17:2 / Hebrews 1:2.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” Mark 12:9

4. God will serve justice.

These tenants pushed their luck; they pushed God's patience, [2 Peter 3:10](#). And as this parable tells us, the world can push its luck with its disobedience and rebellion, but there's a time coming when justice will be done. People will either be born again or wish they hadn't been born at all, [Hebrews 9:27](#).

And unlike what the world believes, our God has the right to judge the world. Our God is a patient God, and He, as the owner of our souls, has the right to expect us to work in the field with the gifts He has given us. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness, [2 Peter 1:3](#).

It's because of their lack of faithfulness to God that Jesus asks these leaders the question, [Mark 12:9](#) / [Luke 20:15](#) / [Matthew 21:40](#). These tenants pushed their luck; they pushed God's patience.

And as this parable tells us, the world can push its luck with its disobedience and rebellion, but there's a time coming when justice will be done, [2 Peter 3:10](#) / [Hebrews 9:27](#).

Our God is a patient God, and He, as the owner of our souls, has the right to expect us to work in the field with the gifts He has given us. He has given us everything we need for life and godliness, [2 Peter 1:3](#).

This parable also tells us two things about mankind.

1. Mankind thinks it can get away with sin.

Sometimes in the world's judicial system, people fall through the cracks and get away with their crimes, but God's justice system doesn't have any cracks. Remember, God's people hadn't heard a word from God for four hundred years, they hadn't heard a word from any prophet until John the baptiser came along.

Out of sight, out of mind, is the phrase they might have used. They must have thought that God was too far away to do anything about the situation. Luke tells us in his account in [Luke 20:9](#), that He was away for a 'long time'.

And so, because of that silence, they may have thought that God was dead and out of the picture. Oh, but how wrong they were and how wrong people are today who think that there's no God or He's a dead God.

People today think they can get away with their sinful behaviour, but our God is very much alive, [Acts 14:15](#) / [Revelation 1:18](#). We don't come together every week to remember a dead God; our God is alive and well today and when He returns the whole world is going to know about it.

2. We can lose our privileges.

This parable has the story of what was still to come. The Jews had all the privileges of being God's chosen people. They also had many responsibilities, which went along with those privileges. But these people enjoyed all the blessings from God.

He looked after them, He provided their everyday needs, He provided wisdom and guidance, food and shelter. He took care of all their needs as we looked at earlier.

And as soon as Jesus mentioned a vineyard, the Jews would know exactly what it meant. They would cast their minds back to [Isaiah 5](#), where Isaiah is talking about the vineyard.

The problem is this parable doesn't mean much to us today, but to a Jew, [Isaiah 5:1-7](#) was a very important part of Israel's history, which they couldn't ignore or forget.

Have you ever sat and listened to a sermon and thought to yourself, Is that preacher speaking about me? Is God speaking to me through that preacher? Sometimes we think maybe He's not speaking about us, but there are times when it's so much in our face that we know that God is speaking to us.

The religious leaders knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. These tenants or Jewish leaders knew Jesus was speaking about them, but as usual, they failed to listen and do their job.

In [Matthew 23](#), we find Jesus talking about the so-called spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation, and he says in [Matthew 23:16](#), 'Woe to you, blind guides!' He calls them 'Blind fools!' in [Matthew 23:17](#). In [Matthew 23:19](#), He

calls them ‘Blind men!’ In Matthew 23:23, He says, ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!’ And on and on He goes.

But the point is that the Jewish leaders were supposed to produce the fruit, Mark 12:2 / Luke 20:10 / Matthew 21:34, and they were supposed to protect the rest of the vineyard. They were supposed to watch out for robbers, but they didn’t because they didn’t do their job properly.

And it’s because of their lack of faithfulness to God that Jesus asks these leaders ‘What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others,’ Mark 12:9 / Luke 20:15 / Matthew 21:40 / Matthew 21:43.

In other words, all the privileges, all the responsibilities of being a child of God were going to be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will be grateful for everything He has done and will do for them, Mark 12:9 / Luke 20:16 / Matthew 21:41.

The Jewish nation will be done away with, and another nation will be raised. A nation of people who will obey His words and take their responsibilities seriously, a nation of Christians.

And that would have hurt, ‘the Gentiles being a part of the kingdom of God. Never!’ A Jew would say. All the privileges the Jews had with God were now going to be available to all who would be obedient to the Gospel of Christ, Ephesians 3:4-6.

‘Haven’t you read this passage of Scripture: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?” Mark 12:10-11

Those listening to Jesus are clearly shocked by His words and say, ‘God forbid!’ Luke 20:16. And so, it’s then that Jesus quotes Psalms 118:22-23 / Mark 12:10-11 / Luke 20:17 / Matthew 21:42. This stone, which was the keystone for the building, the most important stone of all, was being rejected, Luke 20:18 / Matthew 21:44.

The Jewish leaders rejected the Christ, their long-awaited Messiah, Isaiah 8:14-15 / Isaiah 28:16 / Daniel 2:44-45 / Zechariah 12:3 / Romans 9:33 / 1 Peter 2:8. The Jewish leaders rejected Christ, their long-awaited Messiah. Despite knowing this, they didn’t want to accept Him, Mark 12:12 / Luke 20:19 / Matthew 21:45-46. This was a right in your face parable.

The stone the Jewish leaders rejected has now become the cornerstone of a new building, the church, Acts 4:8-12. In other words, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the very words and the teachings of Christ are the very foundation that Christianity is built on.

All the privileges, all the responsibilities of being a child of God were going to be taken away from the Jews and given to a people who will be grateful for everything He has done and will do for them, Matthew 21:43-44.

Jesus was the stone of Daniel 2, which broke into pieces and consumed all the power that was exerted by world kingdoms, Daniel 2:24-25 / Daniel 2:44-45. The Jewish nation will be done away with, and another nation will be raised.

A nation of people who will obey His words and take their responsibilities seriously, a nation of Christians. And that would have hurt, ‘the Gentiles being a part of the kingdom of God. Never!’ a Jew would say, Ephesians 3:4-6. All the privileges the Jews had with God were now going to be available to all who would be obedient to the Gospel of Christ.

‘Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.’ Mark 12:12

They understood what Jesus was talking about with the parable; the chief priests and Pharisees didn’t want to accept Him, Mark 12:12 / Luke 20:19 / Matthew 21:45-46. Instead, they looked for a way to arrest Him, but because of the fear of the people, they couldn’t at this time.

They knew that even the people believed that he was a prophet. And so, because Jesus was always being questioned about His authority, He tells them right to their face that He is the Messiah. They knew that He was the heir; they knew they were going to kill Him, [Luke 20:18](#).

In Matthew, we find Jesus talking about the so-called spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation, and he calls them ‘blind guides!’ [Matthew 23:16](#). He calls them ‘Blind fools!’ [Matthew 23:17](#). He calls them ‘Blind men!’ [Matthew 23:19](#), and He calls ‘hypocrites!’ [Matthew 23:23](#).

But the point is that the Jewish leaders were supposed to produce the fruit, and they were supposed to protect the rest of the vineyard. They were supposed to watch out for robbers, but they didn’t because they didn’t do their job properly. They rejected Him, [John 1:11](#) / [John 3:16](#), and they crucified Him outside the city, [1 Corinthians 2:8](#) / [Hebrews 13:12-13](#).

CONCLUSION

When it comes to dying, most of us don’t know how or when that’s going to happen. But Jesus knew when and how He was going to die. The cross of Christ didn’t come as a surprise to Jesus, but it was still a brutal and shameful way to die, [Hebrews 10:5-10](#).

Jesus Christ was born to die, that’s why He came to earth in the first place. He knew He was going to have to suffer and be mocked both physically and mentally. But it’s because of His willingness to go to the cross that we can come together and worship Him every week.

The stone the Jewish leaders rejected has now become the cornerstone of a new building, the church, [Acts 4:8-12](#). In other words, the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the very words and the teachings of Christ are the very foundation that Christianity is built upon.

And what a privilege that is, to be a part of God’s kingdom. The question is, what are we going to do with Him? Are we going to reject Him as our Saviour, or are we going to accept Him as our Saviour?

The Jews were awaiting their Messiah; He came, and they missed it. If you’re not a Christian today, then like we said earlier, God is patient with you, not wanting you to perish, [1 Peter 3:9](#). But He offers you salvation today, He wants to be your personal Saviour, so don’t be like the Jews and miss out.

PAYING TAXES TO CAESAR

This is yet another example of a group of people who are trying to trap Jesus to find any excuse to have Him put to death. What’s interesting is that we also find an example of others giving someone else a loaded gun to shoot, whilst the people who gave them the loaded gun remain in the background because they’re not brave enough to do it themselves.

‘Later, they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words.’ [Mark 12:13](#)

It’s obvious that the parables, [Mark 12:1-12](#) / [Luke 20:9-19](#) / [Matthew 22:33-45](#), which Jesus had just finished teaching hit a nerve with the Pharisees, and as a result of this, in order to save their own skin and find an excuse to put Him to death, they wanted to find a way to humiliate Jesus in front of everyone else, [Mark 12:13](#) / [Luke 20:20](#) / [Matthew 22:15](#).

THE HERODIANS

The Pharisees send their disciples along with the Herodians, [Matthew 22:16](#). The Herodians were a political group that supported the Roman leader, King Herod Antipas, who reigned from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39.

They wanted everyone to submit to the rule of Herod and they did so purely because of the financial gain they may receive and so they would be left alone in peace.

The Pharisees and others wanted Israel to follow the teachings of the Law, but not with any Roman input, whilst the Herodians were willing to work with the Romans. They were the absolute opposite of those who believed that God and God alone should lead Israel.

When we read the New Testament, we see that when two opposing groups have a common enemy, despite their beliefs, they will come together and unite against the enemy. In this case, the common enemy was Jesus, [Mark 3:6](#), but of course, Jesus knew their hearts too and warned against their teaching, [Mark 8:15](#).

‘They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.’ Mark 12:14

FLATTERY

The Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus and use flattery as a trap, [Mark 12:14](#) / [Luke 20:21](#) / [Matthew 22:16](#). Remember that the Herodians themselves taught that taxes must be paid to Rome. The ironic thing is that they spoke the truth about Jesus; everything they described Jesus to be was true, [Mark 12:14](#) / [Luke 20:21](#) / [Matthew 22:16](#).

They knew Jesus was straight-talking, they knew that He didn’t worry if people were offended when He spoke the truth and because they knew Jesus spoke against them and their teachings, they knew they had to get rid of Him because He was exposing their own hypocrisy, [Matthew 21:28](#).

Obviously, they are trying to set the trap, they’re trying to set Jesus up for the question to come but as Anne Bradstreet once said, ‘Sweet words are like honey, a little may refresh, but too much gluts the stomach.’

THE QUESTION ABOUT PAYING TAX TO CAESAR

‘Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? Should we pay, or shouldn’t we?’” Mark 12:14-15

In simple terms, they were asking Jesus this question based on the law of Moses, [Mark 12:14-15](#) / [Luke 21:22](#) / [Matthew 22:17](#). In other words, does the law of Moses teach that one should pay taxes to a foreign state? In their theology, if Jesus said they shouldn’t pay the taxes, He would be in violation of Roman law because Israel at the time was under the rule of Rome. But if Jesus said to pay the taxes, then they believed that He would be in violation of Old Testament law as stated in [Deuteronomy 17:14-15](#), which was given to Israel as a self-governing nation.

ROMAN TAX

According to history, the Roman taxes were made up one per cent of a man's income. Much like today, the more money you earn the more tax you pay. But we must also remember the Romans had other taxes, customs taxes, import and export taxes, toll bridges, crop taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, and special taxes when there was a war. They had building projects or campaigns to finance.

THE TRAP

If Jesus had said it was unlawful to give to Caesar, there's no doubt they would have dragged Him away to face the courts, charged with treason, which, of course, was punishable by death.

If Jesus had said, 'It is right to pay tax to Caesar,' this wouldn't go down well with the people who were listening because they had longed to get out of Roman bondage.

It's almost amusing that they actually believed they had come up with a question that Jesus has no way out of, [Mark 12:15](#) / [Luke 20:22](#) / [Matthew 22:17](#), but instead of them humiliating Jesus, Jesus will end up humiliating them.

'But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.' Mark 12:15-17

Notice how Jesus knew what they were up to and knew what their intent really was, [Mark 12:15](#) / [Luke 20:23](#) / [Matthew 22:18](#) / [John 2:24-25](#). Interestingly, those who are in positions of leadership always seem to be hypocritical of other religious leaders who hold a different view. The very fact that they set out to trap Jesus in the first place, [Matthew 22:18](#), tells us a lot about the condition of their hearts.

The coin in question, [Mark 12:15-16](#) / [Luke 20:24](#) / [Matthew 22:19-21](#), was a silver denarius, which was worth around a day's wages and engraved on it was the image of Caesar, who was the Emperor of Rome.

The second commandment of the ten commandments prohibited the Jews from making any graven image in order to symbolise the worship of gods in an idolatrous manner, [Exodus 20:4](#).

JESUS' RESPONSE

Jesus tells them to pay the taxes regardless of whose image is on the coin, [Mark 12:17](#) / [Luke 20:25](#) / [Matthew 22:21](#). In other words, the money belongs to Caesar, therefore pay to him that which belongs to him, [Romans 13:7](#).

They needed to learn that just because they pay tax to Caesar, doesn't mean that they are worshipping Caesar. On the other hand, they needed to learn that everything ultimately belongs to God, [Mark 12:17](#) / [Luke 20:25](#) / [Matthew 22:21](#); therefore, our lives are given to God who created all men in His image, [Genesis 1:26-27](#).

Remember, the Jews weren't to pay respect to images like that on the Roman coin, and when they realised this, they actually trapped themselves concerning paying taxes to a foreign government. Jesus says they must give their lives to God and give Caesar his taxes, [Matthew 22:21](#).

HUMILIATED

Jesus answered the Pharisees and the Herodians' questions, but not in the way they were expecting. Their trap failed, and Jesus ended up trapping them. They came to humiliate Him, but He humiliated them. They were amazed and left, [Mark 12:17](#) / [Luke 20:26](#) / [Matthew 22:22](#) / [John 8:1-11](#), because they knew they didn't get one single thing from Jesus that they could use against Him.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we must obey our government and pay our taxes, whilst at the same time obeying our God in whose image we are made. There are genuine people out there who have genuine questions in their hearts which need to be answered honestly.

However, there will also be those among us, even today, who try to trap us with double-edged questions; may we be wise enough to recognise the trap and answer with wisdom, [Proverbs 15:1-2](#) / [Proverbs 26:4](#).

MARRIAGE AT THE RESURRECTION

‘Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question.’ Mark 12:18

THE SADDUCEES

The Sadducees were a religious sect in the time of Jesus, [Mark 12:18](#) / [Luke 20:27](#) / [Matthew 22:23](#). Their origin is not known for sure. Some think they date back to Zadock, a high priest during the time of David and Solomon, [1 Kings 2:26-27](#). However, in all probability, they came into existence during the period between the Old and New Testaments.

We do know that they came from the leading families of the nation, such as the priests, merchants, and the rich. They can well be described as aristocrats. The high priests, the most powerful members of the priesthood, were mainly Sadducees, [Acts 5:17](#).

One of the distinguishing marks of the Sadducees was their rejection of the ‘traditions of the elders’ advocated by the Pharisees. They claimed that God not only gave Moses a written law, but also an oral law, which was passed down and given to the elders. They, in turn, passed these oral laws on down to their successors.

The Pharisees claimed the oral law was needed to interpret the written Law of Moses. They regarded these traditions as important as the Law of Moses itself. By contrast, the Sadducees insisted that only the laws written by Moses, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, were the only binding laws.

In short, the main difference between the two parties was confined, on the whole, to this general rejection of Pharisaic traditions. With the Sadducees, little value was placed on the writings of the Prophets or the Psalms. They didn't outright reject them, but they didn't feel they were on an equal par with the Pentateuch.

The most prominent doctrine of the Sadducees was the denial of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. They believed that the soul dies with the body, thus the extinction of life.

The Sadducees said that Moses nowhere mentions anything about a soul or a resurrection, [Acts 23:8](#). From this passage, we learn that they didn't believe in either angels or spirits.

However, angels are mentioned several times in the writings of Moses. In view of this, it's difficult to see how they could harmonise this with their denial of angels. They may have regarded angels as simply God appearing in some kind of visible form.

The Sadducees also believed in the free will of man, that is, man is responsible for his own prosperity or misfortune. They interpreted the law literally and tended to support strict justice as opposed to mercy toward the offender.

Considering their concept of no life after death, it seems strange to us that they were so intent on punishing those who violated the law. Stranger yet, why would they want to be priests and religious leaders if there is no resurrection? The answer may lie in their belief that God prospered the righteous.

THE UNREALISTIC QUESTION

“Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” [Mark 12:19-23](#)

Just like the Pharisees before them, the Sadducees’ question was all about trying to trap Jesus, [Mark 12:19-23](#) / [Luke 20:28-33](#) / [Matthew 22:24-28](#). They say that Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him, [Mark 12:19](#) / [Luke 20:28](#) / [Matthew 22:24](#), and then they give an example of a woman being widowed seven times, [Mark 12:20-22](#) / [Luke 20:29-32](#) / [Matthew 22:25-27](#).

When you think about the actual question, the woman being widowed seven times, the possibility of this actually happening in real life is almost none, which tells us that this wasn't a sincere question, it was a question asked to try and support their idea that there is no resurrection, [Mark 12:18](#) / [Mark 12:24](#) / [Luke 20:27](#) / [Matthew 22:23](#) / [Matthew 22:28](#).

The law, which is referred to as the ‘levirate law’, was based on the principle that the family name of the dead brother is carried on throughout history, [Genesis 38:8](#) / [Ruth 3:5-6](#) / [Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#).

Moses said that if the older brother, who had a legal right to continue the family name and the birthright, died, leaving his wife without children, his brother must raise up children by the dead brother’s wife.

They asked a question designed to show that the doctrine of the resurrection was absurd. It involved the invented case of a woman who was married to seven brothers in succession. They asked Jesus to tell them whose wife she would be in the resurrection since all of them had been married to her, [Mark 12:23](#) / [Luke 20:33](#) / [Matthew 22:28](#).

JESUS’ RESPONSE

‘Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him. ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’” [Mark 12:24-26](#)

Their question was meant to show a supposed contradiction in the teaching of Jesus, but they didn't know the Old Testament Scriptures or the power of God, [Mark 12:24-27](#) / [Matthew 22:29](#).

In [Luke 20:34-37](#), notice how Jesus speaks of two ages, 'this age' and 'the age to come', [Luke 20:35](#). If this doesn't tell us that there's definitely life after death, I don't know what will.

It's interesting that Jesus just goes with their thought process. Despite the chances of this happening, the woman being widowed seven times previously, Christ resolved the issue, not based on what Moses said but on what God said, [Matthew 22:31](#). In other words, Christ tells them, it isn't Moses they are quoting but God, [Mark 12:26](#) / [Luke 20:37](#) / [Matthew 22:31-32](#).

The Old Testament Scriptures do teach about the resurrection, [Mark 12:26](#) / [Luke 20:37](#) / [Matthew 22:31](#), whether the Jews understood this or not, they couldn't deny what the Scriptures actually said concerning resurrection, [Job 19:25-27](#) / [Isaiah 26:19](#) / [Daniel 12:2](#).

It's clear that the Sadducees didn't understand that there is life after death and they certainly didn't believe in the power of God, [Mark 12:24](#) / [Matthew 22:29](#). This was simply because of their ignorance of what the Scriptures actually teach.

Jesus confirms there will be a resurrection, [Mark 12:25](#) / [Luke 20:36](#) / [Matthew 22:30](#), but He also tells them there will be no marriage at the resurrection, just like angels don't marry, [Mark 12:25](#) / [Luke 20:35-36](#) / [Matthew 22:30](#). There will be no marriage or procreation in heaven, for the purpose of procreation would have fulfilled its purpose. Procreation was for the purpose of populating the world. Heaven, however, will be populated by those who were born again in this world, [John 1:13-14](#).

We also know there will be no death in heaven, [Luke 20:35-36](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:26](#) / [Revelation 20:13-14](#). Our earthly relationships will be superseded by a state wherein we will be like angels who now exist, [Luke 20:36](#) / [Hebrews 1:14](#) / [1 John 3:2](#).

Even though the Sadducees didn't ask Him about angels, I believe Jesus mentioned the angels on purpose, as we looked at earlier, they didn't believe in angels, [Acts 23:8](#).

And so we could say, they came asking one question, but Jesus actually answers two questions, and He tells them their thinking and doctrine are wrong on both counts. There is a resurrection, and angels do exist.

The phrases 'God's children' and 'children of the resurrection', [Luke 20:24](#), are used to mean the same thing. It's God's pledge for His children, [Romans 8:21](#) / [Romans 8:23](#), and as we know, the resurrection is absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith, [Hebrews 6:1-2](#).

It's important to point out that Jesus uses the Greek present progressive tense here, and in doing so, He's pointing out the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still living at the time God made this statement and at the time Jesus referred to it, [Genesis 17:2](#) / [Genesis 26:24](#) / [Genesis 28:21](#) / [Exodus 3:6](#) / [Exodus 3:15](#).

THE GOD OF THE LIVING

'He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!' [Mark 12:27](#)

It's important to point out that Jesus uses the Greek present progressive tense here, and in doing so, He's pointing out the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still living at the time God made this statement and at the time Jesus referred to it, [Genesis 17:2](#) / [Genesis 26:24](#) / [Genesis 28:21](#) / [Exodus 3:6](#) / [Exodus 3:15](#).

Jesus is saying that when a person dies, God doesn't stop being their God and because He doesn't stop being their God, this tells us that the righteous don't cease to exist when they die, [Mark 12:27](#) / [Luke 20:38](#) / [Matthew 22:32](#).

In other words, the souls of righteous people are kept by God in heaven until the resurrection, after which we all will receive our new resurrected bodies which are made for eternal purposes in heaven, John 5:28-29 / 1 Corinthians 15:35-55 / 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

Notice it was ‘the teachers of the law’ who responded to Jesus’ teaching, Luke 20:39-40. You can hear them say, ‘Bravo, bravo, teacher,’ and sniggering amongst themselves as Jesus seems to side with their theology about the resurrection and angels.

It’s also interesting that Matthew doesn’t tell us that the Sadducees were astonished at Jesus’ teaching, but he says ‘the crowds’ were astonished, Matthew 22:33.

It appears the crowds had heard the Sadducees’ theology for years, but no one really seemed to question their beliefs. The Sadducees, like the Pharisees before them, seem to disappear off the scene, no doubt feeling embarrassed and ashamed, and no one else dared to ask Jesus any more questions, Luke 20:40.

As with the Pharisees, their whole religion was one of pretence. In other words, they pretended to know the Scriptures when in fact they didn’t know the Scriptures.

And so, when Jesus comes along and shows how far off their understanding of the Scriptures actually was, the crowd were astonished, Matthew 22:13. We can almost hear the relief in the crowd, ‘at last’, they cry, ‘Someone who knows what they’re talking about, Someone who actually knows and understands the Scriptures correctly’.

CONCLUSION

If we learn anything from Jesus’ dealings with the Sadducees, it’s simply this: we must know the Scriptures. You’ll be amazed at how many Christians misquote Scripture, maybe in ignorance, as I’ve done in the past, but there are others who deliberately misquote Scripture to defend their personal beliefs.

If you listen carefully, you will hear it from the pulpit, you will hear it on the TV, and everyone says the ‘amen’ without realising that they have just been lied to, 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

I was reading a ‘Christian’ survey just the other week and found it shocking that many Christians don’t even possess a Bible. I was even more shocked that those who do own one don’t read it, and some only read it on a Sunday morning.

No wonder people are being led astray and come to believe all kinds of erroneous teachings! It’s a sad fact that many churches don’t have any Bible study time, and those that do have many members in attendance.

I’m not saying that others don’t study at home or by themselves, but one of the best ways to know the Scriptures is by sitting in a Bible class, where you are encouraged to read the Bible for yourself. A Bible class where you are encouraged to ask questions and share your opinion, whilst learning from others, Acts 2:42 / 2 Timothy 2:15.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

‘One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:28-31

The religious leaders are around trying to trap Him, [Matthew 22:34-35](#). The Herodians came to Jesus and tried to catch Him out. As soon as they are silenced, the Sadducees come along, and they too try to trick Jesus. And finally, we have the Pharisees, the teachers of the nation.

It seems as though one young man, an expert in the law, [Mark 12:28](#) / [Matthew 22:35](#) / [Luke 7:30](#) / [Luke 10:25](#), pushed his way forward to ask Jesus another trick question to try and trap Him, [Mark 12:28](#) / [Matthew 22:36](#).

And Jesus looks at this young man and I wonder if there wasn't a look of sympathy on His face! This man had been so wrongly informed about Jesus; I don't think he would believe anything that Jesus would tell him anyway.

But we can imagine that man standing back and waiting for the answer from Jesus. And Jesus deliberately quotes from the Old Testament, [Mark 12:29-31](#) / [Matthew 22:37](#), a passage of scripture that every faithful Jew would recite twice every day.

It's known as 'The Schema', from [Deuteronomy 6:4-6](#). Jesus says we are to love God with all our heart, our soul and our mind, [Matthew 6:33](#) / [1 John 14:15](#), and we are to love our neighbours as yourself, [Matthew 19:19](#) / [Leviticus 19:18](#) / [Galatians 5:14](#) / [Galatians 5:22-23](#). Love is the motivation by which law is put into action in our lives, [Romans 3:31](#).

Poole, in his commentary, says the following about the law and the prophets, [Matthew 22:40](#).

'Moses summed up all in the ten commandments, to which, truly interpreted, all the precepts of Scripture are reducible. Christ here brings the ten to two.'

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART

We all know how much God loves us because the Bible clearly tells us, [John 3:16](#) / [1 John 3:16](#). And so, there is no questioning God's love for us, but how do we love God?

C. S. Lewis once said the following.

'On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him.'

God never commands us to do something without first telling us how to do it. And so, after telling Israel that the LORD God is one, Moses goes on to explain to us how we are to love God.

The Hebrew word for love is the word 'ahab', and it carries with it the idea of having the ultimate love that we can express or feel. In other words, when we say we love the Lord, we're saying we have loved, and we do love and will continue to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength.

Do you love God with all of your heart? If we're honest with ourselves, we will admit that we all love God to a certain extent, but the truth is, sometimes He's not always the one we love most.

Sometimes we love our spouses more or our families more. Sometimes we love our jobs or hobbies more. We have many other things in this world that are pulling for our affection.

So how can we obey the Lord's command to love Him with all our heart? We have to acknowledge that we can't really love Him or anyone else without His help.

In other words, He doesn't ask us to do anything which didn't first originate from Him, [1 John 4:19](#). God is the actual source of our love for Him. He loved us first, and He infused us with His love. To infuse means to fill, to soak; we're being soaked with the love of God. The love of God in us, is the love with which we can love Him in return.

When most people think about love, they think of the warm, fluffy feeling they get when they meet someone. But love isn't merely a feeling; it's an attribute, hence why God is love, 1 John 4:8 / 1 John 4:16. We can't claim to love anyone if we don't know God because God is love. The reason we know and rely on the love of God is simply because God is love.

So what is the heart? You would be forgiven for thinking it is an organ in your body which keeps you alive. That's just a pump that keeps the blood flowing through your body. We have to remember that in the Old Testament, the word 'heart' didn't carry the same deep meaning in Hebrew as it does in the Greek New Testament.

This is one reason why the New Testament gives a deeper meaning to the word 'mind'. In other words, the Hebrew concept of 'heart' included both feelings and thoughts, Genesis 6:5.

Thinking is an activity of the mind, but Jesus asked the scribes why they were thinking those thoughts in their hearts, Matthew 9:4. This shows that our mind is part of our heart.

In Acts 11:23, we read that when we exercise our will, our will is part of our heart. Rejoicing is related to our emotions, but in John 16:22, we see that our hearts rejoice. This shows us that our emotions are also part of our heart. Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, Hebrews 10:22, indicates that our conscience is also part of our heart. Our hearts do much more than we might have thought.

In addition to sensing the wide range of human emotions, our hearts think, decide, and perceive right from wrong. If we didn't have a heart, we couldn't sense love or love in return, Mark 12:30. God created us with a heart so we could have a loving relationship with Him.

So in a very real sense, our heart is at the centre of our relationship with God. We were created by God in such a marvellous way. We have a spirit to contact, receive, and contain Him as life, and a heart to love Him.

He wants to be our life, and He wants us to love Him with our whole heart. And if we're truthful with ourselves, it's easy to love God when things are going well, when we enjoy one blessing after another. But what about those difficult times? What about when challenges come our way?

Israel had to learn the lesson which we still have to learn today. Loving God with ALL of our heart means loving God at ALL times, even when God seems quiet. Even when He says wait, even when He says no.

And, yes, even when bad things happen and challenges come our way. Loving God at all times is a day-to-day learning process. We learn more and more how to do it and keep on doing it a little each day. And we do that until we can say what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:11-13.

Notice that the word 'courage', in Philippians 4:11-13, the root word for courage is 'cor', which is Latin for 'heart'. Living with courage in our hearts is a good way to remind ourselves to love God. Living with courage in our hearts is a good way to remind ourselves not to trust in our own feelings or understanding, Proverbs 3:5.

Martin Luther once said in a poem.

'For feelings come and feelings go, And feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the Word of God: Nought else is worth believing. Though all my heart should feel condemned For want of some sweet token, There is One greater than my heart Whose Word cannot be broken. I'll trust in God's unchanging Word Till soul and body sever: For, though all things shall pass away, His Word shall stand forever.'

When we depend on our own feelings and understanding, we end up confused. God doesn't love me anymore! God has abandoned me in my time of need! Loving God with our mind means renewing our mind daily so that we think more of His thoughts instead of our own, Romans 12:2.

God's will and thoughts are good, pleasing, and perfect, and we need as much of them as possible to fill and renew our minds. Renewing our minds in God's Word is an important way of loving God.

God is a loving God, and He created us with a heart so that we would love Him wholly and absolutely. But as I mentioned earlier, we know our hearts love many other things besides God.

So what do we do to make sure we continue to love God with all of our hearts? Simply trying not to love those things doesn't work. When our heart is turned away from the Lord and set on things such as sins, selfish preoccupations, and worldly pleasures, it has a veil on it, 2 Corinthians 3:15-16.

In other words, they stop us from seeing the Lord. But when we turn our hearts to Him, the veil is removed, and we can see the Lord again. We see His beauty, His virtues, and how wonderful He is.

Then He infuses more of what He is, including love, into us, and it's in this way that our love for Him grows. We can turn our hearts to the Lord Jesus at any time by praying to Him, calling on His name, confessing our sins to Him, and spending time in His Word. These simple practices can remove the veil from our hearts, restore our fellowship with the Lord, and rekindle our love for Him.

When Sir Walter Raleigh was led to the block, his executioner asked him if his head lay right. Raleigh answered, 'It matters little, my friend, how the head lies, provided the heart is right.' Let me finish by asking you, what does your heart speak? How does your heart lie? Are you loving God with all your heart?

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR SOUL

Before we look at what it means to love God with all of our soul, I think we first need to ask the question, what is the soul? All human beings are triune beings. The Godhead is made up of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. And Paul says human beings are also triune beings because we have a body, soul and spirit, 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

OUR BODY IS EARTH CONSCIOUS

The body is of the earth and for the earth. We might describe the body as 'Earth-conscious', since it is the physical tool or instrument, by means of which a person's 'soul' or 'self', by its very nature, is invisible, is able to function in a physical world.

Although the Son existed 'in the beginning with God', John 1:1-2, it was necessary that 'the Word' should 'become flesh' and 'dwell' or 'tabernacle' among us, John 1:14.

The Lord needed a physical body. Paul says in Philippians 2:6-8, without the human form that Jesus took on Himself, it would have been impossible for Him to fulfil the unique purpose for which He came. And so, the Word must become flesh.

This was the divine plan, that's why we find the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, placing the words of the Psalmist from Psalms 40:6-8, into the Lord's mouth. Notice that the 'body' was prepared for 'me,' Hebrews 10:5.

In other words, man is more than just a bunch of chemicals. Man is housed in a physical body, and since his body is designed for earthly life, at death, the body returns to the earth, Genesis 3:19.

OUR SPIRIT IS GOD CONSCIOUS

If we consider the body to be ‘Earth-conscious’, we may think of the spirit as being ‘God-conscious’, Job 32:8. In other words, it’s that part of man’s nature which enables him to reach out to, and communicate with God. It’s the spiritual dimension in man’s character, and here again, we see the difference between man and other creatures. It’s only man who can say, ‘My soul thirsts for God, for the living God’, Psalms 42:2. Its only man who is encouraged to ‘Seek after Him, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him,’ Acts 17:27. Its only man who is given the assurance that ‘He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being,’ Acts 17:28. And as Solomon reminds us at death, ‘The spirit returns to God Who gave it,’ Ecclesiastes 12:7.

OUR SOUL IS SELF-CONSCIOUS

The ‘soul’ is man’s unique self. It is the part of his being which, because it is rational and moral, determines the actions performed by his body, and which, therefore, renders him personally accountable for what he does.

And so, it is man’s ‘soul’ which will ultimately be either saved or lost, depending on a person’s response to the offer of salvation which was made first possible by the coming of the Christ into the world.

The Greeks thought of the soul as the thing that integrates the whole inside. In other words, if something is messed up in our soul, our whole life is messed up. If we have bitterness or unforgiveness in our souls, it saturates everything in our lives. To the Greeks, the soul is the thing that ties heart, mind and strength together. Loving God with all our soul means to love Him with our entire inner being.

To love God with all my soul means loving God with all I am, Psalms 62:5 / Psalms 103:1. My will, my attitudes, my intentions, my emotions, my thoughts and feelings, and my body. To love God with all your soul is to love God with your entire inner life.

Have you ever asked yourself why you are here? Why does my life feel empty at times? We all have a God-shaped space within us which can only be satisfied by Him.

People turn to all kinds of things to fill in that space: drugs, alcohol, affairs, work, etc. But that space can only be filled by God because He is the One who fits perfectly into it.

C. S. Lewis once said the following.

‘The mould in which a key is made would be a strange thing if you had never seen a key, and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it, made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.’

When we allow ourselves to go beyond just believing that God exists, our souls take us much farther than our hearts can. Your soul takes you to a solid relationship with the living Lord, and as a bonus, heaven. Loving God with all your soul means evaluating yourself and working to be everything God calls you to be.

Let me ask you some tough questions, 2 Corinthians 3:18. Do you look more like Jesus than you did last week? What characteristics, gifts, and talents set you apart?

How is God leading you to use your uniqueness to serve Him and to draw others closer to Him? Are you using your resources like time, money, talent, and energy wisely and for His good purposes?

Do you represent Christ with your life? Understanding ourselves and our own special qualities, through the help of others and the Holy Spirit, teaches us how to fulfil God's purpose in our lives. How valuable is your soul? Are you prepared for eternity? What's more important to you, your life or your soul? Matthew 16:24-26.

Your family, your job, your wealth or your soul? In spite of whatever circumstances you face or will face in this life, is it not your deep desire to be able to find your way to the place where you can truly say that no matter what, 'it is well with my soul', that no matter what, I love God with all of my soul.

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR STRENGTH

The Hebrew word for 'strength' is the word 'Me'od', but it doesn't mean strength in terms of muscle power. The word literally means 'muchness'; in other words, the Israelites were to love God with all their 'muchness'.

They are to love God with all their substance, all their possessions, everything which God has given them. They are to love him with all of their might, all their being, all of their energy, Ecclesiastes 9:10.

And as Christians, we too are to love God with all of our might, all of our actions, all of our energy. We're to love Him not just with a portion of our life but all of our life.

There shouldn't be any part of our lives which is kept back from loving God. When we turn our hearts to the Lord, when we turn our soul to the Lord, our strength will naturally follow.

The outward actions that our bodies perform will naturally follow. Loving God with all of our strength will be seen in the way we spend our time. Loving God with all of our strength will be seen in the way we use our energy.

In other words, there's a change which takes place, and that change is demonstrated in the way we use our physical strength to pursue the Lord. It's the idea of loving God more and more and wanting to please Him more and more with every aspect of our lives.

Remember when God commands anything of us, He doesn't force us to do anything against our will. The Israelites had a choice whether to love God with all their heart, soul and strength or not.

Let me ask you, does anyone force you to love your husband or wife? Of course not, you love them because you choose to love them. Does anyone force you to love your children or grandchildren? Of course not, you love them because you choose to love them.

Love goes way beyond our feelings. God doesn't force us to love Him; loving God is a choice. And if we choose to love Him with all of our heart, soul and strength, He will help us to do just that.

Isaiah says that God will give us the strength to do whatever He asks of us, Isaiah 40:29-31. We all have times when we don't feel strong, we all have times when we feel weary and weak. We all go through times when we feel hurt, broken-hearted, physically or emotionally tired, and sometimes even spiritually exhausted.

But it's during those times of weakness that we should be asking God to give us that supernatural strength to keep us going. And when He does, you too will be able to soar like the eagle. You, too, will be able to run and walk without feeling exhausted. In other words, God will give you the strength which you need to keep moving forward.

How do we love God with all of our strength? We need to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, if we're going to keep moving forward, Ephesians 6:10. When we get tired and weak and feel like we can't move forward any more, then ask God to give us strength. Pray that He will give you the power to fly hundreds of miles on the wings of Christ.

Loving God with all of our strength means asking God to remind us that our present troubles are only temporary, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Loving God with all of our strength is going to help us to fix our eyes on what is eternal and not on our physical weakness.

Loving God with all of our strength means we remember that He will deliver us in our times of trouble, Psalms 34:17-18. Loving God with all of our strength is going to help us to remember that God is with us when we feel like we can't go on.

Loving God with all of our strength means we remember not to give up when we're weary, Galatians 6:9. Loving God with all of our strength is going to help us to keep on sharing the Good News with others, even when it looks like nothing is happening.

The point I'm making is simply this: if we want to love God with all of our strength, then we really need to get out of our comfort zones. In other words, we need to get to the point when we've used up all of our own strength, and we start to rely on His strength.

It's easy to talk about our love for God with like-minded people. It's easy to talk about our love for God in a religious setting. But what about outside our church circle?

Loving God with all my strength means stepping out in faith. Loving God with all my strength means going out of my way, even when I'm tired and exhausted, to share the Good News with others outside of our circle.

We're called to go and share that Good News with others, and we're called to serve and care for the needs of others. But all that this requires is a degree of physical strength. The point I'm getting at is that loving God with all my strength is simple to say, but it's not always easy to do.

It takes a degree of strength to visit someone who is sick in the hospital. It takes a degree of strength to sit down and listen to someone's problems. It takes a degree of strength to help someone who has a physical or financial need. And if we want to love God with all of our strength, then we must acknowledge that we can't do anything without His strength working in us.

Don't tell me you don't have the strength to share the Good News with a stranger. Don't tell me you don't have the strength to visit someone who is sick in the hospital.

Don't tell me you don't have the strength to sit down and listen to someone's problems. Don't tell me you don't have the strength to help someone who has a physical or financial need.

Tell me you won't, because Paul says that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you, Philippians 4:13. And so, we have to remember that we can't do any of these things by ourselves.

Paul tells us we have a strength working within us that enables us to keep on going forward, Ephesians 3:20. All the strength we have comes from God, and He gives us the strength to serve Him and serve others.

If your life is anything like mine, you have a hundred things to juggle, like being involved in church work, work, school, a social life, hobbies, and being a husband or wife. At the end of the day, you may be left feeling drained, weak and insufficient because you can't seem to keep up with it all.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, we can hear Paul crying out for his challenging situation to be taken away. He felt like we sometimes feel, but God has a better plan for him.

Instead of removing difficult circumstances from Paul's life, God provides a way to overcome them through strengthening him. God always has a perfect solution, and He makes that clear when He says, 'My power is made perfect in weakness,' 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Because of God's grace, we can find our strength and contentment in our shortcomings. Grace meets our needs and Paul's needs because it expresses God's acceptance and pleasure in us.

Let me encourage you to ask God to give you the strength to do everything He requires of you, Psalm 68:35. Let me encourage you to then go and do it with the strength He gives you. Let me encourage you to love the Lord with all your strength, all your muchness, all your substance, all your possessions, everything which God has given you. Let me finish this part with the words of John Wesley who says the following.

‘Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.’

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF OUR MIND

Remember, although the word ‘mind’ isn’t used in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, it is implied in the word ‘heart’. It’s not until we get to the New Testament that we get a deeper meaning to the word ‘mind’.

And as we know, in today’s society, there is an even greater understanding of the mind. Hence, why mental health issues have risen over the years, and there’s a big focus on mental wellbeing.

1. The state of our mind.

The human mind is one of the most incredible aspects of creation. It’s more powerful than the largest supercomputer and can solve great problems and make great discoveries.

However, if a person begins their thinking by refusing to acknowledge what they know to be true. That is, if they refuse to acknowledge there is a God, then the further away from God their reasoning will lead them.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them with a mind to be able to choose wisely. However, as soon as Satan entered the scene, he corrupted their minds by placing doubts in their minds concerning God’s will for them, Genesis 3:1-5. And mankind has struggled in their minds ever since concerning God’s will.

In the New Testament, we find various words which describe the state of our minds. Because of sin, people’s minds have become futile, depraved, deluded and darkened, Romans 1:21 / Romans 1:28 / Colossians 2:4 / Ephesians 4:18. Paul tells us that the effects of sin in our minds have consequences for how people view God and the world around them, Romans 8:5-7.

2. The cure for our mind.

If people’s minds have become futile, depraved, deluded and darkened, there’s only one option, and that’s to renew our minds. That word ‘transformed’ in Romans 12:2, is the word ‘metamorphoo’ and it simply means to change, to morph.

And if we want to renew our minds, we must fill our minds with the things of God. If we want to renew our minds, we must set our hearts and minds on things above, Colossians 3:1-2.

In the Christian’s spiritual battle, the key element that is being fought over is the mind, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Just as Satan appealed to Eve’s mind to get her to disobey God, he wants to deceive Christian minds, 2 Corinthians 11:3. And so, our minds need to be renewed daily by God’s Word so that we aren’t conformed to the world and don’t adopt the world’s thinking patterns.

3. To have the mind of Christ.

Paul told the Corinthian church, which loved the wisdom of the world, that Christians are to ‘have the mind of Christ’, 1 Corinthians 2:16. Although it may be a very easy thing to say, it will be a daily challenge for us all to have the mind of Christ in our lives.

Loving God with all of our minds means focusing our thoughts on Him. We think about His holiness, His goodness, His awesome works and creation. Whatever is going on in your heart will be reflected in your life, Proverbs 23:7. We are to love God with our thinking and reasoning, not just our emotions.

4. Train your mind.

Paul says we need to think about good things, not evil things, Romans 8:6. We're to focus our entire mind on the things that please God. To love God with our minds is to hold Him in high esteem, to think about Him with reverence and with adoration. The more we love God with our minds, the more we'll be driven to worship Him for who He is. In the Book of Philippians, there are sixteen references to a person's mind or their thoughts. I believe that most Christians are much too indiscriminate about what they allow in their minds, Philippians 4:8. In other words, what we think about is our choice, and we need to choose wisely what we're going to focus on.

What ought to dominate the thoughts of people who are on their way to heaven? The Bible says, If you reap negative thoughts and gossip and criticism, if that's what you sow in your mind, you're going to reap a negative and bitter spirit, Proverbs 4:23.

Have you ever watched Satan attack a church through negative and critical thinkers? That's one of his favourite strategies, and we don't even think it's Satan, we don't even know he's doing it. Satan loves to plant negative, critical thinkers in church, and they suck the joy right out of that place.

We could all think about something ugly about everybody else, but that's not what you're going to do if you're going to love the Lord with all of your mind, Philippians 4:8.

If we're going to love God with all of our mind, then we need to think about those things which are good and fine about other people and think about all you can praise God for and be glad about it.

Can I give you some advice about how you can battle against Satan on this one? Don't let your mind be a vacuum; don't let Satan decide what you're going to think about.

Remember that worldly thinking is something you used to do before you became a Christian, Ephesians 4:22-24.

Start your day in the Word and put the Scripture in your heart. Start your day praying to God, asking for His Spirit to control your thoughts, Psalms 143:5.

And when you find yourself tempted and listening to some gossip or thinking something ugly about somebody, say a prayer for that person at that specific moment, and God will start to work on your heart too, Isaiah 26:3 / Colossians 4:2.

God wants us to love Him completely, and if we claim to love Him completely, then we must obey Him completely. We must love Him with everything we've got, Jeremiah 17:10.

Let's ask you, what will history write about us concerning our love for Him? I hope and pray that history will write something similar to what it wrote about King Josiah. Josiah gave it his all, in line with God's law, 2 Kings 23:25.

Let me encourage you to do the same.

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on, no one dared ask him any more questions." Mark

12:32-34

I want you to notice something about that passage of Scripture in Mark's account because it looks like the scribe was surprised at the answer, Mark 12:32-33. Also notice when Jesus SAW, that he answered wisely, Jesus didn't just hear that young man speaking to Him, He SAW on his face an honest expression when Jesus SAW that he answered wisely.

Jesus said, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God’, [Mark 12:34](#). I believe that Jesus saw in that man’s face faith and honesty. Here is a man who many might call a rationalist, or a ritualist.

But there, standing before Jesus, was a man who seemed to have more understanding than those who had been trying to trap Jesus. And Jesus can bless a person like this abundantly.

And notice that after this, no one dared to ask Him any more questions, [Mark 12:34](#). They stopped their schemes to trap Jesus in some argument since they had failed to win any of their arguments. The schemes of entrapment thus stopped, and they moved to scheme how they might physically take Him.

WHOSE SON IS THE MESSIAH?

‘While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, ‘Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’ David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?’ The large crowd listened to him with delight. As he taught, Jesus said, ‘Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.’ [Mark 12:35-40](#)

After weathering their barrage of questions, Jesus asked His opponents a question: how could the Christ be both David’s son and David’s Lord? [Mark 12:35-37](#) / [Luke 20:41-44](#) / [Matthew 22:41-46](#).

This question was crucial because the scribes’ objection to Jesus was that He, a mere man, they thought claimed divine authority. Jesus showed by His question that the Old Testament had predicted that the Messiah would be both David’s son, human and David’s Lord, divine, [Psalm 132:11](#) / [Matthew 1:1](#) / [Matthew 21:9](#).

The dilemma is how David could call one of his descendants Lord, [Psalm 110:1](#), when, according to Jewish practice, the descendant king should refer to his father or ancestor king as lord.

What Jesus argued is that [Psalm 110:1](#) is a prophecy by David of the Christ. David didn’t make the statement concerning himself, [Acts 2:34](#) / [Hebrews 1:13](#). David in the psalm begins by telling us what the LORD, that is, Yahweh, said to the lord, that is, Adonia, that is, Jesus, David’s lord. Please note the word ‘lord,’ used in the NIV, should have a capital ‘L’.

Jesus quotes these words in [Mark 12:36-37](#) / [Luke 20:42](#), and [Matthew 22:43-45](#), to show how David called the Messiah lord, which means that the Messiah was greater than David.

Peter quoted these words from [Psalm 110:1](#), in [Acts 2:34-35](#), to show how David prophesied the deity and accession of Jesus. Paul quotes these words in [1 Corinthians 15:25](#) to demonstrate the rule and dominion of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews quotes these words, [Hebrews 1:13](#), to explain how Jesus is superior to any angel. Later, in [Hebrews 10:13](#), the writer quotes these words again to explain the rule and dominion of Jesus.

The LORD, that is, God the Father, spoke to the Messiah, that is, Jesus the Son, and told Him He would sit at His right hand until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet, [Mark 12:36](#) / [Luke 20:42-43](#) / [Matthew 22:44](#) / [Ephesians 1:20](#) / [Hebrews 8:1](#). In other words, Jesus would remain there until the Father provided the victory, [1 Corinthians 15:20-28](#) / [Hebrews 2:8](#).

An important point in Mark, in the context of these events, is that the common people received Jesus, [Mark 12:37](#). They weren’t part of the religious hierarchy of the religious establishment. They weren’t puffed up by their religious training or the positions they held.

They weren't part of the religious politics that constantly intimidated the religious leaders into conformity with the accepted traditions and practices of Judaism. They didn't stumble over their pride but accepted Jesus for who He was. They were the true Israel by faith who accepted Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus used religious leaders to take Himself to the cross since the leaders had fallen from God. Though the Jews could not actually carry out the death sentence, they were the ones who called on the Romans to crucify Jesus.

Peter later identified them as the ones who had to carry the blame for crucifying the Son of God, [Acts 2:36](#) / [Acts 4:5-12](#). Leaders would do well to continually check their motives by the word of God.

God's leaders must continually caution themselves with God's word in order to guard themselves from working against Him. The Pharisees were left speechless, and from that day on, no one dared to ask Jesus any more questions, [Mark 12:34](#) / [Matthew 22:46](#) / [Luke 14:6](#) / [Luke 20:40](#).

WARNING AGAINST THE TEACHERS OF THE LAW

‘As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.” Mark 12:38-40

A WARNING AGAINST HYPOCRISY

Jesus speaks to the crowds and the disciples and tells them that the teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, [Matthew 23:1-2](#), that is, they enjoy the position of authority and were supposed to teach the law according to Moses.

They sat there, but they didn't have any authority, and they certainly didn't practise what they preached. They didn't lead by example but rather led by command, [Matthew 23:3](#). Interestingly, Jesus tells the people to do whatever they tell them, but don't do what they do; this again implies they didn't practise what they preached.

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees' ideas of religion and their traditions became very heavy, [Matthew 23:4](#) / [Acts 15:10](#), that is, they made it almost impossible for people to obey their legalistic traditions, [Mark 7:1-9](#). Their hypocrisy was that they didn't preach 'justice, mercy and faith,' [Matthew 23:23](#). They kept binding non-essential burdens on the people that couldn't be perfectly obeyed in order to accomplish justification before God, [Matthew 23:4](#) / [Romans 3:20](#) / [Galatians 2:16](#).

Everything they did was only for public show, [Mark 12:38-39](#) / [Luke 20:46](#) / [Matthew 23:5-7](#) / [3 John 9-10](#). They make their phylacteries wide. Phylacteries were small leather boxes that contained Scriptures.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘In [Exodus 13:16](#) / [Deuteronomy 6:8](#) / [Deuteronomy 11:18](#), it was said to Israel concerning the teachings of the law, that they should be bound, ‘for a token upon thy head, and for frontlets between thine eyes’. In the inter-biblical period, we find the Jews converting this figure into an outward fact. They took four passages adjacent to the thrice-repeated injunction, namely, [Exodus 13:2-10](#) / [Exodus 13:11-17](#) / [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#), and [Deuteronomy 11:13-22](#), and writing them on strips of parchment, encased the folded strips in minute leather boxes. These four boxes were set on edge and fastened upon one leather base, which was placed in the middle of the forehead, and held there by a string tied round the head with peculiar knots which had a mystical meaning. Borders of the garments were

considered sacred by the Jews, and the enlargement of the border was another device for ostentation and gratification of the pride of its wearer.’

We also read of how much they loved their authority, as they loved to sit in places of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogue, [Mark 12:39](#) / [Luke 20:46](#) / [Matthew 23:6](#). This was all about the show, ‘look how important we are!’

We can almost imagine them becoming upset with people if no one greeted them at the marketplace or even took the time to call them ‘Rabbi’, which means teacher, [Matthew 23:8](#). Oh, how they loved to be seen by people, sit in positions of authority and liked to have a title.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the word ‘Rabbi’.

‘This word literally signifies great. It was a title given to eminent teachers of the law among the Jews, a title of honour and dignity, denoting authority and ability to teach. They were gratified with such titles and wished it given to themselves as denoting superiority. Every time it was given to them, it implied their superiority to the persons who used it, and they were fond, therefore, of hearing it often applied to them. There were three titles in use among the Jews, Rab, Rabbi, and Rabban, denoting different degrees of learning and ability, as literary degrees do among us.’

Jesus turns and speaks to His disciples and tells them three things they were not to do, [Matthew 23:8-10](#).

1. Do not be called ‘Rabbi’, [Matthew 23:8](#).

They weren’t to receive such a title of distinction. Jesus says the reason for not doing so was simply He was their Teacher, and all the disciples were equal, that is, they were equal in authority.

2. Do not call anyone on earth ‘father’, [Matthew 23:9](#).

This obviously doesn’t apply to calling our physical fathers, father. The word used here implies someone with authority, someone who is superior and has the right to command.

The reason Jesus gives is that they have one Father, who is in heaven, [Matthew 6:9-13](#). He is the One with all authority, He is superior, and He certainly has the right to command.

3. Do not be called ‘instructors’, [Matthew 23:10](#).

The word instructor implies a teacher, someone who was considered a leader in Bible times because of their position, [James 3:1](#). The word refers to those who go before others, those who claim the right to direct and control others. The reason Jesus gives for this is simply that they have an instructor, the Messiah, Jesus Himself.

Notice how Jesus tells them the greatest among them will be their servant, [Matthew 20:26](#) / [Matthew 23:11](#). They don’t need any titles; they just need an attitude which is willing to serve others, [Mark 10:43-44](#).

Leadership doesn’t begin at the top, it begins at the bottom, it begins by serving others and putting their needs first, [Philippians 2:4](#). Whoever exalts themselves will be humbled, that is, brought down, but whoever humbles themselves will be exalted, that is, raised up, [Matthew 23:12](#). It’s always wise to humble ourselves, otherwise, God will do it for us, [Luke 14:11](#) / [James 4:10](#).

Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Now having declared that to His disciples, these are the rules for His disciples. He now turns and addresses Himself to these scribes and the Pharisees. And He has an eightfold denunciation against them, pronouncing an eightfold woe. To my disciples, don’t follow their example. They say, but they don’t do. They exalt themselves. They draw attention to themselves. They love to be exalted and elevated above people, but you are brothers. If you’re going to be the chief, be the servant. Humble yourself, and God will exalt you. But exalt yourself and God will abase you.’

No one knows how they went about ‘devouring widow’s houses’, [Mark 12:40](#) / [Luke 20:47](#) / [Matthew 23:14](#). Note that the footnote in [Matthew 23:14](#), says, ‘some manuscripts include here words similar to [Mark 12:40](#), and [Luke 20:47](#).’

Maybe when we think of the parable which Jesus taught about ‘Unjust Judge’ in [Luke 18:1-8](#), we can get a glimpse of what they were doing. Maybe they were charging a huge amount of money when some widows were seeking justice, maybe they abused the widows’ hospitality and took advantage of their kind generosity, [Mark 12:41-44](#). There’s nothing more impressive in some people’s eyes than a long-winded prayer, [Mark 12:40](#) / [Luke 20:47](#). Even today, this still happens where Christians treat prayer like a sermon, and they remind God of what He wrote in His Word.

Because of their hypocrisy, Jesus tells them they will be judged and punished with a harsher punishment, [Mark 12:40](#) / [Luke 20:47](#). Why? As ‘God’s spiritual leaders’, they should have known better; they were full of arrogance and pride, and they pretended to be something they weren’t.

And if this isn’t a lesson for the churches’ spiritual leaders today, I don’t know what is. We need to be careful that opinion and tradition don’t become law, [1 Corinthians 4:6](#); we need to be careful how we treat the venerable among us, [James 1:27](#), and, more importantly, we should pretend to be something we’re not.

Jesus used religious leaders to take Himself to the cross since the leaders had fallen from God. Though the Jews could not actually carry out the death sentence, they were the ones who called on the Romans to crucify Jesus.

Peter later identified them as the ones who had to carry the blame for crucifying the Son of God, [Acts 2:36](#) / [Acts 4:5-12](#). Leaders would do well to continually check their motives by the word of God. God’s leaders must continually caution themselves with God’s word in order to guard themselves against working against Him.

THE WIDOW’S OFFERING

‘Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.’ Mark 12:41

Jesus sat down, looked up and observed people contributing to the temple treasury [Mark 12:41](#) / [Luke 21:1](#). He saw many rich people deposit large offerings into the temple treasury.

THE TEMPLE TREASURY

In the New Testament, there seems to be a lot of things happening in and around the temple treasury, which is also known as the Court of Women. It was called the Court of the Women, as that is as far as women were allowed to enter the temple courts. It was in this court where Jesus was presented for purification as a child, the place where they met Simeon and Anna, [Luke 2:25-38](#).

We know that Jesus taught in the treasury, [Matthew 21:23](#) / [John 7:14](#) / [John 7:28](#) / [John 8:2](#) / [John 8:20](#), but one thing we should bear in mind is that He never actually entered the sanctuary itself because it was only the priests who were allowed to enter. The treasury was a court that was located to the east of the temple itself, just below the Nicanor Gate.

The Sanhedrin often met there, and it was here that they brought the woman who was supposedly caught in the act of adultery, [John 8:1-20](#). In the treasury, there were thirteen boxes on the wall, into which people could drop their offering money. They are made of bronze and called trumpets because of their shape.

‘But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.’ Mark 12:42

Not only did Jesus see many rich people deposit large offerings into the temple treasury, but He also saw an impoverished widow give two small coins, which were nearly worthless, [Mark 12:42](#) / [Luke 21:2](#).

THE COPPER COINS

The KJV uses the word ‘mite’, which was a very small Jewish coin called a ‘lepton’, meaning ‘the thin one’, it’s sometimes called a farthing or a penny, [Luke 12:59](#). It was made of bronze or copper and was the smallest in terms of the value of all the Roman Coins, [Mark 12:42](#).

HOW DID JESUS KNOW WHAT SHE GAVE?

I’ve personally held one of these coins in my hand, and I must say it’s tiny, I would say around the size of our old British half pennies. How did Jesus know that this widow had given in two little coins?

It’s possible that He saw them; we certainly know that He knows all things and all people, but it’s also possible that the sound these coins made against the metal would have indicated how much people offered to the temple.

‘Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.’ Mark 12:43-44

The Lord explained that the widow had contributed more than the rich, more than all of them put together, as suggested here; she put in everything she had, while the rich had simply given their left-over change, [Mark 12:43-44](#) / [Luke 21:3-4](#).

This is the difference between a collection and an offering. When we stand outside a supermarket, we usually find someone rattling a collection box, and if we like the cause, we’ll do our shopping and give them any spare change we have left over.

An offering isn’t about giving the leftover change; it’s purposely given, the amount is purposely given, and we give first, then do whatever we need to do with the rest.

WHY DID JESUS COMMEND THE WIDOW’S GIFT?

Some commentators suggest that the Jewish law at the time wouldn’t allow anyone to give less than two gifts; if this is true, then it’s clear she gave the smallest amount legally possible.

However, if she literally gave everything she had and only had two coins to her name, this speaks volumes about her faith in God to take care of her daily needs. Her offering was a reflection of her heart. What she gave was in accordance with God’s law, which was only addressed to Jewish males over the age of twenty, [Exodus 30:12-14](#). It’s entirely possible that she wasn’t obliged to give, but she did so as a free will offering, [Exodus 35:29](#). If that’s all she had, then it was truly a sacrificial gift because this meant she had nothing left.

She is the example of sacrificial living, which is in contrast with those who spend their wealth on everything else but reluctantly give God the leftovers, Matthew 6:19-21.

Her giving was easy because she knew her giving wouldn't affect her lifestyle; she trusted in God and not in wealth. She gave because she truly loved God and expressed her love for Him through her giving, 2 Corinthians 4:15 / 1 Corinthians 15:10.

JESUS CONTRADICTS MODERN VIEWS OF GIVING

Many modern churches seem to regard large donations more highly than small ones. Some honour wealthy donors in special ways and allow them more influence in church policy, occasionally they even ridicule small contributions as unworthy of the Lord. It's clear that the Lord Himself viewed giving in a very different way.

Jesus wasn't impressed by the size of the offering, whether large or small, but He was very concerned with the attitude of the giver. To Jesus, the gift of the widow, while having almost no monetary value, was worth much more than the large and impressive donations of the rich. We need to think of riches as Jesus did.

CONCLUSION

Jesus teaches us that giving has little to do with the amount we give but the attitude in which we give. He sees what we give, He knows the amount we give, but He also knows how much we have kept back for ourselves.

The poor among us should take great comfort from the widow's example, and they should know that their 'small' offering is just as accepted by God as someone who is rich and making a 'large' offering.

Even today in our churches, we have those who give a 'large' amount because they have to; God says, we MUST give! But then you get those others, who, out of a heart of thanksgiving for what God has done in their lives, may give 'less' because that's all they have, but their hearts are right.

When we look at the Christian faith as a whole, we know that our faith isn't just about receiving, but it's also about giving, Acts 20:35 / 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 / Philippians 4:8-18. To be a Christian means we need to be willing to sacrifice, even in our finances.

If we first give ourselves to the Lord, 2 Corinthians 8:5, we will have no problem being liberal in our giving. Remember, Jesus saw what the widow put into the temple treasury, so He still sees it today, 2 Corinthians 9:7.

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION

'As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on

another; every one will be thrown down.” As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” Mark 13:1-4

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE, THE CITY, AND THE SIGN OF HIS COMING

Earlier, Jesus declared judgment on the city of Jerusalem, **Matthew 23:38**. He also said that this would happen in the generation of those He was speaking to, **Matthew 23:36**.

The apostles here are obviously impressed with the physical structure, that is, the temple that Herod the Great had built and probably wondered why God was going to destroy the temple.

Jesus tells them that not one stone here will be left on another, and everyone will be thrown down, which I’m sure would have shocked the disciples. Jesus was preparing the disciples for the final pronounced judgment upon Israel, Jerusalem and the temple, **Matthew 13:3-9 / Matthew 13:36-43 / Matthew 21:33-46 / Matthew 22:1-14 / Matthew 23:29-39**.

The destruction would be great and final, **Deuteronomy 28:15-68**. It’s at this point that Peter, James, John and Andrew later came to Jesus privately while He was on the Mount of Olives, **Mark 13:1-4 / Matthew 24:1-3 / Luke 21:5-7**.

THE DISCIPLES QUESTION

In **Matthew 24:3**, we see that His disciples asked three questions.

1. There was a question concerning the destruction of the Temple and the City.
2. A question concerning ‘the sign of His coming’.
3. A question concerning ‘the end of the world’.

In **Mark 13:4**, we see the disciples asking two questions.

1. When will these things happen?
2. What will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

But in **Luke 21:7**, Luke only records Jesus’ response to the first two questions. Luke doesn’t record Jesus’ response concerning the end of the world. The AV has ‘the end of the world’, the primary meaning of the word translated ‘world’ is age, era, ‘aion’.

What Jesus is doing in **Mark 13:1-31 / Matthew 25:1-35 / Luke 21:5-36** is predicting the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. After hearing Jesus’ harsh sermon, in **Matthew 23**, a long chapter where He just criticises and gives woe one after the other to the Jewish people, and right after that, He’s just walked out of the temple, the last time He’ll be there, He was leaving the temple forever.

The disciples may be concerned that He has been so harsh to the Jewish people lately, and they’re trying to find some kind of positive response. They say, ‘Look at how impressive these buildings are,’ **Mark 13:1 / Luke 21:5**. But we need to understand that there has been, all the way through the Gospel of Matthew, a theme that a coming judgment against Israel is near.

John the baptiser is preaching, the Pharisees and Sadducees come out to see him, **Matthew 3:7**. So we have wrath that's coming. In **Matthew 8**, Jesus meets a Gentile soldier who wants Him to heal his servant, **Matthew 8:7-10**. And look what he said next, 'Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' **Matthew 8:11-12**. He spoke about judgment.

Another example is where He tells this parable of tenants in **Matthew 21**. And the father sends servants to the vineyard, but the tenants kill him, then he sends his own son, and they kill him too.

And so, the father says, "I am going to punish those wicked tenants," **Matthew 21:41**. And look what he says, 'therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit,' **Matthew 21:43**. He speaks about judgment.

We begin to understand why the Jews were so angry with Jesus; they couldn't have missed the point of His sermon. One more example, **Matthew 23**, this whole chapter is just one woe after the other to the Jews, and again He speaks about judgment, **Matthew 23:32-36**.

What was the judgement that was to come on this generation of Jews? And how was Jesus going to prepare His church to escape the coming judgment upon Israel? Before the end of the world, Jesus tells them the following.

'Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.'" **Mark 13:5-8**

1. Before the siege of Jerusalem, there would be many disturbing events, false messiahs, false prophets, battles in various countries, widespread anarchy, earthquakes, famine, and plagues, **Mark 13:5-8 / Mark 13:21-22 / Matthew 24:4-8 / Matthew 24:23-26 / Luke 21:8-11**.

These would be only the beginning of the many troubles that would all happen before the destruction of the temple, **Mark 13:8 / Matthew 24:8**.

'You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me, you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.'" **Mark 13:9-13**

2. The disciples to whom he was speaking would be persecuted by the Jewish religious leaders, betrayed even by their close relatives, and killed.

They would be hated everywhere, **Mark 12:12-19 / Matthew 24:9-13 / Luke 21:12-19**. All this had to happen before the temple was destroyed, **Luke 21:9**. They were required to remain faithful throughout all those traumatic experiences, **Mark 13:13 / Matthew 24:13 / Luke 21:18**.

3. The Gospel will be preached throughout the earth.

In **Mark 13:10** and **Matthew 24:14**, we learn that the Gospel has to be preached to all nations before Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed. The word 'end' in **Matthew 24:14** refers to the destruction of the Temple. The apostles preached the Gospel 'in all the world', to 'all nations', **Acts 1:2 / Acts 1:4 / Acts 1:8**, to 'every creature,' **Colossians 1:23**.

Now there are about forty years between the death of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem. And I believe this was because Jesus was going to give the Gospel a chance to be preached all over the world to prepare Jews and Gentiles for what was coming.

Such a proclamation was going to let the world know of God's justification for the destruction of Jerusalem. The Gospel is going to go into all the world; the story of how the Jews rejected and killed their own Messiah is going to go into all the world.

Now did that happen? I believe it did, **Acts 2:5 / Romans 1:8 / Colossians 1:6 / Colossians 1:23**. And so in one generation's time, everywhere, especially in the cities where Jews live, the Gospel was preached, and people were prepared for what God was about to do.

I believe that Jerusalem's destruction signalled that the fuller dispensation was over and would never return. God was going to raise up a new Israel, consisting of the elect of every nation on earth.

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

‘When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand.’ **Mark 13:14**

The abomination of desolation, **Mark 13:14 / Matthew 24:15**, is a phrase out of the Book of Daniel that refers to a sacrilege that would be so detestable that it would cause the temple to be abandoned by the people of God. Daniel mentions three different desolations.

1. That was previously caused by Nebuchadnezzar, **Daniel 9:17**.
2. That was eventually caused by Antiochus Epiphanes, **Daniel 8:13 / Daniel 12:11**.
3. The series of desolations that would occur at the time of the

Roman siege, from AD 68 to AD 70, **Daniel 9:26-27**. Antiochus Epiphanes came to Jerusalem and took a pig into the temple and sacrificed it on the holy altar. And all the Jews said, ‘that was the abomination of desolation,’ but Jesus comes along and says, ‘that’s not its complete fulfilment.’

There is still an abomination of desolation to come, predicted by Daniel. Now, what is that? People have gone everywhere suggesting what that will be, and many think it will happen in this tribulation period. But I think the Bible tells us very, very clearly what Jesus is talking about.

In the Jewish Gospel, Matthew says the abomination of desolation, **Matthew 24:15-16**, so does the Gospel of Mark, **Mark 13:14**. But in the Gospel of Luke, you have the exact words right until those verses, and you have the same exact words after those verses.

But in Luke, he doesn't say watch out for the abomination of desolation. He says, ‘when you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near,’ **Luke 21:20**.

Now there's Luke's interpretation of what abomination of desolation means. And the present tense is used there, ‘when you see Jerusalem in the process of being surrounded,’ **Luke 21:20**.

‘Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equalled again.’ **Mark 13:14-19**

So, what is the warning of Jesus? It's very clear. They were to flee, **Mark 13:15-17 / Matthew 24:16-20 / Luke 21:21-24**. Jesus basically says, ‘You get out of that city before it becomes encircled by that Roman ring of steel. Run across the rooftops, don't go back down to get your cloak, help the pregnant women, pray it's not in winter, and hope it's not a Sabbath day. ‘You get yourself out of that town, the moment you see that army and don't waste time doing it.’

Josephus, who was a Jewish historian and Eusebius, a Christian historian, tell us that's exactly what happened. What did most of the Jews do when the Roman army under Titus came?

They did the exact opposite of what Jesus said. When the Roman army showed up, they all gathered their belongings and ran into Jerusalem for safety. And what followed was one of the most horrific accounts of suffering and desolation ever recorded.

Josephus writes about things that happened when that city was surrounded, that are so abominable, it's hard to put in writing, it's hard to describe how gruesome the suffering was, as one million Jews eventually lost their lives.

The Romans came in and, literally like Jesus said, the gold in the temple was burned and melted into the cracks. They took stone by stone of that temple and that city apart, and then they totally burned the place. Josephus said, 'When they were through, you couldn't believe that anybody had ever lived there.'

But the Christians, according to Eusebius, when they saw that army, they remembered Jesus' words, and they ran quickly out of town. Remember, Jesus said, 'run to the mountains'? **Mark 13:14 / Matthew 24:16 / Luke 21:21.** They ran through the city up to the Transjordan Mountains called 'Pella', and the Christians were saved. We can't imagine how the fall of Jerusalem was to Jews and Christians all over the world; it made all the headlines. I mean, to a Jew, the fall of Jerusalem, that's like the end of an age; if Jerusalem falls, God must be dead.

In **Matthew 24:20**, they are to pray that they would not have to flee on the Sabbath. This confirms that these predictions are to do with the Jews living then. The horrors that would ensue would exceed anything else in history, either in the past or in the future, **Mark 13:17-19 / Matthew 24:19-22 / Luke 21:26.** They have nothing to do with the end of the world.

'If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.' **Mark 13:20-23**

Jesus again reminds them, before the siege of Jerusalem, there would be many disturbing events, false messiahs, false prophets, battles in various countries, widespread anarchy, earthquakes, famine, and plagues, **Mark 13:20-23 / Mark 13:5-8 / Matthew 24:4-8 / Matthew 24:23-26 / Luke 21:8-11.**

These would be only the beginning of the many troubles that would all happen before the destruction of the temple, **Mark 13:8 / Matthew 24:8.** The Lord gives a reason why they must ignore the false messiahs.

They are to ignore them because when the Lord does come, it will not be in the desert or some obscure place, **Matthew 24:27.** He will appear instantaneously and will be seen by everyone who has ever lived, **Revelation 1:7.**

Jesus says that when he comes to bring judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple, it will be clearly visible, as visible as lightning, **Matthew 24:27.** **Matthew 24:28** is a proverb: the wicked, wherever they are, will not escape the administration of God's justice. Wherever the body is, there will the 'vultures' be gathered together. Some translations use the word 'eagles', but it probably refers to vultures.

'But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' **Mark 13:24-25**

The sign language in **Mark 13:1-31 / Matthew 24:1-35 / Luke 21:5-36** is actually Old Testament judgement language. Jesus is using a language which some call apocalyptic, and it was very familiar to students of the Old Testament. We're not familiar with it because we're Gentiles, and so sometimes we think they're talking about the second coming when they aren't necessarily doing so.

For example, in the apocalyptic language, you often announced judgement by saying the whole cosmic structure, sun, moon, stars, were going to be shaken, **Mark 13:24-25 / Matthew 24:29 / Luke 21:25**. In fact, that was just an Old Testament way of saying God was about to judge a nation.

THREE EXAMPLES

In **Isaiah 13:10**, we read about a judgement against Babylon, which is not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Babylon.

In **Isaiah 34:4**, we read about a judgement against Edom, again, that's not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Edom.

In **Ezekiel 32:7-8**, we read about a judgement against Egypt, again, that's not to be interpreted literally; that's a figure of that particular style of writing saying that God is going to judge Edom.

What I'm saying is, when a Jew heard language like, the stars are going to be darkened, the moon is going to turn dark, the sun is going to fall. When they heard talk like that, they didn't think that the 'end of the world,' they thought, 'what nation is God judging now?'

And when Jesus uses that kind of language in His sermon, He's saying that God is sending judgement upon Israel. Just like He did on Egypt, just like He did on Edom and Babylon.

'At that time, people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.' **Mark 13:26-27**

People say, 'Well, what about **Mark 13:26-27 / Matthew 24:30-31**, where Jesus says, 'He is going to come on the clouds of the sky'. Again, I'm going to say that's judgement language.

Let me give you an example from **Isaiah 19:1**, 'An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them.'

Remember Jesus said, 'all these things will happen in this generation', **Matthew 23:36**. He also said, 'truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened,' **Mark 13:30 / Matthew 24:34 / Luke 21:32**.

What I believe He did, He used the judgement language that the Jews understood to say this, 'all those things that have happened to Babylon, all those things that have happened to Egypt and Edom, now it's Israel's turn.'

Look at **Matthew 26:64**. I used to think this referred to the second coming of Christ, but I'm not too sure now.

Remember when Jesus was before Caiaphas, the high priest, on trial, and Caiaphas says, 'You tell me if you are the Son of God?' And Jesus says this, 'Yes, it is as you say,' 'But I say to all of you: In the future, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven,' **Matthew 26:64**.

Now, is that a reference to the second coming? Notice it says, 'He's sitting at the right hand.' It doesn't say He's standing or He's riding a horse; it says, He's sitting.

I think what Jesus is saying there is, "Caiaphas, this day you are my judge, you and your people are judging me, but the day is coming, and you're going to see it when I'm sitting at the right hand of God, and I'm sending my judgement to you." And Caiaphas' generation saw that prophecy come true.

In this text, Jesus is bringing the news of the passing of one era and the establishment of another in which the glory of God isn't going to be in the temple made by hands anymore.

We're so far removed from this text at this time that we don't understand why this text is so important. In the first-century world, before you could ever preach the Gospel of Jesus, you had to explain what happened to Israel.

Why is the dispensation of Israel the way God is working? What is all this? Are Gentiles included in the kingdom? What is all this? The Messiah has come, and they crucified Him, but He rose again.

You had to explain that God had ended an era and judged Israel, and now the kingdom is going to be made up of the elect of every nation. Because most Jews saw the end of the temple as the end of the world. Jesus is using the language that they understood, and He was trying to explain to them, 'Listen, the destruction of Jerusalem is really the work of God.'

What Jesus was trying to prepare the church for was this: 'something is about to happen in about forty years that is going to shake your world, the holy city is going to be wiped out, the temple is going to be gone, but God is behind it, God is doing it, and God is in control.'

Notice, He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other, **Mark 13:27 / Matthew 24:31**. This sounds like the final coming of Christ, **1 Corinthians 15:52 / 1 Thessalonians 4:16 / 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9**, but not necessarily.

The word 'angel' means messenger, and it can refer to angelic beings or human beings. In the context here, I believe Jesus is referring to human messengers, **Luke 7:24 / Luke 9:52**, that is, His apostles, the ministers and preachers of the Gospel who would deliver the Gospel message after them.

Notice the Lord and the use of angels during Daniel's time, **Daniel 10:20-11:2**, and so, once again, we're reminded that the Lord coming in judgment doesn't automatically mean the last judgment.

Notice also, we have the trumpet call, which isn't always a reference to the final coming of Christ. Here it is, the call of the Gospel of peace, life and salvation. When we look back at **Leviticus 25:9-12**, we find the trumpet being blown in the year of Jubilee, in which every fiftieth year, the Israelites sounded a ram's horn all through the land and proclaimed the year as a year of release or freedom.

In **Revelation 8:6-12**, we read of seven angels blowing their trumpets in relation to the judgment which was coming upon the Roman Empire. In other words, the trumpet call isn't always in relation to the final judgment.

The gathering together is a reference to the Gentiles, **Luke 21:24**, who were now chosen or elected in place of the Jews according to Jesus' prediction, **Matthew 8:11-12 / Luke 13:28-29**. This verse is all about protection, the gathering up of those under someone's care so they are close by and shielded, **Isaiah 11:12 / Matthew 23:37**.

However we interpret these verses, we must remember that Jesus says these things will happen within this generation, not in the future of His second coming, **Matthew 23:36 / Matthew 24:34 / Luke 21:32**. No longer were Israel God's chosen people, now salvation will be offered to everyone on the earth, **Mark 13:27 / Matthew 24:31**.

'Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.' **Mark 13:28-31**

The sign events of **Mark 13:1-31 / Matthew 24:1-35 / Luke 21:5-36** have already been fulfilled. And I think the key to understanding **Mark 13:1-37 / Matthew 24:1-35 / Luke 21:5-36**, is in **Mark 13:30 / Matthew 24:34 / Luke 21:32**, 'I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.'

'These things' is an interesting phrase. We will never understand sign language unless we ask someone what it means. And that's what Mark and Luke did in their Gospels, where we have the parallel passages with this particular sermon, the disciples ask Jesus, 'Tell us what the signs of these things are?' **Mark 13:4 / Matthew 24:3 / Luke 21:7**.

At the end of all three Gospels, He says, ‘This generation will not pass away until these things happen,’ **Mark 13:30 / Matthew 24:34 / Luke 21:32**. The real question is, what does Jesus mean by the word ‘generation’? So, there are different views, and one view says, ‘Well, that’s talking about Israel, Israel the nation will not pass away until this happens.’ Or it’s talking about the race of the Hebrews. Or it means the generation that’s alive when the tribulation starts, they won’t pass away until this happens.

I’m going to challenge that view, even though it’s very popular. It became very popular among the dispensationalists when Israel became a state in 1948.

They said, ‘Well, that’s a sign,’ the fig tree is budding, and, in this generation, Jesus has to come back. And so, when this didn’t happen, they changed their mind and said that Jesus would definitely come back before 2048. And that’s a common view among a lot of people, let me challenge that view.

I don’t think the mention of the fig tree is talking about a re-established state of Israel. Sometimes the fig tree in the Bible refers to Israel, but he said in Luke, ‘Look at all the trees,’ **Luke 21:29**. And the point I think He’s making is, ‘you know when trees begin to bud, you know summer is near.’ Summer is on its way when the trees start to bud. So, the thing that Jesus is predicting is, ‘when you see those signs, you know it’s near.’ Remember when Jesus, after the triumphant entry, went to the temple, and He cleansed the temple, and He came out of the temple, and He saw a fig tree.

And it had lots of leaves, and He went to get some fruit, but it didn’t have any, and He cursed it, and said, ‘may you never bear fruit again,’ **Matthew 21:19 / Mark 11:14**. Now, almost all scholars see that as an allusion to Israel. I don’t think that three chapters later, he’s talking about Israel.

If you look at the word ‘generation’ in Matthew, Mark and Luke, every single time it’s used, it’s talking about the current hearer. I don’t see a reason to make it mean something different in **Mark 13 / Matthew 24 / Luke 21**. I think what Jesus is saying is, ‘everything that I have just told you is going to happen, is going to happen in this generation’s lifetime.’ What Jesus was saying was going to happen in the lifetime of that generation.

I think it would be useful to point out some important truths. When it comes to **Mark 13:1-31 / Matthew 25:1-35 / Luke 21:5-36**, it’s clear they are interesting and obviously a difficult passage of text, and people have had many different extreme views of it.

For example, liberal theologians use this text as proof that Jesus was mistaken. They say, ‘See, he says quite clearly that He would come back in this generation, and He didn’t, so he was mistaken.’

And so, they detract from the Deity of Jesus using this text. Others say this is talking about ‘a tremendous seven-year tribulation, still to come, that we haven’t seen yet, but these signs are going to let us know when it’s near’.

Let me share with you three arguments against those ideas. Many of the signs that people use to predict His return aren’t signs at all. In troubled times people are very eagerly looking to the signs of the last days.

I believe we have been in the last days ever since the coming of Jesus. In **Acts 2:17**, Peter said what happened with the outpouring of the Spirit happened, ‘in these last days.’

In **Hebrews 1:1-2**, it says, ‘in the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.’

We’re in the last days, but people talk about all the wars that are going on, but these wars haven’t been any worse than they have been before. Famines aren’t new; a famine was recorded in **Acts 11**, and there were famines before the destruction of Jerusalem. Earthquakes aren’t new things.

We need to be very careful that you aren't convinced by all these signs that people are talking about that prove the very end is near. 'These things', **Mark 13:7 / Matthew 24:6-7 / Luke 21:10-11**, have been going on since the days of creation, and they will continue to go on until Jesus returns.

When people get into an end-of-time frenzy, they hunger for someone who will stand up and say, 'I can make sense out of it.' Jesus said before the fall of Jerusalem that people are going to do that.

They're going to stand up, and He said, 'for false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect', **Mark 13:5 / Matthew 24:24 / Luke 21:8**.

And they're going to say, 'I've got it all figured out, come follow me, and I'll explain it all to you.' Jesus says to be careful about that, be suspicious of people who have inside information about the end that the rest of the church doesn't have.

Do the world's catastrophes and problems indicate the imminence of the Lord's return? Are these 'Signs of the Times'? We've all been in this situation, haven't we?

There's a knock at the door, and two people are standing with tracts in their hands. The moment I opened the front door and saw the two men who stood before me, I knew who and what they were, as surely as if they had their identity branded on their foreheads.

They were 'servants' of the 'Watchtower Organisation', that religious body which, in 1931, became guilty of the offence of 'Identity Theft' when it took upon itself the name that God had used to describe His 'unfaithful' ancient people, Israel, **Isaiah 43:9-10 / Isaiah 44:8-9**.

In other words, these two men were so-called 'Jehovah's Witnesses'. They were smartly dressed and very friendly, and it came as no surprise to me when, in an affable, conversational style, one of them asked me what I thought of the current world situation.

'Tsunami. Earthquakes. Volcanic action. Flooding. Epidemics. Global warming. Destruction of the ozone layer. The collapse of the world's financial system. Did I think that we are living in the 'end times'?

Also, did I think that all the world's catastrophes and problems indicate the imminence of the Lord's return? Are they 'signs of the times'? I don't claim to be well-versed in what 'The Watchtower' organisation teaches, and I am aware of the fact that its 'servants' have been instructed by their leaders to radically change their approach when they go 'door to door'.

They are no longer to present themselves in the old, uncompromising, and rather superior manner, which often left people feeling angry and antagonistic towards them. Instead, they must seek to engage their contacts in friendly discussion.

Some of us remember that, years ago, they met with wide resentment, because of their manner of approach, but they accepted resentment and the rejection of their message quite happily, because they regarded themselves as being 'persecuted for righteousness' sake', and, therefore, they went on their way rejoicing!

But these days, they adopt a more diplomatic, conciliatory tone, and ask such questions as those to which I have already referred, ready, when the opening presented itself, to introduce their 'gospel' of a Renovated Earth, dry cleaned and sanitised, free of all problems, and providing a Paradisiacal life for the 'great multitude' who accept the 'Watchtower's' message when Christ returns.

So these days, they constantly look for 'signs of the times', a phrase, the definition of which is given as, 'Evidence of the imminence of the Return of Christ and the End of the World'.

The ‘Watchtower’ isn’t alone in its search for ‘signs’. Throughout the centuries of ‘church history’, men have preached and made predictions concerning the Lord’s return, but we don’t have the space here to deal with that aspect of the subject.

Let me give you a few examples of misguided predictions from more modern times. Ellen. G. White was converted by William Miller in 1842, the year when he was attracting popular attention, predicting that the Return of the Lord would occur in 1843.

Within a year, he claimed one hundred thousand followers, and, when his prediction failed, he said there had been a slight miscalculation, and Christ would return in 1844.

Some believed him, but when Christ didn’t return, Millerism went to pieces, and it was later, in 1863, that Mrs White established the Seventh Day Adventist Church on the remnants of the Miller movement by simply adding the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

‘Chambers’ Biographical Dictionary’ confirms the dates, and, if I took the time to examine my notes or my library, I am sure that I could supply you with other statements in the same vein.

The information relating to Joseph Smith comes from the Mormon official ‘Doctrine and Covenants Commentary’ Section 130, which begins on p.1001 and which is headed, ‘Important Items of Instruction, given by Joseph, the Prophet. April 2nd, 1843.

The commentary on this ‘revelation’ tells us that on the 2nd of April, Smith had heard Orson Hyde, one of the first ‘Apostles’ of Mormon, refer to the return of the Lord when speaking at a meeting. Later, at dinner, Smith called the attention of Hyde to his statements and said he would ‘offer some words of correction’.

Verse 14 and following of this ‘revelation’ records Smith saying, ‘I was once praying very earnestly to know the time of the Coming of the Son of Man when I heard a voice repeat the following – ‘Joseph, my son, if thou livest until thou art eighty-five years old, thou shalt see the face of the Son of Man; therefore, let this suffice and trouble me no more on this matter’. ‘I was left thus, without being able to decide whether this coming referred to the beginning of the millennium or some previous appearing, or whether I should die and thus see his face’.

Smith was thirty-eight years old, born in 1805 at this time. Verse 13 in the same ‘revelation’ says that it was received when he was ‘praying earnestly’ eleven years earlier, on December 25th, 1832. Had he lived. He would have reached the magical age of eighty-five in 1890, but he died in 1844, shot whilst attempting to escape from the jail in Carthage.

Then Charles Taze Russell came along, in 1874 he published a pamphlet entitles, ‘The Object and Manner of the Lord’s Return’ and according to the ‘official history’ of the Watchtower movement, the same year he came down to breakfast and announced to those present, ‘The Lord is now present, although His presence has been graciously veiled from mortal view’.

Russell continued to say that the Lord had been on earth for three and a half years, but invisibly. In 1918, the year following the death of Russell, His successor, the so-called Judge Rutherford, published a book, which declared that ‘The world has ended. Millions now living will never die!’

And, one final example of this religious folly, fifty years ago, there appeared a monthly religious magazine bearing the name, ‘The Signs of the Times’, and, as the title indicates, it was dedicated to identifying any event on earth, that might be seen as a ‘sign of the times’, and, therefore, as a sign that the Second Coming was at hand. In fact, I think that this magazine is still published in parts of the world where ‘Seventh Day Adventism’ seem strong, for example, in Australia and the U.S.A.

Furthermore, although they do not share the views of the ‘Watchtower’ concerning what will happen before or after the return of the Lord, there are other religious groups who also love to talk about ‘the signs of the times’ and whose ideas are just as erroneous as those of the self-styled ‘Witnesses’.

These groups are also convinced that His return will be preceded by the ‘signs.’ Indeed, the teaching of certain denominations on the subject of the ‘Second Coming’ is the foundation that underpins everything else that they believe and teach, so that it has become nothing short of an obsession. It is recorded that, on one occasion, C.H. Spurgeon said, ‘Ye men of Plymouth, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? Get on with your work!’

It’s sad, therefore, that it seems never to occur to these people that they may not be on biblical ground when they look for such ‘signs’ or that they may be guilty of teaching error when they claim that the Lord’s return will be preceded by ‘signs’.

I say this because, when we examine the particular passage of Scripture in which the phrase ‘signs of the times’ is mentioned, it becomes quite clear that the ‘signs’ to which the passage refers have nothing whatsoever to do with the end of the World, or to the Lord’s return.

Let me state this simply: there is not a single verse in the Word of God that instructs, or encourages believers to look for ‘signs of the times’ in connection with the Lord’s return, or with the end of the world. The expression, ‘signs of the times’, occurs only once in the New Testament scriptures.

It is found in Matthew, where we read about an unlikely alliance of traditional enemies, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who came to Jesus, ‘tempting’ Him, that is, ‘testing Him’.

They asked Him for a ‘sign from heaven,’ **Matthew 16:1-4**. They had already raised the issue earlier, when they said, ‘Master, we would see a sign from you,’ **Matthew 12:38**. Incidentally, it is significant that they didn’t treat him with anything more than mild politeness. They merely called Him ‘didaskale’, which means ‘teacher’.

In **John 3:2**, Nicodemus also called Jesus ‘Master’, using the title ‘Rabbi’, which also means ‘teacher’, but which is a much more respectful and honourable title. But notice what the Jewish leaders asked for. They asked for a ‘sign’, but a sign of what? There’s no mention of His ‘return’ or the end of the world. Why not?

The reason is surely obvious; it would never have occurred to them to ask such questions, and they would even have regarded any suggestion that He may be the Messiah as outrageous and blasphemous. Only those who believe Him to be the Christ would talk about such subjects.

So, what sort of ‘sign’ were they seeking? And why did they want a sign? They demanded a sign because the issue was one of authority. They were challenging His authority because His authority depended on His identity. Had He, in fact, appeared on the scene with a message from God? In other words, was He a true prophet?

This was something that Nicodemus, himself a Pharisee, had already settled for himself and which he acknowledged when he said to Jesus, ‘We know you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do the signs you do unless God is with him’, **John 3:2**.

Notice that although the ‘A.V.’ uses the word ‘miracles’, John consistently uses the word ‘signs’. Later, when the faith of Nicodemus had grown stronger, he appears to have become a true ‘believer’, **John 19:38-39**.

Now, when the Jewish leaders asked for a ‘sign from heaven’, they thought they were setting Him a test that they were confident He would fail. They were demanding a demonstration of miraculous power as proof that He was a true prophet of God.

We need to bear in mind that, because the Jews were a Theocracy, a people governed by God, at least, in theory! They were never surprised when men came claiming to be prophets sent by God. But they invariably demand that

anyone claiming to be divinely commissioned should give proof of his heavenly calling by performing a miraculous act.

Such an act would be accepted as the ‘sign from heaven’, that is, of ‘heavenly’ endorsement. So, they said to Jesus, ‘What sign do you show?’ ‘We would see a sign from heaven.’

Yes!, you and I know that the Lord had already performed enough wonderful deeds to have convinced unbiased people that He had come from God, but, behind their opposition to Him we must see the fact that these religious leaders were actually concerned about their own authority which they felt He was undermining.

They were resentful of His growing influence among the ordinary people who ‘heard Him gladly’, and they wilfully, and quite deliberately, refused to recognize and acknowledge the miracles He had already performed.

Matthew 12:34-43 tells us that He had performed a miracle of healing which had amazed the common people, but the Pharisees dismissed the miracle, saying, ‘He casts out devils because he is in league with the Devil!’

This is why He called them, ‘a wicked and adulterous generation’ when they asked for a sign. He accused them of refusing to see the ‘signs of the times’, that is, the signs of those times, and warned them that no special sign would be given to them. The ultimate proof of His identity and His authority was one which had already been determined by ‘heaven’. It was the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Now, we know that he was speaking about His death, burial, and resurrection on the third day. **Romans 1:4** states that He was ‘declared to be the Son of God, by the resurrection from the dead’, and it is this, the ultimate sign, which Jesus describes as ‘the sign of the prophet Jonah’. He declared that the acts of power that He had already performed endorsed His identity and proved that He had come to do the will of the Father.

But these men shut their eyes against the evidence. More than this, they wickedly described His ‘signs’, performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, as the work of the Devil, and in so doing, they were actually committing the unforgivable sin.

This wasn’t the only occasion when the Jewish leaders showed they were dishonest men. On another occasion, when Jesus was in the Temple teaching the people, the Jewish leaders descended on him in full force, **Matthew 21:23-27**. The chief priests and elders of the people, backed, no doubt, by members of the Temple Guard who had the responsibility of maintaining order in the Temple courts, came and demanded to know ‘By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?’

They knew that the previous day He had cleansed the Temple for the second time, and the words, ‘these things’ refer to the events of that day, that is, to His cleansing of the Temple court and His teaching of the people. The priests were indignant.

Firstly, because He had disrupted the business of buying and selling that went on in the Court of the Gentiles, an enterprise which they allowed, and of which they approved because it made them a great deal of money, **Matthew 21:12**.

Secondly, because He frequently taught the people in the Courts of the Temple, without first acknowledging their authority and obtaining their permission, **Matthew 21:23**.

In their view, Jesus was not a qualified and authorised teacher, and they, therefore, concluded that He acted with an authority He did not possess, **Mark 11:27-33 / Matthew 21:23-27 / Luke 20:1-8**. Hence, their challenge, ‘By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?’

We see, then, that nothing in these Scriptures concerns ‘signs of the times’ such as those for which my two ‘Watchtower’ visitors were looking. When the Priests and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign, they were concerned

about His identity and authority at that time, during His earthly ministry. They were concerned about His First Coming, not about His Second, concerning which they knew nothing and understood nothing.

THE DAY AND HOUR UNKNOWN

‘But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.’ Mark 13:32

IF JESUS WAS GOD, WHY DIDN'T HE KNOW WHEN HE WAS GOING TO RETURN?

Many Christians acknowledge that Jesus is God, but wrestle with the question, if Jesus was God, why didn't He know when He was going to return? If Jesus really was God in the flesh and all-knowing, 1 John 3:20, then surely, He would have known when He was going to return! There are two views when it comes to answering this question.

1. Jesus didn't know the hour because of His humanity.

It shouldn't surprise us that the angels in heaven don't know when Christ is to return, Mark 13:32 / Matthew 24:36 / because they are not all-knowing. They are created beings, Colossians 1:16, but not all-knowing. Remember, these created beings didn't even understand the Gospel, 1 Peter 1:3-12, never mind knowing the date when Christ will return.

Many people make the mistake of forgetting that Jesus was also human. Throughout His life, we see glimpses of both natures. Because He was human, He got thirsty, John 19:28, but because He was God's Son, He could turn water into wine, John 2:1-13.

Because He was human, He got hungry, Mark 11:12, but because He was God's Son, He could feed five thousand hungry people, Mark 6:30-44. Because He was human, He became weary, John 4:6, but because He was God's Son, He was raised from the dead, Matthew 28:1-15.

Jesus was fully God but also fully man, John 1:1-3 / John 1:14. When He came to earth as man, He voluntarily chose to restrict some of His divine attributes, Philippians 2:6-8.

Paul tells us that Jesus 'emptied Himself and humbled Himself.' He emptied Himself so that He could serve, 'He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.'

When the Bible says, 'that he emptied himself', it doesn't mean He became less than God; when He was on earth, it means He became more than God. He was God, but now He was also a man. He didn't get rid of deity; He emptied deity into humanity. He could never stop being God because God is His nature.

But do you know what He did? He relinquished His glory; He concealed it in human flesh. Now and then, we get a glimpse of it. He was up on a mountain one time, with three disciples, and He was transfigured, and they saw his glory, Mark 9:2-3.

Paul saw it on the Damascus road, Acts 9:3, and John saw it in his vision, Revelation 1:12-16. And someday we're going to see the bright, brilliant glory of Jesus. But when He was on earth as a man, He concealed that glory.

In other words, Jesus didn't manifest His divine attributes unless the Father told Him to do so, John 4:34 / John 5:30 / John 6:38. He displayed His all-knowingness on many occasions, John 2:25 / John 3:13, but He voluntarily

restricted that all-knowingness to only those things which God wanted Him to know during Jesus' earthly life as a man, **John 15:15**.

This is the reason why Jesus said, only the Father knew about the date and time when Jesus would return, **Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32**. We must also remember that He voluntarily 'humbled Himself', **Philippians 2:8**. In other words, Jesus lived a life which was in complete submission to the Father, so He set us the supreme example of what sacrifice is all about.

When we read of Jesus doing things that only God can do and knowing things that only God can know, it's because, at those moments, the Father was telling Him what to say and showing Him what to do.

He submitted to the Father but still remained One with the Father, **Matthew 26:39 / Matthew 26:42 / John 5:30 / John 6:38 / John 8:28-29 / John 10:30 / John 12:49 / John 14:28 / John 14:31**.

Jesus was indeed God in the flesh, but He voluntarily chose to restrict some of His divine attributes, **Philippians 2:6-8**, which include His all-knowingness, while He was a man.

When He declared that only the Father knew the time of His coming to His disciples, **Matthew 24:36 / Mark 13:32**, He didn't know when that time was because the Father hadn't revealed that to Him. However, after He was resurrected, He resumed His full divine status, which includes His all-knowingness, **Matthew 28:18 / Acts 1:7**. Jesus didn't know at the time He spoke to His apostles when He was going to return, but now that He has been exalted in heaven, **Philippians 2:9-11**, He will certainly know, He knows when He will return, **Titus 2:13**.

2. Jesus did know the hour.

Many people have come to the conclusion that Jesus is speaking literally in these verses, **Mark 13:32 / Matthew 24:36**, but what if He isn't? What if He's speaking metaphorically? The key to understanding Jesus's words is found in the word 'know'.

Although the word 'know' can mean knowledge, as in knowing something, Jesus uses the word in a different way, with a different meaning. The word 'know' Jesus uses is the Greek word 'oiden', which means to declare or to make known. Look at Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 2:2**.

'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.' **1 Corinthians 2:2**

We know that Paul didn't literally mean he forgot everything and only had knowledge of Christ Jesus and Him crucified. Paul is referring to the only thing that he taught and proclaimed among them.

The word 'know' which Paul uses here is the same word which we find Jesus using in **Matthew 24:36** and **Mark 13:32**, which carries with it the idea of knowing and remembering.

But Paul is using it in a figurative sense to proclaim in knowing one thing, and so it's possible that Jesus could be using the word in the same way. In that He didn't know the hour in a literal sense. In other words, the Father will be the one who will proclaim when the 'hour' will be. In other words, no one has the authority to do this but the Father.

Notice the use of the word 'know' in **Matthew 11:27**. Obviously, Jesus isn't being literal because many 'know' the Son, but they do not share in the intimate way the Father and the Son know each other.

Nor is He excluding the Holy Spirit; this is just an expression in saying that the Father and the Son have an intimate relationship. In other words, Jesus is saying no one knows my Father as I do.

Remember, Jesus has the power and wisdom of God, **1 Corinthians 1:24 / Acts 1:24 / Colossians 2:9**, which tells us that Jesus was omniscient. And so when we read other passages like **Mark 2:6-8**, we read that Jesus had the ability to read hearts.

In **John 2:24-25 / John 16:29-30 / John 18:4**, we are told that Jesus indeed does 'know' all things. The reason we know these are not simply expressions is because of what the disciples said to Jesus in **John 16:29-32**.

The disciples came to understand that Jesus was speaking plainly, not figuratively, and they came to the conclusion that He knew all things. Notice also that Jesus predicts their future, **John 16:32**, implying that He does know all things.

Jesus knew the Samaritan woman's past concerning her many husbands, **John 4:17-18**. He knew all about Nathaniel before they met, **John 1:47-48**. He knew Judas would betray him, **John 6:64**, and He knew His disciples' secret thoughts, **Luke 9:47**.

And so when Jesus says He doesn't 'know' the hour, He is using figurative language, which is clearly evident in the context of **Mark 13:33-37**. When we read **Mark 13:33-37**, notice He shares a parable about a master who went away and his servants didn't know when he would return, **Mark 13:35**.

Everyone knows that the Master in the parable is a reference to Jesus and the servants are His followers. His servants don't know when their master will return, but the question is, does the Master know when He will return? Of course, he does, hence why the servants are to keep busy and keep watching, **Mark 13:37**.

Jesus is saying it's not for any humans or any angels or the Son to make known the hour; the Father makes it known, **Matthew 24:36** / **Mark 13:32**. Jesus is aware of the hour, but only the Father will declare the hour.

Jesus is not saying that he doesn't have cognitive knowledge of the hour, but it's not for Him to make it known to them; that is for the Father alone. This fits in with Jesus' answer to His disciples concerning the restoration of Israel, **Acts 1:6**.

'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.' **Acts 1:7**

CONCLUSION

For many years, I used to teach that Jesus didn't know the hour because He suppressed His all-knowingness while He was a human. Although the first view is still good, I now, however, after digging a little deeper, believe that the second view is a stronger argument, as it doesn't contradict other Scriptures where Jesus clearly knows all things.

Jesus is comparing His coming with a Jewish wedding, in accordance with tradition. It's the father who announces the day of the wedding; it's not the groom or the bride.

The groom and the bride know, but they are not the ones who declare it, **Matthew 22:1-14** / **John 14:1-3**. The point is that Jesus isn't speaking about ignorance; He's speaking about declaration.

THE END OF THE WORLD

From **Mark 13:32-37** / **Matthew 25:36-51**, Jesus discusses the end of the world. In response to their first question, the Lord gave them detailed information and instruction from **Mark 13:5-31** / **Matthew 24:4-35**.

Then, we read **Mark 13:32** / **Matthew 24:36**, we find this unmistakable statement, 'but about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.'

The main sign of His return is the absence sign. Notice how Jesus shifts gears starting in **Mark 13:32** / **Matthew 24:36**. In **Matthew 24:1-35**, He keeps talking about 'those days' in **Matthew 24:19** / **Matthew 24:22** / **Matthew 24:29**, and from **Matthew 13:5-31**, He keeps talking about 'those days', **Mark 13:17** / **Mark 13:19** / **Mark 13:20** / **Mark 13:24**. But from **Matthew 24:36**, and **Mark 13:32**, He starts talking about 'that day'.

And in the New Testament, any time you talk about ‘that day’, singular day, the day, it’s talking about the day that Jesus returns. Nothing could be more clearly stated than these warnings, that we cannot know when the Lord will come.

The Lord warns that as it was in the time of Noah before the flood came and the people were going about their lives in the usual way, so it will be when He returns, **Matthew 24:37-39**.

In those days, they neither knew nor suspected that anything unusual was about to happen. They paid no attention to Noah’s warnings and were unprepared when the flood came and swept them all away.

Jesus didn’t say, ‘the days before I come, there’s going to be turmoil all over the world, there will be famine and distress.’ He said, ‘Do you know what is going to characterise the world before I come back? Normal things, people are going to be planting their fields, people are going to be planning weddings, they will never notice.’

If you know someone who is getting married soon, that’s a sure sign that Jesus is coming. The only sign before the flood was the preaching of Noah, **Genesis 6:5 / Genesis 7:6-23 / Matthew 24:37-39**.

It’s not wrong to have a wedding or to plan a party, that’s not what He’s saying. What he’s saying is, ‘the tragedy is going to be that when God comes back, what’s going to characterise the world is an exceeding casual world.’

And the only warning the world is going to get is the witness of the church. I guess there would have been some people around in Noah’s time thinking to themselves, ‘I believe in God, I believe what Noah said is going to happen, but I’ll wait just before he finishes building that ark before I step on board.’

We can’t do that with God, and the reason we can’t do that with God is that, like Noah, we have already been warned about what’s going to happen. And just like the people in Noah’s time, if you choose to ignore that warning, you’re going to drown in the flood.

In **Matthew 24:40-41**, He’s telling them that He would arrive unexpectedly, and He would find many people who weren’t prepared for it. We must always be prepared for the Lord’s sudden appearance.

‘Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” **Mark 13:33-37**

Jesus proceeds to teach how believers should behave in view of the fact that there will be nothing to warn that His Coming is imminent, **Mark 13:33-37 / Matthew 24:42-43**. He says that it will be unheralded, like the coming of a thief, in the night.

Jesus gave signs to warn the church of the destruction of Jerusalem, and it saved their lives, **Mark 13:5-31 / Matthew 24:4-35**. And it helped the kingdom all over the world to understand that God has judged Israel and now the kingdom is made of Jews and Gentiles, **Luke 21:24 / Matthew 8:11-12 / Luke 13:28-29 / Isaiah 11:12 / Matthew 23:37**.

He gave signs for that, but He didn’t give any signs for His return, He said, ‘My return is as a thief,’ **Mark 13:33-35 / Matthew 24:42-44**. Thieves don’t give signs, thieves don’t send cards saying, ‘hope you’re not home next Monday night, we’re hoping to drop by.’

To illustrate what is involved in watching and being ready, Jesus contrasted two servants, **Matthew 24:45-51**. The first servant is described as ‘faithful and wise’; he had fulfilled his responsibilities while his master was away, and he would receive a great reward when his master returned.

So, it is with those disciples who remained faithful and wisely understand their duties to serve the Lord. The second servant is described as ‘wicked’, he wasn’t faithful, he was not wise, and he didn’t fulfil his responsibilities while his master was away. And so, he would be punished when his master returned.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The ‘weeping and the gnashing of teeth’ are expressions used by Jesus to convey some idea of the anguish and despair of the condemned who shall be cast into the outer darkness.’

What does all this mean to us? It means that what Jesus said came true. He said that the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed. He said that the Christians of that time would live if they followed Jesus’ instructions. He said if they ran back into Jerusalem, they would certainly die, and many people did.

There’s a time coming when everyone in heaven and on earth and every demon in hell is going to bow down and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it’s just a question of when, **Philippians 2:9-11**.

Matthew continues with three parables illustrating the need to always be prepared for the Lord’s appearing, **Matthew 25**, emphasising that we cannot know when He will come, **Matthew 25:13**.

The Lord has not left us ‘in the dark’ that He will appear suddenly, without warning. So, by always being prepared, we will not be caught off guard, **1 Thessalonians 5:4**. The Lord Jesus says, ‘I am definitely coming suddenly.’ Can we, with confidence and with joy, say, ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus’? **Revelation 22:20**.

And then He tells these three parables about the servants that were given assignments, about the ten wise and foolish virgins, about the parable of the talents, **Matthew 25**.

All three parables have two things in common: in all three parables, the master was gone longer than they expected, and in all three, when he came back, everybody was surprised. The people who are ready for Him and the people who weren’t ready for Him.

It’s not like the wise virgins knew He was coming back, and so they were ready. **Matthew 25:5** tells us that they were sleeping too. They were just as surprised as the foolish virgins. When Jesus comes back, we’re not going to have a clue that He was coming on that day. What Jesus is doing isn’t giving us clues to date His return.

He said to us, ‘You need prepared lives because you don’t know the date of My return, so you stay ready.’ We talk a lot about what signs we’re looking for, but Jesus closes by saying, ‘You know I’m looking for a sign too.’

The sign Jesus is looking for is ‘faithfulness’. He’s attempting to get spiritually long-distance runners. Jesus said, ‘When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’ **Luke 18:8**.

That’s the sign Jesus is going to look for. There is no special evidence of His imminent appearance! Instead, a solemn warning which every one of us should take seriously and think about more frequently, ‘watch, therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord will come,’ **Mark 13:35-37 / Matthew 24:42**.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

1. We should not believe anyone who claims to be able to predict the date of the Lord’s return.

If Jesus didn’t know, surely no mere man does. Anyone who claims to be able to discern the time of Jesus’ return by a careful study of prophetic texts is claiming to know more than the Lord Himself and should not be taken seriously.

2. Since we don’t know when the Lord will come back, we should always be ready.

If you knew for sure that the Lord would come back today, would you change some things in your life? Then why not just assume that He is returning today, for He might, and make the changes immediately. It is utterly foolish to procrastinate in our repentance.

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION

‘Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ‘But not during the festival,’ they said, ‘or the people may riot.’ While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly. ‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.’ Mark 14:1-9

DON'T GET CONFUSED!

As we approach this text, many people make the mistake of mixing this Simon with the Simon we find in Luke’s account in **Luke 7:36-50**. The Simon referred to in Matthew’s account is the Simon who had been cured of leprosy, **Mark 14:3 / Matthew 26:6**, and possibly out of thankfulness, hosted a dinner in his home in honour of Jesus. Robertson, in his commentary, says the following:

‘This anointing has nothing in common with that given by Luke, except the fact of a woman anointing the Saviour’s feet, and the name Simon, which was common. The former was in Galilee; this is at Bethany near Jerusalem. There, the host despised the woman who anointed; here, her brother is one of the guests, and her sister is an active attendant. There, the woman was a sinner, a notoriously bad woman; here it is the devout Mary who ‘sat at the Lord’s feet and heard his words,’ months before. There, the host thought it strange that Jesus allowed her to touch him; here, the disciples complained of the waste. There the Saviour gave assurance of forgiveness, here of perpetual and worldwide honour. Especially notice that here the woman who anoints is anticipating his speedy death and burial, of which at the former time he had never distinctly spoken. In view of all these differences, it is absurd to represent the two anointings as the same, and outrageous on such slender grounds to cast reproach on Mary of Bethany.’

After Jesus finished speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and His return, He now prepares His disciples for what was going to happen to Him, **Mark 14:1-2 / Luke 22:1-2 / Matthew 26:1-5**.

In **John 12:1**, we find some confusion over the timing. John tells us six days before Passover. **Matthew 26:2** and **Mark 12:1** suggest that this occurred at different times, two days before Passover. It may have been that Jesus arrived on Friday, but the dinner took place on Tuesday.

Jesus returns from Ephraim to Bethany after spending some time there. This coming Passover, **Mark 14:1 / John 12:1**, would occur after His death on the cross but before His resurrection. Jesus is going to be handed over to be crucified, **Matthew 26:2**. He was going deliberately to His death, **Mark 10:32-34**.

While Jesus spoke about His upcoming death to His disciples, the religious leaders met together at Caiaphas’ palace to discuss how they could secretly arrest and kill Jesus, **Matthew 26:3-4 / Mark 14:1-2 / John 10:28**.

They did it secretly because under Roman law, they didn’t have the official right to kill Jesus without the consent of the Roman governor, who was at this time Pilate.

However, they couldn't kill Him during the festival, just in case it caused a riot among the people, **Matthew 26:5**; those who believed Jesus was who He claimed to be, **John 21:46**.

The 'supper' is the main meal, usually in the evening, and it was a dinner in Jesus' honour, **John 12:2**. It was in the house of Simon the leper, **Mark 14:3 / Matthew 26:6**, probably one whom Jesus had healed. Assuming Simon was the host, there were fifteen men present: Simon, Jesus, the twelve, Lazarus, and Martha 'served', **John 12:2 / Luke 10:40**. Jesus has the opportunity to spend some last moments with the people He loves, His good friends Lazarus and the sisters, **John 12:2**. These must have been very precious moments for the Lord as He knew His time was drawing closer. It seems likely that a four-day gap occurred between **John 12:1** and **John 12:2**.

Mary is mentioned in **John 12:3**, but in Matthew and Mark, she isn't named. She took 'a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume,' **Mark 14:3 / Matthew 26:7 / John 12:3**, its value was around three hundred denarii, which is equal to three hundred days' wages for a working man, **John 12:5 / Matthew 20:2**.

The nard that Mary used is better known as spikenard, an expensive perfume imported from India. It was far more expensive than the ordinary man in the street could ever hope to be able to afford, and it is possible that this had been a much-prized possession of the woman. It was highly scented and was normally used on the hair as a perfume and oil together.

She 'anointed the feet of Jesus', **John 12:3**. **Matthew 26:7**, and **Mark 14:3**, tell us that she anointed His head also. Anointing the head was a way of honouring a special guest, **Psalms 23:5 / Luke 7:46**. John recalls that Mary's loving act went beyond the customary practice, **John 12:3**.

A respectable Jewish woman wouldn't let down her hair in public because in doing so, she might be regarded as a woman of loose morality, but Mary was forgetful of propriety under the compulsion of love.

This was the second time something such as this had happened to the Lord, **Luke 7:38**, and it was a great act of humility for Mary to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair as the washing of feet was normally done by a servant, **John 13:1-17 / Matthew 26:17-35**.

The fact that John was present is proven by his remembering the strong scent filling the house, **John 12:3**. Note that each time we meet Mary in the narrative, we find her at the feet of Jesus; we see that here, and in **Luke 10:39 / John 11:32**.

In **John 12:4-6**, we see Judas Iscariot object to the 'wasting' of this expensive perfume. Matthew and Mark both tell us that Judas found some support among the twelve for his objection, **Mark 14:4 / Matthew 26:8**.

It seems that they, too, were more concerned with the value of material things. At first glance, we may even have some sympathy for Judas as the poor of the region would have benefited greatly from the money to be made by selling the perfume, **Mark 14:4-5 / Matthew 26:8-9**.

However, we see that it's clear that Judas was the treasurer and John tells us that he wasn't really concerned about the poor but more concerned with lining his own pocket, **John 12:6**.

Mary's act is an act of love towards her Master, and she had her priorities right because she could have sold it and given the money to the poor. She chose instead to use it to anoint Jesus and seized an opportunity she would never have again.

It was a personal expression of her true feelings and her thanks for the raising of her brother Lazarus just a few weeks earlier, **John 11:38-44**. When we examine the motive behind Judas' apparent indignation, one sees a rather sad picture.

Jesus demands total honesty from His followers, and here, amid the group of believers, is this thief. Judas, the man who was to sell the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, was already guilty, **Matthew 26:14-16**.

The lesson to be learnt here is interesting; anyone given the responsibility of keeping the ‘church funds’ needs to calculate the spending without error. They must keep an unquestionable account of all entrusted to them, and they must be unscrupulously honest, ready to give account at all times.

A hint toward balance is given in **Mark 14:6-8 / Matthew 26:10-12 / John 12:7-8**. We must balance our giving as individuals as well as a church, and we need to ensure we don’t squander the Lord’s money on trivialities such as expensive gardens, excessive buildings and decorations while people around the building are starving either physically or spiritually. Balance in all things is always demanded of the Christian.

Mary was being criticized by Judas, and if we seek the parallel account in the Gospels, by the other disciples present, Jesus comes to her rescue, He tells them to leave her alone, **Mark 14:6**.

It’s clear from **John 12:4**, that Judas spoke directly to Mary about the waste and I’m sure they would have stepped in to stop her from wasting any more oil on Jesus if Jesus hadn’t stopped them. I love it when Jesus speaks up and defends the innocent as He does here; He even pays her a high compliment.

Mary was more concerned about showing her love and appreciation of Jesus than the others were, and Jesus wasn’t about to stop her. Nothing was too valuable in her eyes for Jesus.

‘It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial’, Jesus says, **Mark 14:8 / Matthew 26:12 / John 12:7**. Mary believed that Jesus was soon to meet His end, and she knew she wouldn’t have the opportunity to show her love by being involved with the preparation of His body, so symbolically she did it now. Nothing can take away from the great love that this act expressed to our Lord. Mary had taken her opportunity to express her love. Jesus was soon to depart, the poor were always present to give an expression of love, **Mark 14:7 / Matthew 26:11 / John 12:8**, but alas, Jesus did not. Jesus said that this act of love would be her memorial wherever the Gospel was preached, **Mark 14:9 / Matthew 26:13**.

When we think about the disciples, they have been with Jesus for over three and a half years now, but they never seem to understand anything Jesus spoke about to them concerning His upcoming death. Mary, on the other hand, seems to have this great insight as to what is about to happen to Jesus.

I can imagine the heartbreak in Jesus’ mind when all this was going on, the disciples didn’t get it because they were too busy arguing amongst themselves as to which one of them would be the greatest, **Matthew 18:1-4 / Mark 9:33-36 / Mark 10:35-45 / Luke 9:46-47 / Luke 22:24**. I believe that men like to look at the facts and the figures, while women seem to be more sensitive to what is going on around them.

What a marvellous acclamation Jesus gives Mary, it’s one of those prophecies which is often overlooked and dismissed, **Mark 14:9 / Matthew 26:13**. This humble act of servitude that Mary performed would become the memorial of her love for Jesus, **Hebrews 11:4**.

She had the right spiritual attitude by giving Jesus the very best she had to offer, which is a lesson we can all learn from. Her name will go down in history because of this one moment with the Christ, as the Gospel is spread throughout the world, her name and her deed will follow along beside. This is just one of the things she will always be remembered for, but what about us today? What will people remember about us when we go to be with the Lord?

I’ve often said and believe this with all my heart that I could preach a hundred of the best sermons you’ve ever heard preached, and most people would forget them within a few days or weeks or months. But if I were to do one act of kindness for someone, **Matthew 10:42**, they would remember that one act of kindness all the days of their lives. Some people will be remembered for their Bible knowledge, some will be remembered because they were great preachers of God’s Word, and some will be remembered as great cooks or bakers.

Some as great singers, great hosts, but then there will always be some Mary's around, who lovingly serve the Lord without making a song and dance about it. Those little acts of love speak louder than words. What will you be remembered for doing?

CONCLUSION

You can always tell when it's election time in the UK as the political parties begin to promise many good things to come, especially for the poor. In our world today, there are many countries that are really poverty-stricken.

We read about it in the newspaper and see it in front of our eyes on the TV screen. We only have to walk down our city centres to see the hundreds of homeless people sleeping rough on the streets.

I guess the question is, what are we doing about it? What are we doing to help these people? We will always have the poor among us, which means there will always be an opportunity for us to help meet some of those needs, **Mark 14:7 / Deuteronomy 15:11 / John 12:8 / Galatians 2:10.**

It's so easy to focus on the negatives in this story; we could focus on Judas and his attitude, and we could focus on why the disciples seem to agree with Judas. But I'm wondering, what will people say about us when we leave this world? What will be written on your gravestone?

It's so easy to focus on the negatives in this story; we could focus on Judas and his attitude, or we could focus on why the disciples seem to agree with Judas. But I'm wondering, what will people say about us when we leave this world?

‘Here lies a Christian who loved God so much, they always gave God the very best of what they had to offer.’

‘Here lies a Christian who cared for the poor so much, they continually gave food, clothing and drink to the poorest on our streets.’

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS

‘Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So, he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.’ **Mark 14:10-11**

Luke tells us that Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, **Luke 22:3**. After he entered Judas, John tells us that the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus, **John 13:2**. How Satan entered Judas we don't know, but the Bible clearly tells us that he is working in Judas to get him to betray Jesus.

And please know that Judas wasn't forced to obey Satan any more than he was forced to follow Jesus. He had free will like you, and I do to choose who he will obey.

Judas now goes to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus, **Mark 14:10 / Luke 22:4 / Matthew 26:14**. Judas asks them how much are they willing to give him to deliver Jesus over to them and so they counted out thirty pieces of silver, **Matthew 26:15**.

Notice they were delighted and agreed to give him money, **Mark 14:11 / Luke 22:5**. Judas then consents, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present, **Mark 14:11 / Luke 22:6 / Matthew 26:16**.

Judas Iscariot is probably one of the most memorable disciples of Jesus, but sadly for all the wrong reasons. Now I think Judas could have got a lot more. I mean, this shows how far Jesus has sunk in his eyes. He could have pushed for much more from the chief priests.

Thirty pieces of silver were just the price of a common slave, **Matthew 26:15 / Exodus 21:32**. The priests were very aware of what Zechariah wrote, **Zechariah 11:12-13**, but their anger toward Jesus clouded any objectivity they had in applying prophecy to what they were actually doing, **Matthew 26:14-16**.

By the way, have you ever wondered why they needed Judas? They didn't need Judas to recognise Jesus. They didn't need Judas to find out where Jesus was. Do you know what my theory is? Three times in the Gospel of John, they sent guards to arrest Jesus, and all three times the guards couldn't do it.

I think they were beginning to fear that Jesus was un-arrestable. And they said, "We need someone on the inside, someone that can catch Him when his guard is down, someone that won't surprise Him so that we can get Him before He knows what's going on." And Judas said, "I'm your man." And Judas got his bargain.

And the Jewish leaders got their insider. And Satan got his opportune time to come back and attack Jesus. Because by this point, Judas is now the disciple of Satan. And so he makes his deal.

WAS THE LAST SUPPER A PASSOVER MEAL?

Before we move on to the rest of the text, I think it would be useful to answer the above question. Many people are confused as to whether Jesus actually ate the Passover meal during the Last Supper.

Some say He did, while others suggest that it was just a normal meal. The best way to answer this question is to go back and discover exactly what date and time the Passover was supposed to be kept.

The Hebrew word for evening is 'rev', and it means 'mixture.' It's a mixture of day and night, and it refers to the time when the sun is no longer visible, but the light from the sun is still visible. In other words, it's what we would call sunset or twilight.

When it came to the Day of Atonement, for example, we read the words 'from evening to evening', and we read that the tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement. We read that, that day begins at sunset (evening) on the ninth, until the sunset of the tenth day, **Leviticus 23:27-32**.

When we read **Leviticus 23:5**, we find the word 'twilight', and in **Numbers 9:2-3**, we read the words 'twilight' and 'appointed time'. We see that on the fourteenth day at twilight or sunset is the Passover, which means at the evening ending the fourteenth day, is when you keep the Passover. The Jews were to keep the Passover at the 'appointed time', **Numbers 9:2-3**.

This obviously means that they weren't supposed to do it any other day, and if they kept the Passover on the evening of the thirteenth, they would be disobeying God's command.

Passover is the meal which begins the feast of unleavened bread, **Leviticus 23:5-8**, and notice the unleavened bread is to be eaten for seven days, **Leviticus 23:6**, not eight days. If the Jews ate the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth, this means on the evening of the thirteenth, they would be eating unleavened bread for eight days. Also, notice what the Jews had to do with the lamb. They were to keep the lamb until the fourteenth day and then kill it at twilight, **Exodus 12:6**. If they killed the lamb on the evening ending the thirteenth, then this means they kept it only for three days. And so, to kill the lamb on the fourteenth day at twilight means to kill it at the end of the fourteenth day, that is, day four.

Now let's fast forward to the Last Supper. When we read **Mark 14:12 / Luke 22:7**, and **Matthew 26:17**, we see that this event took place on the day that the Passover lamb must be killed. This means it was the fourteenth day of the first month, which is in line with what we read in **Exodus 12:6 / Numbers 9:2-3**.

Concerning this meal, notice what Jesus told his disciples. He said, 'I will keep the Passover', **Matthew 26:18**, and He said, 'I may eat the Passover', **Mark 14:14**. So Jesus clearly intended to eat the Passover with His disciples.

He tells His disciples to 'go and prepare the Passover that we may eat', **Luke 22:8**, and He tells them to follow a man who enters his house and asks, 'where I may eat the Passover with my disciples,' **Luke 22:11**.

This is exactly what His disciples did; they went and prepared the room for the Passover meal, **Mark 14:16 / Luke 22:13 / Matthew 26:19**. Once again, we see that Jesus clearly intended to eat the Passover with His disciples in this man's house.

When they were in the man's house, they sat down and notice it was evening, **Mark 14:17-18 / Luke 22:14-15 / Matthew 26:20-21**. This was the right time to eat the Passover meal, as we noted earlier, **Numbers 9:2-3**. Notice Jesus says He eagerly desires to eat THIS Passover with you, **Luke 22:14-15**.

The reason many people get confused as to whether Jesus celebrated the Passover is because of what John says in his Gospel. John writes, 'then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness, they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover,' **John 18:28**.

Notice they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. This appears to contradict the other Gospel writers because it suggests that Jesus is going to be crucified on the day before the Passover meal. In other words, how can Jesus have eaten the Passover meal if the time for eating the Passover meal hadn't arrived yet?

The answer to this question is fairly straightforward when we remember that the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread is referred to as Passover. We see this in the Old Testament, where Ezekiel refers to the Passover as a feast of seven days, **Ezekiel 45:21**, and we see this in the New Testament, **Luke 22:1**.

When we keep this in mind, **John 18:28** becomes clearer. The priests didn't want to defile themselves at any point during the feast of Passover because they would be eating sacrifices every night. According to **Numbers 28:16-24**, they offered sacrifices to God every day, for the entire seven days of the feast.

SUMMARY

Jesus clearly asks the disciples to prepare a place for them to eat the Passover meal, and we see that Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples. Since He ate the meal, this also means that He would have eaten unleavened bread, **Exodus 12:18-20**, not leavened bread as some suggest.

Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples on Thursday, the fourteenth at evening, **Leviticus 23:5 / Numbers 9:2-3 / Mark 14:17-18 / Luke 22:14-15 / Matthew 26:20-21**. The priests came together, 'straightaway, in the morning,' **Mark 15:1**, thus on Friday.

He was crucified on Friday, the fifteenth and buried before sunset, **Mark 15:42-43**. The women rested on the Sabbath on Saturday, the sixteenth, **Luke 23:56**. The women returned on Sunday, the seventeenth, early in the morning to find the empty tomb because Jesus had risen from the grave, **Mark 16:1-2 / Luke 23:51-24:1 / Matthew 27:62-28:1 / John 19:42-20:21**.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST SUPPER

‘On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ So, he sent two of his disciples, telling them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.’ The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So, they prepared the Passover.’ Mark 14:12-16

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples want to know where they can go make the preparations to the Passover, Mark 14:12 / Luke 22:7 / Matthew 26:17.

Jesus tells His disciples, Peter and John, Luke 22:8, to go into the city and ‘man’ carrying a water jar will meet them, Mark 14:13 / Luke 22:10 / Matthew 26:18. This would be very unusual indeed because it was mainly women who carried the water jars.

Notice that Jesus tells them to ask the owner of the house, where is ‘My’ guest room, Mark 14:14 / Luke 22:11, which implies the owner of the house could well have been a disciple of Jesus. The disciples were to tell him that ‘the Teacher says, My appointed time is near’, Matthew 26:18.

Jesus seems to know that there is a large room upstairs, already furnished and ready, Mark 14:15 / Luke 22:12. The disciples find everything just as Jesus said, and only had to make preparations for the Passover meal, Mark 14:16 / Luke 22:13 / Matthew 26:19.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS BETRAYAL BY JUDAS

‘When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.’ They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, ‘Surely you don’t mean me?’ ‘It is one of the Twelve,’ he replied, ‘one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.’ Mark 14:17-21

Luke placed Jesus’ announcement of His betrayal after the institution of the Lord’s Supper, whereas Matthew and Mark located it before that event in their Gospels.

Ellicott, in his commentary, says the following.

‘On the whole, the order of the first two Gospels seems here the most probable. and agrees better with the fourth. The date before us do not enable us to say with certainty whether Judas partook of the memorial; but, if we follow the first two Gospels, it would seem probable that he did not.’

JUDAS

What kind of man would bargain for Jesus? The man is the man Judas, and although he’s not a pleasant person to study, he gets a lot of attention in the Gospels, and so we need to ask ourselves why. I don’t believe that anybody suddenly becomes influenced. I don’t believe that Judas was ever a second-class disciple.

Remember, he was chosen by Jesus to be numbered among the twelve after Jesus spent a full night in prayer, **Luke 6:12-16**. Judas was treated, he was taught just the same as all of the other disciples, and he was sent out by Christ to minister by the same apostolic authority.

Yes! Judas went out in the name of Jesus and healed the sick, imagine that? Imagine looking back years later and when you realise that your baby is alive because Judas healed him.

Yes! Judas went out in the name of Jesus and cast demons out of people. And yes, Judas went out and preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven to the multitudes. Judas was just as much a disciple as anyone else.

I think a lot of our portrayals of Judas are way off the mark. Every picture I've ever seen, an artist's portrayal of the disciples, always has Judas off in the corner.

I don't know why, but he's always a skinny-looking guy. Kind of small and thin, he's always got dark hair and a goatee beard, but I don't know what that means. But he's always a sinister-looking guy, and when you take one look at the picture, you will always say, 'That guy is Judas!'

Because if he wasn't Judas, he probably is a gang leader. How do we know that he wasn't a big guy, with a big old smile on his face? How do we know that Judas didn't have the heartiest laugh of any of the disciples?

This man was as zealous as any of the twelve. The other twelve trusted him enough that when they needed someone to take care of the money, they picked Judas.

I think Judas, probably like the others, was just as passionate in the beginning as any of them. He was a nationalist just like Peter, John and Simon. He thought Jesus was going to launch the political liberation of Israel, and he was on the ground floor to make it happen.

But what I think happened, I think sooner than the others, Judas was the one who realised that Jesus wasn't willing to be the king, he wanted him to be. I believe that Judas became disillusioned. Imagine that he is the treasurer of a nearly bankrupt movement, following a man that, in Judas' opinion, cannot take advantage of the moment.

I think for Judas, the real turning point is in **John 6**. Jesus feeds the multitude, and the crowd try to force Him to become king, **John 6:15**. This is the moment all the twelve have been waiting for. 'Let's crown Jesus, let's round up the troops, let's ride into Jerusalem and let's liberate Israel.'

Do you know what Jesus did? He refused. He withdrew from the multitude when they came to find Him the next day, and He preached one of the fieriest sermons He ever preached.

He says, 'The only reason you're here is for the food.' He started talking about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and the Bible says that after that, many people turned away, **John 6:66**. And in Judas' mind, Jesus blew it. And that's when Jesus said something very interesting that he hadn't said yet. He chose the twelve, but one of them would later betray Him, **John 6:70-71**. I don't know if, at this moment, Judas plans to betray Jesus; that's still two years away.

But at this moment, already in the heart of Judas, is frustration and disillusionment that Satan is going to start to work on. From that moment on, Judas began to live more and more of the life of an impostor.

I think for some time, Judas started to live that way. He started to do the stuff, but did not listen to the music. In fact, at some point, it says that every now and then he would put his hand in the money to get a little out. He was determined to get something out of his association with Jesus. And with every small act of treachery, his heart grew a little bit harder.

When we get towards the last week of Jesus' life, He's anointed at Bethany by Mary. Who opens a bottle of perfume, which is worth a year's wages, her life's savings, and then she just extravagantly pours it on Jesus. And the Bible says Judas wasn't happy about it, because he used to help himself to the money in the money bag, **John 12:4-6**. For Judas, the final straw was Jesus giving a blessing to Mary for her extravagance. In **Matthew 26:14-16**, we find Judas making his agreement with the leaders to hand Jesus over for thirty pieces of silver. I think Judas could have got a lot more.

I mean, this shows how far Jesus has sunk in his eyes. He could have pushed for much more from the chief priests. Thirty pieces of silver were just the price of a common slave.

JESUS PREDICTS HIS BETRAYAL BY JUDAS

And so, we shift now to a few days later, and we go to the upper room. All the disciples are gathered together to have a Passover meal, **Exodus 12:18-20**. The disciples suggest that they prepare for the Passover by finding a place to have the meal together, **Luke 22:15**.

Jesus knew His time to go to the cross was nearing, **Luke 9:51**, but His disciples never really understood what He meant. They didn't understand that Jesus Himself was the Passover lamb, **Luke 22:7-13**.

As they were getting on with the meal, Jesus interrupts and announces that one of them would betray Him, **Mark 14:18 / Matthew 26:21**, which sent shockwaves through the disciples.

Jesus hints at the coming events, and He reminds the disciples present of **Psalms 41:9**, in which it is prophesied that one close to the Lord would betray Him, and so He ensures that the men know when the incident occurs, 'He who ate my bread' etc., **Psalm 41:9 / John 13:18-19**.

They're introduced to 'even my close friend, someone I trusted', **Psalm 41:9 / John 13:18**. This is a picture of a close, personal friend, enjoying a relationship of trust, betraying his host. Sharing a meal was more than a social occasion; it guaranteed mutual trust between host and guest.

The disciples now know that one of them will betray Jesus. And John says something very interesting, 'the evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus,' **John 13:2**. We have to wonder if the blood money on Judas that night? Were the thirty silver coins in his pocket when he sat down to have supper with Jesus? Something else I think about is this: what was going on in the minds of both men when Jesus washed the feet of Judas? **John 13:5 / John 13:11**.

Judas knew what he was going to do, and Jesus knew he was going to do it, **John 13:11**. What were both men thinking when Jesus washed his feet? I think Jesus was about to get really personal with this battle.

I think the Lord was about to make one last appeal to His deserting disciple. I want to show you what happened at the Supper because it was a real battle, **John 13:18-30**.

Notice that Jesus basically said three things. A prediction, an answer and a command. Jesus said, 'one of you is going to betray me', **Mark 14:18 / Matthew 26:21**.

Can you imagine the gulp that Judas had to restrain when Jesus said that? Can you imagine the shock that he had to try to keep from registering when Jesus said that?

This text makes us face the sovereignty of God and the free will of men. Jesus predicted His betrayal, but predicted doesn't mean predestined. In other words, Jesus' awareness of Judas' betrayal doesn't excuse Judas from responsibility for his actions.

God does not design treachery, but God can design treachery in His plan. God doesn't make men do evil, but God can use evil men. Later, Judas' remorse is evident that betrayal was his choice, **Matthew 27:3**. He did not have to betray Jesus, but God used that betrayal to save the world.

The reason Jesus made the prediction was to let the other disciples know that He was in control. The situation wasn't out of hand. Later, looking back, the apostles would remember that Jesus' betrayal and death were exactly what He had predicted, **John 12:16 / John 13:19**.

In other words, later they were going to reflect, they were going to look back on that night. And they are going to realise that Jesus saw that coming, it was all part of a plan, He knew what was about to happen.

And they were going to realise He really is the Son of God, He really is in control, He really is the Lord. That's why Jesus made that prediction. He wasn't the helpless victim of superior forces; He was totally in control of the situation. One sent by God to effect God's purpose going forward calmly and unafraid, to do what God had planned for him to do.

It will reinforce their conviction that He is the one written about so many years before. He shows that even at this late stage, he is concerned about the spiritual well-being of the men who are to carry the message to all the world.

He uses this opportunity to assure the disciples that all who accept the word they are to bring accept Jesus and therefore accept God as well, **John 13:20**. Again, in **John 13:20** we find the words, 'very truly,' which is solemn assurance, 'and one whom I send', an apostle, **Matthew 10:40 / Luke 10:16**.

These men are to be His inspired representatives, **John 14:26 / John 15:26-27 / John 16:13**. To receive them, heed their teaching is to receive the Lord Jesus and to receive Him is to receive the Father who sent Him.

Notice that Jesus 'was troubled in spirit,' **John 13:21 / John 11:33 / John 12:27**. His prediction, 'one of you will betray me,' is His third reference to the betrayer in **John 13**. One terrible thing lay in the heart of the Lord, He knew the time was coming close, so He needed to tell of this thing, **John 13:21**.

The Bible says, 'He testified' as opposed to 'He told', **John 13:21**. This infers more of a declaration, a speech of significant importance, something that He had seen, or been witness to. Thus, this was a prophecy that, of course, was soon to be seen to be trustworthy.

The words, 'one of you is going to betray me', **Matthew 26:21 / Mark 14:18 / John 13:21**, must have cut to the heart of this group of men. The disciples were perplexed, 'at a loss to know which of them he meant', **John 13:22**. They looked at each other, each wondering who was to be guilty of this most hideous crime, **Mark 14:19 / Matthew 26:22**. The one whom Jesus loved, **John 13:23 / John 19:26 / John 20:2 / John 21:7 / John 21:20**, is a reference to John. Tradition has always understood this to be John. All the Gospels describe this event, and all show concern to ensure the individual would not be the guilty party. In his humility, John never names himself in the account, and the other accounts describe John as the one Jesus loved.

In **John 13:24**, we see that each guest was reclining at a low table, John was next to Jesus. When Jesus said, 'one of you will betray me', **Mark 14:18 / Matthew 26:21 / John 13:21**.

Peter made a sign or gesture to John, asking, 'Who is it he means?' **John 13:24**. John merely leaned back and asked Jesus, 'Lord, who is it?' **John 13:25**. The way he recounts the incident with **John 13:27-29** suggests that this was a private interchange, question and answer not heard by the others.

Notice that all the other disciples address Jesus as Lord, **Matthew 26:22 / John 13:25**, but Judas simply addressed Jesus as Rabbi, meaning teacher, **Matthew 26:25**. Jesus was more than a teacher; He was the Son of God, **John 20:30-31**. I think the disciple's amazing lack of suspicion about Judas tells us a couple of things.

1. It tells us that Judas hid his dishonesty very well.

You can be a bargainer for Christ, and other people will never know it.

2. Jesus must have treated Judas as well as any of the other disciples.

If they had seen over the years that Jesus had a problem with Judas, they would have suspected Judas, but they didn't. Because there was nothing about the way Jesus loved Judas that gave them any hint that Judas would sell his Lord.

Why do you think Peter wants to know? Peter wanted to take preventive action. Peter's got a sword, **Luke 22:49-51 / Matthew 26:51-55 // John 18:10-15**. And all he needs to know is who in this room would sell out Jesus. With the lifting of one finger, Jesus could have saved His life and ended Judas's life like that. Peter would have jumped up and cut off his head so fast that Judas wouldn't know about it until he sneezed. Jesus didn't do that.

Instead, He gave an answer that only Judas could respond to. He said in **John 13:26**, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' We might ask, well, why didn't they figure it out then?

How many of you have seen a copy of Leonardo da Vinci's famous portrait of 'The Last Supper'? It's a magnificent work, but it's so wrong. They didn't sit at a long table, in chairs, with a white tablecloth. Passover was eaten lying on the floor, **John 13:13 / John 13:23**.

They would have a U-shaped table, with the host up at the front, in the very middle. There was someone on the right in a special place of honour. And someone on the left in a very special place of honour. And everybody else would be down the sides. They would lie down on their left elbow and eat with their right hand.

That's why the Bible says that 'John was up against the breast of Jesus,' **John 13:25**. He didn't have bad table manners; John was right here, to the right of Jesus. Right up against His breast as they ate. Now, let me ask you, who would have been right to the left of Jesus in the very special place of honour?

Somebody so close to Jesus could take a piece of bread and hand it to him. Jesus gave Judas the place of honour at the Passover. And all that the disciples thought was happening, in fact, we know later from Matthew that Jesus and Judas were able to have a very private conversation.

We read that although Judas was aware of the decision he had made to betray the Lord, he didn't want to reveal himself, **Matthew 26:25**. We see a piece of bread or meat dipped in the sauce, which was bitter herbs, **Mark 14:20 / Matthew 26:23 / John 13:26**.

Giving a piece of bread to a guest was a sign of friendship or special favour, this would mean that Jesus wasn't only identifying the traitor to John but also assuring Judas of His love for him.

It was love's last appeal. He knew what Judas planned, but in the end, he held out the opportunity to turn from the wickedness of his heinous crime. I believe He was making a special appeal to Judas' heart. He was holding that piece of bread there, and He was looking right into his eyes.

And both men knew what He was saying, 'Judas, I know it's you, I know what you're struggling with, I know what you're thinking about doing to me, Judas, can you go through with it? Can you turn on me like that? Can you sell me out?'

Jesus was knocking at the door of his heart, and Judas threw open the door and told Jesus to stay outside, and he invited Satan in, **Luke 22:3 / John 13:27**. As someone once said, 'it was Judas' Gethsemane.'

Just like in Gethsemane when Jesus made His decision, and the angels came to give Him strength. Judas made his decision, and the dark angel showed up that quickly to make sure he didn't change his mind. And at that moment, Jesus knew that He had lost him.

The whole betrayal of Jesus was foreordained; Jesus would suffer the death of the cross, **Isaiah 53 / Psalm 22 / Acts 2:23**. Jesus says it would be better for His betrayal to have never been born, **Mark 14:21 / Matthew 26:24 / John 17:12**.

When we read **John 13:28-29**, we need to ask, why didn't John expose Judas? He and other disciples knew nothing of Judas' plans, and he may not have thought that the betrayal was imminent.

All the apostles said, 'Is it I?', **Matthew 26:22**, so probably they were thinking not of deliberate, calculated treachery, but involuntary betrayal, e.g. Peter's denial.

Also, the apostles refused to accept that Jesus was going to be crucified. On the other side of Cavalry, it must have seemed incredible that Jesus should urge Judas to do his work of betrayal quickly, **John 13:27**.

This is the only time in Scripture where God and Satan gave a man the same command. Judas was arranging for Jesus' crucifixion, **Luke 12:50 / John 13:27**.

Jesus was thinking, 'I have a baptism to undergo, what tension I must suffer, till it is all over! As if He said to Judas, Get on with it. I must get it over with!' **Mark 14:21 / Matthew 26:24**.

The disciples think Jesus is referring to some act of kindness, **John 13:29**, but the most extreme opposite is true. He is referring to the most terrible crime ever committed against man or God, **Mark 14:21 / Matthew 26:24**.

Judas casts aside all hesitation and gives himself up wholly to Satan's work. Up to this point, he had doubts and impulses to do better, but now he plunges headlong into the bottomless pit. Judas rejects Jesus' last plea of mercy, and Judas goes out into the night, **John 13:30**.

Although it was night, I'm sure that John was referring to more than the obvious: Jesus is the light, **John 8:12 / John 12:46**. It's always dark when you leave Jesus! The word 'night', **John 13:30**, marks the time, but probably symbolic also, the forces of darkness were gathering around Jesus, **Luke 22:53**. Also, Judas deliberately rejected the Light of the World, **John 8:12**, and went out into total spiritual darkness.

He ceases to follow and loses the light of life. The picture painted is gloomy and intensely sad, **Mark 14:21 / Matthew 26:24**. He had a chance to repent for his betrayal, but his worldly sorrow led him to hang himself, **Matthew 27:5 / 2 Corinthians 7:10**.

CONCLUSION

The problem with reading about Judas is that over the centuries, he has been so despised that we can't relate to him, but the disciples could. The question they asked when Jesus said, 'one of you is going to betray me' is 'Is it I?' 'Could it be me?'

I think that's the question we're supposed to ask ourselves because I think if we look deep into our hearts, we will admit that there have been times in our lives when we have made some hard bargains for Jesus. Judas sold out Jesus for thirty pitiful pieces of silver, but I've sold Jesus out for less than that, haven't you?

THE LORD'S SUPPER

'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them. 'Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' **Mark 14:17-**

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘This is the seventh of nine meal scenes that Luke recorded in his Gospel, Luke 5:29-32 / Luke 7:36-50 / Luke 9:12-17 / Luke 10:38-42 / Luke 11:37-54 / Luke 14:1-24 / Luke 22:14-20 / Luke 24:28-32 / Luke 24:36-42.’

Jesus desired to eat this Passover with His disciples before He suffered, Luke 22:15. Jesus knew exactly what was to come and He was well aware of the suffering He needed to endure to fulfil the will of the Father. He tells His disciples that He won’t eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God, Luke 22:16.

In other words, He won’t eat another Passover until His own death happens, 1 Corinthians 5:7. Some believe this means that Jesus won’t eat the Passover again until we all get to heaven.

However, I believe it could also have reference to the time when His kingdom was established on earth, that is the church, Matthew 3:2 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 9:31 / Acts 2. Notice that Luke records that there were two cups, Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:20.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following.

‘There were four times that participants in the Passover meal drank together, commonly referred to as four cups. The Passover opened with a prayer of thanksgiving followed by the drinking of the first cup. Then the celebrants ate the bitter herbs and sang Psalms 113-114. Next, they drank the second cup and began eating the lamb and unleavened bread. Then they drank the third cup and sang Psalms 115-118. Finally, they drank the fourth cup. The cup in view in this verse may have been the first of the four. If it was, Jesus evidently did not participate in the drinking of the following three cups, Luke 22:18. The other Gospel writers did not refer to the first cup, so this may have been the third cup, the so-called cup of redemption. This view assumes that Jesus did participate in the drinking of the first and second cups, which would have been normal.’

Jesus takes this first cup, thanks God for it, and then asks the disciples to take it and divide it among themselves, Luke 22:17. He tells them that He won’t drink again until the Kingdom of God comes, Luke 22:18 / Matthew 3:2 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 9:31 / Acts 2.

Jesus now institutes His memorial that had more significance than the normal Passover meal that the Jews ate at this time of the year, Exodus 12:11 / Luke 22:14-20 / Mark 14:17-26 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Jesus took the bread, Mark 14:22 / Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26 / 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, probably unleavened bread, Exodus 12:15 / Exodus 13:3 / Exodus 13:7 / Deuteronomy 16:3, gave thanks to God for the bread and gave it to His disciples.

A traditional Jewish prayer for giving thanks for food was as follows, ‘Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.’

Jesus tells His disciples that the bread represents His body, Mark 14:22 / Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26 / John 10:7, that is, metaphorically speaking. Paul later tells us that Jesus also spoke about the bread as His spiritual body, the church, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. The ‘breaking of bread’ is often used in the Scriptures to speak of the Lord’s Supper, Acts 2:42 / Acts 20:7 / 1 Corinthians 10:16-18.

After supper, Jesus then took another cup, Mark 14:23 / Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:27 / 1 Corinthians 11:25, gave thanks to God for the contents of the cup, that is, the fruit of the vine, Mark 14:25, and then passed it to His disciples to drink, each one of them, Mark 14:23 / Acts 20:7.

This was to become a symbol of the blood of Christ, Mark 14:24 / Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:28, who offered up His own life for others, Leviticus 7:26-27 / Acts 15:20 / Colossians 1:20 / Hebrews 9:12 / Hebrews 9:14 / Hebrews 9:20 / 1 Peter 1:2 / 1 John 1:7.

Jesus’ blood of the covenant was poured out for the forgiveness of sins, Jeremiah 31:31-34 / Exodus 24:8 / Acts 2:38. Jesus tells them He won’t drink of it again until that day when He drinks it new in His Father’s kingdom, Mark 14:25 / Luke 22:17 / Matthew 26:29 / Matthew 3:2 / Mark 9:1 / Luke 9:31 / Acts 2.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Christ made the Lord’s Supper the solemn sign and seal of the covenant for the forgiveness of the sins of his disciples in all ages. Christians who forsake the Lord’s Supper are described in the New Testament as having ‘trodden underfoot the Son of God’ and as having ‘counted the blood of the covenant wherewith (they) were sanctified an unholy thing’ and as having ‘done despite’, insulted, unto the Spirit of grace, **Hebrews 10:29.**’

WHY WAS WINE USED?

Have you ever considered why wine is used in the Passover? God never commanded the use of wine for the Passover; there’s no mention of it in **Exodus 12**.

There are a few reasons for drinking four cups of wine, according to the Jews. When promising to deliver the Jews from Egyptian slavery, God used four terms to describe the redemption, **Exodus 6:6-8**.

1. ‘I shall take you out.’
2. ‘I shall rescue you.’
3. ‘I shall redeem you.’
4. ‘I shall bring you.’

They were freed from Pharaoh’s four evil decrees.

1. Slavery.
2. The ordered murder of all male progeny by the Hebrew midwives.
3. The drowning of all Hebrew boys in the Nile by Egyptian thugs.
4. The decree ordered the Israelites to collect their own straw for use in their brick production.

The Jews believe that the four cups symbolise their freedom from our four exiles.

1. The Egyptian.
2. Babylonian.
3. Greek exiles.
4. And their current exile, which they hope to be rid of very soon with the coming of the Messiah.

The reason this is important is that in Luke’s account, we read that there were two cups used, one on either side of the bread, **Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:20**. In Jewish history, the cup of the Passover was likely four cups of wine, which is the number found in the Mishnah, interspersed throughout the meal.

Jesus says He won’t drink from this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when He drinks it new with them in His Father’s kingdom, **Mark 14:25 / Luke 22:18**.

This is either speaking of the time when Christ’s kingdom was established, **Matthew 18:20 / Acts 2:42**, and He will partake of the new supper with His people, or it could be speaking about the time we get to heaven.

Smith, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Now I look forward to that day when I drink of it in His Father’s kingdom with Him. I am going to have a glorious Lord’s supper someday. And we’re going to just be there with Jesus in the kingdom of God.’

Dummelow, in his commentary, says the following.

‘These mysterious and beautiful words are a well-known ‘crux’ of interpreters. It seems clear, however, that they are to be taken as referring to the whole rite of the Lord’s Supper, and not simply to the ‘fruit of the vine’, or cup. This is evident from **Luke 22:16**, ‘I will not any more eat thereof’, that is, of the Christian Passover or Supper, ‘until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ Interpretations fall into two main classes, according to as ‘the kingdom of God’, that is, ‘My Father’s kingdom’, is understood to refer to the period after the Resurrection, or the period after the Judgment. According to the first interpretation, the sacred rite which Jesus now institutes, and which He will not again celebrate until He has triumphed over death and sat down a conqueror on the throne of His Father’s kingdom, will, after the Ascension, and especially after the descent of the Spirit, be to the disciples a new thing. No longer will the shadow of disappointment and seeming failure hang over their meetings. The sin of the world will have been atoned for, death will have been conquered, the Spirit will have been given, and Jesus will be present at the feast, not, as now, in the body of His humiliation, but the power of His risen and glorious life. According to the other interpretation, the Lord’s Supper is regarded as a type and prophecy of the eternal marriage supper of the Lamb, **Revelation 19:9**. These two views do not exclude one another. The title ‘this fruit of the vine’, which Jesus applies to the sacred cup even after consecration, would seem to exclude the medieval doctrine of Transubstantiation.’

THE LORD’S SUPPER

I would like us to consider a few things concerning the Lord’s Supper. Firstly, the prayer for the bread and the wine, too often I hear people asking God to bless the bread and the wine, but this isn’t what Jesus did, He simply thanked God for them, **Mark 14:22-23 / Luke 22:17 / Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26-27**.

He blessed God, not the bread and the wine because He knew that God was the One who supplied the bread and the wine and supplied everything for them to have it, i.e., the rain and sun which caused them to grow so that they could make bread and wine.

Secondly, we must remember that we don’t come to the Lord’s table looking for forgiveness, **Matthew 26:28**. I’ve lost count of the number of times I hear someone asking God to forgive us our sins as if we only have our sins forgiven once a week. Our sins have already been forgiven at our baptism, **Acts 2:38**, and when we confess our sins to Him, **1 John 1:9**.

IS IT A TIME OF CELEBRATION OR MOURNING?

Well, possibly both, it saddens us when we remember what we did to cause Jesus to have to go to the cross, but it’s also a time of celebration because Jesus has conquered death and dealt with our sins and promises to come back again, whilst we remember what He did for us.

Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper in order for us to remember the great sacrifice He made for us and that we rely on Him and His sacrifice for our salvation.

He gave us this memorial, so we would not forget Him and what He did for us. In **Luke 22:19**, when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He said, ‘Do this in remembrance of Me.’ This is done to help us remember the Lord and what He did for us.

The death of our Lord wasn't an accident. It was in God's eternal plan of redemption for Christ to come to this earth and take our punishment for our sins by dying for us, so God can now be just in saving us. In several places in the Old Testament, God foretells the death of His Son for us, **Isaiah 53:5-6**.

God and Christ are loving and wonderful for what they have done for us. We read of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper, **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**. This is how we remember the great suffering that our Lord did for us. We proclaim our faith in this great and wonderful deed to the world each time we partake of the Lord's Supper.

Some partake of only the bread, and their priest partakes of the fruit of the vine; this is a perversion of the Lord's Supper. This isn't doing it the way the Bible instructs.

But notice each Christian is to partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine. When we partake of the unleavened bread, we picture our Lord's body hanging there, suffering in anguish and pain, taking the punishment that was rightly due us.

As we drink of the fruit of the vine, we envision His precious blood which was poured out for us to cleanse us from all our sins. What great love and concern God and Christ have for us!

The Lord wants us to remember what He did for us every first day of the week as the church did in the first century. We are to remember that our Lord gave up heaven to come to this earth for thirty-three years, and then died for us.

We remember the humiliation of the mock trial, the crown of thorns and the terrible scourging that left His back raw and bleeding. We remember the soldiers gambling for the Lord's only earthly possession, the clothes on His back.

Then we remember the nails as they were driven into His hands and feet, and the cross as it was raised and dropped into the hole. We also remember the spirit of forgiveness of our Lord, as He was being crucified, **Luke 23:34**. We remember our Lord's loud cry of victory, **Matthew 27:46**.

We remember as our Lord hung on the cross, how the people mocked, shamed, and made fun of Him as He was dying not only for their sins but the sins of all mankind, **1 Peter 2:24**. We remember the sun refused to shine, and the earth shook because of the death of the Son of God, **Matthew 27:45 / Matthew 27:51**.

We must first examine ourselves to determine whether we have the right attitude to partake in this memorial. We must put all else from our minds. We should make sure we have our minds centred on what Christ did for us.

We must clear our minds of all other thoughts and centre our minds on the sacrifice of our Lord, **1 Corinthians 11:27-29**, or otherwise, as **1 Corinthians 11:29 (KJV)** says, 'We eat and drink damnation to ourselves.' There are four things we need to look at before and whilst we participate in the Supper.

1. We need to look back to the cross, **1 Corinthians 11:23-25**.
2. We need to look forward to His return, **1 Corinthians 11:26**.
3. We need to look within ourselves, **1 Corinthians 11:27-29**.
4. We need to look at each other, **1 Corinthians 11:33**.

Many Christians today refuse to partake of the Supper because they feel they are 'unworthy'. The truth is all of us are 'unworthy', but this isn't Paul's point. Paul is speaking about the Christian's attitude towards the Supper, do they partake without really thinking about what the bread and wine symbolise?

Do they partake without thinking about what Christ did for them on the cross? If not, they are spiritually crucifying Jesus all over again, hence the need to self-examine first to avoid judgment.

Many Christians today refuse to partake of the Supper because they have a problem with a brother or sister in Christ, so they believe they would be partaking in the Supper in an 'unworthy manner'.

I find it tragic that Christians refuse to partake of the Supper because they have a problem with someone else. The truth is, Christians shouldn't be participating in 'worship' as a whole, not just the Supper, if they have a problem with their brothers or sisters, **Matthew 5:23-24**.

I've often heard Christians say that we should refuse non-Christians the Lord's Supper because they will bring 'judgment on themselves'. First of all, Paul is writing to Christians, and it's Christians who should be 'examining themselves', Paul doesn't deal with non-Christians participating in the Supper. Secondly, if non-Christians partake of the Supper, how much more 'judgement' can a non-Christian come under?

I find it fascinating that some Christians will refuse any non-Christian visitor the Supper but will happily take their money for the offering! I believe the Supper is for Christians, but if a non-Christian begins to come regularly to our assemblies, then someone should go and explain to them what the Supper is all about and who it is for.

Many people don't want to remember the Lord's death for us very often since they only partake of the Lord's Supper monthly, quarterly, annually, or not at all. The excuse is given that they do not want to partake of it more often because it will become too commonplace and lose its meaning. But the very opposite is true.

The Lord's Supper loses its meaning when we choose not to partake and think about it. This would be like saying that we should only pray two or three times a year, for if we prayed more often, then prayer would lose its meaning. This would be absurd.

Does the Lord's death really mean anything to us? But Jesus requested in **Luke 22:19**, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' Do we really care to regularly remember the death of our Lord?

People seem to be turned off by the death of Jesus and the shedding of His blood. They don't care to remember it. But it is His blood that cleanses us from our sins, **Revelation 1:5**.

They would rather remember Him as a babe in a manger than a crucified Saviour. It is an insult to Jesus to celebrate His manger and then ignore His cross. Many people seem to be ashamed of the death of Jesus, **Mark 8:38**.

This memorial of our Lord is called 'the Lord's Supper' in **1 Corinthians 11:20** and 'the Lord's table' in **1 Corinthians 10:21**. In **1 Corinthians 10:16**, it is referred to as 'the breaking of bread' and 'communion'. But the church in the first century met every first day of the week to observe the Lord's Supper, **Acts 20:7**.

Why did they come together on the first day of the week? Here we see the church in the first century came together on the first day of every week to break bread, which is the Lord's Supper.

Their primary reason for coming together on the first day of the week was to partake of the Lord's Supper. We cannot be pleasing to the Lord if we observe the Lord's Supper only a few times a year or not at all.

Are we really interested in proclaiming the Lord's death to the world until He comes? **1 Corinthians 11:26**. People today don't seem to have a problem with the example to give on the first day of each week, **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**.

One of the things they were to do when they came together was to give. What else was the church at Corinth to do every first day of the week when they came together? They were condemned for making a gluttonous feast out of the Lord's Supper, **1 Corinthians 11:20**.

When did they come together in one place? Every first day of the week. What were they doing when they came together every first day of the week? Perverting the Lord's Supper by making it into a glutinous and drunken feast.

What were they supposed to be doing every first day of the week? Partaking of the Lord's Supper. Two of the things the church at Corinth did every first day of the week were to give and partake of the Lord's Supper.

Why shouldn't we be like those in the first century who assembled on the first day of every week to remember the Lord's death by partaking in the Lord's Supper?

But many people seem to have a problem in seeing the importance of partaking in the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, as the church in the first century did when it was under inspired apostolic guidance.

When the Jews, who lived under the Old Testament, were commanded to remember the Sabbath Day, that is, the seventh day of the week, to keep it holy, they kept all fifty-two Sabbath Days of the year holy. The first day of the week also occurs fifty-two times each year.

When Christians today observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, they are following the Biblical example of **Acts 20** of the disciples who came together on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper, **Acts 20:7**.

We also read in **Acts 2:42**, concerning the church at Jerusalem, 'And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.' Again, we see the first-century church was steadfast or regular in the breaking of bread, which is their observance of the Lord's Supper.

But later, men in denominational groups chose to partake of the Lord's Supper less frequently. Should we be any less regular than the church in the first century?

According to what we have seen in the scriptures, we are to both give and partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Could the Bible be any clearer concerning the Lord's Supper?

Another perversion of the Lord's Supper occurred when men introduced the absurd doctrine of transubstantiation in the Decrees of the Council of Trent, which met from 1545 to 1563 A.D.

This decree devised by men stated that the bread and the fruit of the vine are converted miraculously into the literal body and blood of Jesus when we partake of it.

Sadly, men would dare to pervert the Lord's Supper into such a mockery. It's ridiculous to place literal interpretations on symbolic language. In **John 15:5**, Jesus says, 'I am the vine, you are the branches.'

Here, Jesus is using figurative language because we know He isn't a literal vine, and we aren't literal branches.

In **John 10:9**, Jesus said, 'I am the door.' But again, He uses symbolic language.

Concerning the Lord's Supper, Jesus said in **1 Corinthians 11:25**, 'This do in remembrance of Me.' The Lord's Supper is designed to help us remember what the Lord did for us.

And as we partake of it, as **1 Corinthians 11:26** says, 'You proclaim the Lord's death till He comes'. We are showing the world that we believe that Jesus died for our sins.

ONE CUP OR MANY!

It's hard to believe that churches years ago split over the issue of 'one cup or many', even today, there are some divisions within the Lord's body over how many cups should be used for the Lord's Supper.

I find it heartbreaking when divisions arise within the Lord's church, but I find it even more heartbreaking when some go as far as to make it a salvation issue. Let's go ahead and see some of the arguments that are used to 'prove' that we should only use 'one cup'.

The Bible references cited next are the passages some Christians use to argue for the use of 'one cup' only: **Mark 14:23** / **Luke 22:20** / **Matthew 26:27** / **1 Corinthians 10:16** / **1 Corinthians 10:21** / **1 Corinthians 11:25** / **1 Corinthians 11:26** / **1 Corinthians 11:27** / **1 Corinthians 11:28**.

When we're dealing with any Biblical text, we must think carefully about what is being said, keep it in context and be consistent with the outcome.

When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we know that the 'bread' represents the 'body' of Christ, **Mark 14:22 / Luke 22:19 / Matthew 26:26**. When it comes to the Lord's Supper, we know that the 'wine' represents the 'blood' of Christ, **Mark 14:23-24 / Luke 22:20 / Matthew 26:27-28**.

And so, if the 'bread' represents His 'body' and the 'wine' represents His 'blood,' what does 'the cup' represent? Most Christians who argue against more than 'one cup' maintain they are following the example of Jesus, but we need to ask ourselves the question: Is every part of an example binding?

Look at **Acts 20:7-8**, the text says they met in the 'upstairs room', are we going to say that the church today must meet in an 'upstairs room'? Look at **Matthew 3:13**, the text says that 'Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan', are we going to say that we must follow Jesus' example and be baptised in the River Jordan?

If Jesus was baptised in a river, does this mean that anyone who's been baptised in a baptistry or a lake hasn't received a Biblical baptism? 'Then Jesus came from Galilee to John to be baptised by him in the Jordan River.'

When we think about the 'bread' which was used in the first century, it looks nothing like the unleavened crackers we use today. Does this mean we must use a 'loaf' for the Lord's Supper?

Those who insist on one cup only argue that they're following Jesus' example, and they say if churches use more than one cup, they have gone beyond what is written, **1 Corinthians 4:6**, and therefore it is sinful.

The bulk of the argument is based on the fact that there is no Biblical evidence that authorises the use of more than 'one cup'. They do agree, though, that the Bible authorises by command, example, direct statement and expediency, which basically means something useful.

Expediency involves the right of choice, within the realm of that which is authorised in the New Testament and is not itself a source of authority. A basic example is that we are commanded to teach, and the use of overhead projectors would be useful for doing so.

Those who argue for the use of 'one cup' only always ask the question, where is the command, example or direct statement that authorises the use of individual cups for the Lord's Supper?

It seems to me they have forgotten about the expediency part. And like most people who make everything a salvation issue, they fail to be consistent with their arguments.

The same people who argue for the use of 'one cup' only have no problems authorising things like a church building, songbooks, seats, etc., because they say those things are expedient. Surely if those things are expediency, then so is the use of 'multiple cups' for the Lord's Supper!

With all the arguments about 'the cup', what about the bread? The consistent argument would be to ask, Where is the Scripture that authorises the use of two or more plates for the bread to be served on? There is none! Yet these same Christians use more than one plate for the bread to be served on.

I also find it interesting that these same Christians understand that the expression 'one bread' just means that all are to partake of the bread, and they understand that the number of plates for the bread doesn't change anything; in other words, they are all taking the bread.

You see, there is just as much Bible authority for more than 'one cup' as there is for more than 'one plate' for the bread. The point is that the 'container' isn't important, but what is important is 'the fruit of the vine' and 'the bread'. A cup is an expedient or aid to taking the fruit of the vine, just as a plate is an aid to taking the bread. The number of cups or plates isn't specified.

Think about this, when the Samaritan woman spoke to Jesus and said in **John 4:12**, ‘Surely, you’re not greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock.’ Does this mean that each of them put their lips on the well and drank? Surely it means all of them drank from it, but not all from the same container.

Jesus says in **Matthew 26:27**, ‘Drink from it, all of you.’ When he said this, did He mean for them to drink the cup or its contents? This was a figure of speech known as a metonymy. Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept.

We all agree that one plate or many plates don’t violate the command to eat the bread, why? Because the plate isn’t significant, it’s the bread which represents the body of Christ, which is significant.

It’s heartbreaking to hear how some Christians take things to the extreme and turn things into a salvation issue, whilst being inconsistent with their arguments.

The number of cups used in partaking of the Lord’s Supper should no more divide the church than whether we meet in an upper room or ground floor, whether we baptise people in the Jordan River or a bath in someone’s house, **Ephesians 4:3**.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST AND BAPTISM

Many people dismiss baptism as necessary for salvation because they don’t understand the connection between the ‘water’ used in baptism and the ‘blood of Christ’.

Many Christians, as I once did, struggle to understand how they are connected. To see and understand the connection between the water and the blood of Christ, we need to go back to Jesus’ words when He instituted the Lord’s Supper.

The text tells us the reason why Christ shed His blood, He says it was for ‘the forgiveness of sins’, **Matthew 26:27-28**. We know that if there was no blood shed, there would be no forgiveness of sins available to anyone, **Hebrews 9:22**. To this very day, all sinners need the blood of Christ in order to be forgiven for their sins, **Hebrews 9:13-14**. When we read **Acts 2:38**, we learn that people were baptised in the Name of Christ ‘for the forgiveness of their sins’. This demonstrates that Christ’s blood is connected to baptism in water. John tells us that it is Christ’s blood that ‘washes our sins away’, **Revelation 1:5**.

When Paul met Ananias, Ananias told Paul to ‘be baptised to wash away his sins’, **Acts 22:16**. This also demonstrates that Christ’s blood is connected to baptism in water. Paul tells us that it is ‘in Christ’, that Christians have ‘redemption, through the blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins’, **Ephesians 1:7**.

The word ‘redeem’ carries with it the idea of being bought out of slavery. Christians have been bought out of slavery by the blood of Christ, and when they are baptised, they have the forgiveness of sins, **1 Peter 1:18-19**.

The Hebrew writer tells us, ‘having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water’. **Hebrews 10:22**.

The sprinkling is a clear reference to the blood of Christ, **1 Peter 1:22**, and the water is a clear reference to baptism, **Ephesians 5:25-26**. Peter speaks of our baptism as a pledge of a clear conscience toward God, **1 Peter 3:21**. This again demonstrates that Christ’s blood is connected to baptism in water.

It’s the blood of Christ that reconciles people into a relationship with God, **Ephesians 2:13 / Ephesians 2:16**. For a person to be reconciled to God, they need the blood of Christ, and they come into contact with the blood of Christ at baptism.

Christians have been justified by the blood of Christ, and because they have been justified by His blood, the result is salvation, **Romans 5:8-9**. The word ‘justify’ simply means to make righteous (right before God, just as if one has never sinned).

Yes, everyone has sinned, but it’s only Christians who can appear before God as though they haven’t sinned. Christians are justified by the blood of Jesus when they have their sins washed away in the waters of baptism.

THE CONNECTION

1. Jesus shed His blood in His death on the cross, **John 19:33-34**; sinners are baptised into His death, **Romans 6:3**.
2. Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins, **Matthew 26:28**; sinners are baptised for the forgiveness of sins, **Acts 2:38**.
3. Jesus shed His blood to clean our conscience, **Hebrews 9:13-14**; sinners are baptised as a pledge for a clear conscience, **1 Peter 1:21**.
4. Jesus shed His blood so that we can be washed of our sins in it, **Revelation 1:5**; sinners are baptised to have their sins washed away, **Acts 22:16**.

CONCLUSION

The Bible clearly tells us that Jesus’ blood saves us, but the Bible also tells us that His blood can only be accessed by being baptised in water for the forgiveness of our sins, **Acts 2:38 / Acts 22:16**.

It’s through the waters of baptism that God washes us clean from our sins, **Colossians 2:11-13**, and gives us a pledge of a clear conscience towards Him, **1 Peter 3:21**.

We come into contact with the blood of Christ in the waters of baptism; it’s then that we become ‘in Christ’ and all of our past sins are forgiven, and we receive a new life, **Romans 6:1-5**.

After we’ve been baptised, His blood will continue to cleanse us and purify us from all unrighteousness, if we remain faithful to Him and confess our sins to Him, **1 John 1:6-9**. Have you been baptised for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, why not? **Acts 22:16**.

‘When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.’ **Mark 14:26**

After instituting His memorial, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives, **Mark 14:26 / Matthew 26:30**. The word ‘sung a hymn’ is actually ‘hymning’ in Greek and is a reference to the Hallel Psalms, which they would have sung.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The Passover was observed by the Jews by singing or ‘chanting’, **Psalm 113-118**. These they divided into two parts. They sang **Psalm 113-114** during the observance of the Passover, and the others at the close. There can be no doubt that our Saviour and the apostles also used the same psalms in their observance of the Passover. The word rendered ‘sung a hymn’ is a participle, literally meaning ‘hymning’, not confined to a single hymn, but admitting many.’

JESUS PREDICTS PETER’S DENIAL

‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them, ‘for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’ Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’ ‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.’ But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same.’ Mark 14:27-31

It’s clear that Satan wanted to use Simon to stop Jesus from going to the cross, Luke 22:31. Jesus specifically prayed that Peter be strong, Luke 22:32. He also prayed for all the twelve on this occasion, John 17:9 / John 17:11 / John 17:15. His prayer was that their faith be strong enough to withstand the trials through which they were about to go in the next few days.

The Lord was about to foretell the denial of Peter and the flight of the twelve but He began by appealing to the prophecy, Mark 14:27 / Matthew 26:31, quoted from Zechariah 13:7.

God had revealed Himself in the Old Testament under the extensive use of the metaphor of ‘the shepherd of Israel’, Psalm 23 / Ezekiel 16, but here it was stated that the Shepherd would strike the Shepherd, thus God laid upon Himself in the person of the Son, the iniquity of us all. Inherent in this was the failure of all human support.

Christ here went far beyond the detailed prophecies of His passion and calmly set up an appointment to meet the twelve in Galilee after the great sacrifice had been offered, Mark 14:28 / Matthew 26:32. Christ promised to meet them after His resurrection, and He did, Mark 16:7 / Luke 24:6 / Matthew 28:7-10 / John 21:1-6.

Jesus told the disciples that they would all fall away, Matthew 26:33. The disciples still didn’t fully realise what was soon to occur and so, Peter asks where Jesus is going, John 13:36.

Jesus answered him and tells him he can’t follow Him now but he will later, John 13:36. Jesus was going voluntarily to death but it wasn’t yet time for Peter to die. He would eventually ‘follow’ his Master to death by crucifixion, John 21:18-19.

Peter retorted that, though the others might, he would never abandon Him, Mark 14:29 / Matthew 26:33. Peter asked why he could not follow Jesus immediately, which shows three things about Peter’s personality.

1. His devotion. He wants to be with his Master.
2. His impatience, ‘Why can’t I follow you right now?’
3. His self-reliance. ‘I will lay down my life for you.’

All of these are shattered for that time when he was guilty of denying the one he loved. Even though Peter wasn’t perfect, he made mistakes as we all do. Christ replied that he would deny Him three times that very night, Mark 14:30 / Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:34.

It’s important to see that Peter was sincere in this assertion; he meant it, but he didn’t know himself as well as Jesus knew him. He revived and became a great apostle for the Lord. Peter promises all for Jesus but Jesus knows better, Peter would deny his Lord three times that evening, Mark 14:30 / Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:34 / John 13:38.

Matthew referred to the event of the cockcrow, a phenomenon taking place every morning, Matthew 26:34. Mark and John had reference to the beginning of a cockcrow, Mark 14:30 / John 13:38, which always starts with one or two roosters leading all the rest.

Again, Peter denied it, saying that he would even be willing to die with Him, Mark 14:31 / Luke 22:33 / Matthew 26:35. Perhaps Peter’s overconfidence was one reason he fulfilled this very prophecy a few hours later. Jesus knew the truth of what was to happen.

Peter wouldn’t lay his life down for the Lord, but the Lord for him. Peter wouldn’t follow; he would deny. The prophecy Jesus gives in this regard tells of three great truths of Jesus.

1. Jesus, the great prophet.
2. Jesus, the great sufferer.

3. Jesus, the great Saviour.

‘The cock will not crow’ etc, **Mark 14:30 / Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:34**. **Mark 13:35** indicates that it marked the third of the four ‘watches’, ‘evening’, six through to nine, ‘midnight’, nine through to twelve.

‘Rooster-crowing’ twelve through to three, ‘morning’, three through to six, hence, what Jesus means seems to be that before three am, Peter will deny him three times.

The prediction shattered Peter; throughout the Upper Room discourse afterwards, he is silent. Jesus, just moments before His departure, takes time to teach Peter, who was in many ways the leader, about the future in this great lesson. This lesson is recorded so we can learn from its experience.

Peter wasn’t alone in rejecting the idea of their failure, for both Mark and Matthew relate how ‘all the disciples’ made the same affirmation of loyalty, **Mark 14:31 / Matthew 26:35**.

What none of them realised was that the source of true spiritual strength hadn’t yet been provided through the death of Christ and that it was, therefore, impossible for them to have stood without that strength. It was at this time that the events and statements of Jesus in **John 13-17** took place. Jesus had a private meeting with the apostles as recorded in **John 13-17**.

There were actually two meetings going on at the same time: this one, where Jesus said He was about to be crucified during Passover and the other meeting when the chief priests were saying He can’t be killed during Passover, **Mark 14:1-2**, but as usual, Jesus’ plans are always first; He will die when He chooses to die.

In the **John 13-17** meeting, Jesus made specific promises to the apostles that applied only to them. In **John 17**, He made a specific prayer for the apostles and for those who would not believe in Him through their preaching.

Jesus now reminds them of their past mission trips, **Luke 9:1-6**. He asks them if they lacked anything and the disciples answered nothing, **Luke 22:35 / Matthew 6:33**. Now, Jesus is going to send out His apostles, but the situation has changed. No longer will they be able to go out empty-handed, preaching the kingdom of God.

He then tells them to take a purse and a bag, if they have them, but if they don’t have a sword, then they should sell their cloak and buy one, **Luke 22:36**. Now, when they go on missions, they will find trouble and suffering. They are not going to find a welcoming world; they will face hostility.

Jesus now amplifies this message by quoting from **Isaiah 53:12** and applying it to Himself, **Luke 22:37**. This is the prophecy of the suffering servant. The disciples respond to this by saying that they currently have two swords, **Luke 22:38**. There are two ways to take Jesus’ response when He says, ‘that’s enough’, **Luke 22:38**.

One way to understand Jesus is that He is saying that two swords are enough. Two swords are all the swords you will need. But I do not think this is what Jesus means; this is clear from what is about to happen when Jesus is arrested.

The other way to understand Jesus is that he is saying it is enough of this talk. It is not the swords that are enough, but enough of this talk. The point would mean that his disciples are completely misunderstanding what he is telling them.

Jesus is telling them about their future. No longer will their mission be easy; no longer will people welcome them into their homes to preach. They will be met with hostility and suffering; they will need to go prepared and ready to protect themselves because they are going to be counted as outlaws and rebels in society.

GETHSEMANE

‘They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” **Mark 14:32**

Apart from His upcoming crucifixion, this must have been one of the most agonising events in Jesus' life, and as we go through the account, we can only imagine the emotional and spiritual pain Jesus is going through.

The name Gethsemane means 'oil press', which suggests that the garden was a grove of olive trees in which was located an oil press. The Garden of Olives, **Luke 22:39**, as it is also called, is located to the east of the Kidron Valley between the path up the mountain and the busy Jericho Road. John tells us that when Jesus had finished praying, He and His disciples went and crossed the Kidron Valley and went to a garden on the other side, **John 18:1**.

The Kidron valley, east of Jerusalem, separating the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount, was the route taken by David when he fled from the city because of Absalom, **2 Samuel 15:23**, and it has a significant place in the history of the nation.

In **1 Kings 15:13**, it's where Asa burned the 'abominable image'. In **2 Kings 23:4-30**, it's where Josiah burned the idolatrous vessels out of the temple and in **2 Chronicles 29:16-36**, it's where it involved the cleansing of the temple by Hezekiah. From the altar of sacrifice in the temple, there was a channel down to the brook Kidron, and through that channel, the blood of the lambs drained away.

When Jesus crossed the brook Kidron, it would still be red with the blood of the lambs which had been sacrificed. The 'valley', 'cheimorrhos', literally means 'winter-flowing', a stream which flowed only in winter or after heavy rain.

'Place', 'chorion', an enclosed piece of ground, so the owner must have given permission for Jesus and the disciples to use it. The owner was probably a friend of Jesus, as Jesus often went there. Notice **Luke 21:37**, this probably means that Jesus and His disciples used to shelter there, sleeping in the open air, and probably in this very garden.

THE GARDEN

A 'garden', 'Gethsemane', means 'oil press', **Luke 22:39**. It was a private garden, **Mark 14:32**. Located on the slopes of Mount of Olives, but the precise location is unknown. The present 'Garden of Gethsemane' is very old, and the original garden must have been close by, but nobody can say with certainty exactly where it is today.

This wasn't the first time Jesus came here to pray, **John 18:2**, and so, it's easy to understand why Judas knew exactly where Jesus would be when it came to Him being arrested.

'He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." **Mark 14:33-34**

Mark tells us that whilst they were in the garden, Jesus left the other eight disciples at a distance but took Peter, James and John, His inner circle of friends, with Him to a quiet, isolated place in order for Him to pray, **Mark 14:33 / Matthew 26:37 / Matthew 4:21 / Matthew 17:1**.

Matthew and Mark tell us a little more detail about Jesus' emotional state, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' **Mark 14:34 / Matthew 26:38**. While Jesus went to pray, they were to stay and keep watch and pray that they won't fall into temptation, **Mark 14:34 / Luke 22:40**.

It's clear that even though the disciples seem to be oblivious to what Jesus was going through and about to go through, Jesus Himself knew exactly what was coming up. He knew that the cross was awaiting Him, and He knew He was about to carry the sin of the world on His shoulders, **John 12:27 / Hebrews 5:7**.

It was time to express exactly what was going through His mind. It was time to go and pour His heart out to His Father, and so He asked Peter, James and John to stand guard and keep watch because He knew that the mob was coming with Judas, His betrayer, to arrest Him.

JESUS FIRST PRAYER

‘Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Mark 14:35-

36

Luke only records Jesus’ first prayer, Luke 22:41-42. Jesus’ outpouring of His heart towards His Father shows the real love He had for His Father, Mark 14:35-36 / Luke 22:41-42 / Matthew 26:39 / Matthew 6:9. This highlights the closeness of their relationship, a Father and Son relationship.

Remember earlier, Jesus taught the disciples to pray, ‘our Father’, Matthew 6:9, but notice here that Jesus addressed the Father as ‘My’ Father. God became His Father when Jesus was in Mary’s womb, Psalm 22:10 / Jeremiah 32:27. If this doesn’t show us that God the Father was the unique Father of the Son and the Son was the unique Son of God the Father, I don’t know what will, John 3:16.

We know that all things are possible for God, but if mankind were to be saved, then this couldn’t possibly be removed. Jesus knew exactly what was coming up, ‘the cup’, Mark 14:26 / Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:39, symbolised suffering, and He knew the eternal destiny of mankind was upon His shoulders, Matthew 20:22.

We know that He gladly went to the cross, but not without expressing very real human emotions about it. He was fully Deity, but He was also fully human. His choice, which on the surface seems simple enough, was either His Father’s will or His own, Mark 14:36 / Luke 22:42 / John 6:38, but His human side was full of sorrow.

As God in the flesh, John 1:1 / John 1:14, He knew what the plan was, but as a human, the thought of it was overwhelming, Hebrews 5:7. He knew He had to be obedient even unto death, Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 5:8.

‘Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Mark 14:37-38

The disciples were sleeping when Jesus returned, Mark 14:37 / Luke 22:45-46 / Matthew 26:40-41. He specifically asks Simon a question and seems surprised that he was asleep, Mark 14:37 / Matthew 26:40. Notice why the disciples fell asleep, they were ‘exhausted from sorrow,’ Luke 22:45.

Scientists have actually proven that sleeping really helps relieve stress and anxiety. Jesus asks them to watch and pray, Mark 14:38 / Matthew 26:41, but notice He didn’t ask them to pray for Him. They had to pray for themselves as they were about to go through their own spiritual ordeal.

We often get the impression that Jesus left the disciples, prayed, and a few moments later came back to the disciples, but notice that Jesus actually prayed for ‘one hour’, Mark 14:37 / Matthew 26:40.

This implies that the words we have recorded for His prayers were all that He actually said. He obviously must have waited for some kind of reply from the Father and was in agony for that period of time.

Falling into temptation is a real danger for all Christians because the flesh is weak, Mark 14:38 / Matthew 26:41. This is the reality of sin; we may not want to sin or purposely get involved in sin, but we should never underestimate the power of those temptations which can lead us into sin, Galatians 5:17 / James 1:13-14.

JESUS SECOND PRAYER

‘Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.’ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.’ Mark 14:39-40

Jesus now prays for the second time, and He prays the same prayer as before. Once again, His choice, which on the surface seems simple enough, was either His Father's will or His own, **Mark 14:36 / Luke 22:42 / Matthew 26:42 / John 6:38**.

The first prayer of Jesus was asking God if it was possible to remove the cup of suffering which was coming His way but here, He acknowledges that it's not possible. In other words, there is no other way to save mankind, so His Father's will, will be done, **Mark 10:38-39 / Isaiah 50:5**.

Because the disciples' 'eyes are heavy', **Mark 14:40 / Matthew 26:43**, tells us they were under a lot of stress too. Probably because of everything which has happened up to this point, especially during the Last Supper. They too were emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausted. The disciples were so tired they didn't know what to say to Jesus.

JESUS THIRD PRAYER

'Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" **Mark 14:41-42**

Jesus now prays for the third time and prays the same prayer as before, **Mark 14:41 / Matthew 26:44**. Why did He repeat His prayer in Gethsemane?

Plummer, in his commentary, says the following.

'We may reverently suppose that He Himself knew that the first utterance of the prayer hadn't been complete in its success. His human will wasn't yet in absolute unison with the will of his Father, and, in this way, we may trace progress between the first prayer and the second. In both cases, the prayer is made conditional, but in the first, the condition is positive, and in the second, it is negative. 'If it is possible' has become 'If it is not possible', and there's no longer any petition that the cup be removed. We may believe that in the third prayer, even if the same words were used, the 'if' has become equivalent to 'since', 'since this cup cannot pass from me, thy will be done.'

While they were sleeping, Jesus was receiving another kind of strength. He received strength from an angel, **Luke 22:43-44 / Matthew 4:11 / Hebrews 1:14**.

THEORY

There is a theory about what's going on here in reference to 'drops of blood,' **Luke 22:44**. Although this medical condition is relatively rare, according to Dr Frederick Zugibe, it's well known, and there have been many cases of it. The clinical term is 'hematohidrosis.'

Around the sweat glands are multiple blood vessels in a net-like form, and under the pressure of great stress, the vessels constrict. Then, as the anxiety passes, the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture.

The blood goes into the sweat glands.' As the sweat glands are producing a lot of sweat, it pushes the blood to the surface, coming out as droplets of blood. Now I said that this was a 'theory' and I'm not denying this condition exists; however, I don't believe this is what's happening here with Jesus.

Notice Luke the physician's words, he says, 'his sweat was like drops of blood,' **Luke 22:44**. He uses the word, 'like', which tells us that it wasn't actually drops of blood but 'like' drops of blood. In other words, His sweat wasn't literal blood, but the sweat fell from His face as if it were blood.

When writers of the Bible are trying their best to describe something which they find difficult to explain, they often use words like 'seems like', 'looks like', 'sounds like', **Acts 2:1-3**.

If this text shows us anything, it shows us the intensity of His anguish. He knew exactly what was coming up, and as a result, He's sweating so hard that Luke writes that it looked like blood falling to the ground. No wonder an angel came to strengthen Him, **Luke 22:43-44**.

When Jesus returned, He asked if the disciples were still sleeping and resting, **Mark 14:41 / Luke 22:45-46 / Matthew 26:45**. The betrayer, that is Judas, is coming with the mob, **Matthew 26:46 / Mark 14:42**, and they need to be alert. This isn't the time for sleeping, but a time for spiritual warfare preparation. As Christians, we must always be on our guard. We must always watch and pray because our enemy, the devil, is seeking to destroy us, **1 Peter 5:9**.

While the disciples are still sleeping, the time has now come for Jesus to eventually go to the cross. It was the time of the betrayal, the trial and the crucifixion of the Son of God, **John 2:4 / John 12:33**.

The time had come to fulfil the eternal scheme of redemption that God had planned before the foundation of the world, **Ephesians 3:8-11 / Revelation 13:8**. It was time for Jesus, the head crusher, to fulfil the promise of **Genesis 3:15**.

Satan would be crushed by the sacrifice of the Son of God. However, the heel of the Son would be bruised by the necessity of His death on the cross. It was time for Jesus to pay a sacrificial price for our deliverance from sin.

As predicted by Jesus, the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified, **Matthew 26:1-5**. Jesus has no intention of trying to run away and hide. He's headed straight towards the mob like a man who's fully embraced the will of His Father. Jesus chose the will of His Father whilst Judas chose the will of his own pocket, **John 12:6 / Matthew 26:15**. What exactly was Jesus struggling with? Have you ever wondered what Christ's struggle was all about? What was the source of Jesus' great stress and anguish? Clearly, He was in intense spiritual agony, but the reason for that anguish is that He has to make a decision.

The same decision that Adam had to make, and the same decision that you and I have to make. Will I do what I want? Or will I do what God wants?

God asked such a small thing of Adam. He put him in a beautiful paradise and told him to have anything he wanted, but just don't touch that one tree, **Genesis 2:17**, that's all He asked of Adam. But what did He ask of Jesus? He asked Him to go and hang on a tree.

That's what Jesus was wrestling with, and when He left Gethsemane, we know what His decision was because He didn't back down. Do you know why? Jesus died before He was killed. He died to self, He died to personal ambition, He died to personal desire. He died before He was killed.

Jesus didn't moan. He didn't walk to the cross like a victim. He marched to the cross as a man who had fully embraced the will of His Father, **John 10:17-18**. Jesus had to make that decision, but He didn't have to choose to carry it out. Throughout His ministry, He could have stepped back into heaven at any time.

Even the devil knew that, as you know from **Luke 4:1-12 / Matthew 4:1-10**, after Satan had failed to tempt Jesus, God sent angels to care for Jesus, **Matthew 4:11**. I believe Jesus could have returned to His Father right there and then. And again, in **Matthew 17:1-7 / Mark 9:2-13**, when Jesus spoke with Elijah and Moses, He could have returned with them.

He could have avoided the cross, but not if He wanted to accomplish the longing of His Father's heart. His Father loved the lost children of the world, and their only hope was a perfect substitute to take the penalty that they deserved. Jesus loved His Father, and He knew what His Father wanted.

CONCLUSION

We only get a tiny glimpse, and we can only but imagine the agony which Christ went through here in Gethsemane, but we must never forget that He went through it all and chose His Father's will in order for sinners to be saved, even today. When He was faced with a difficult decision and His closest friends let Him down, He poured His heart out to His Father.

As Christians today, we too will have many times in our lives when we're faced with our Gethsemane moments. There will be times when we feel let down by our family, friends and even brothers and sisters in Christ, but it's then that we need to fall on our knees and pray from the depths of our soul for guidance from our Father.

Crucifixion certainly was an agonising experience. The victim slowly suffocated as he grew gradually weaker and finally was unable to pull his body up against the nails to breathe. But others have suffered similar executions with less dread than Jesus.

There must be something Jesus feared besides pain. Several passages teach that Jesus bore the sins of the world on the cross, **Isaiah 53 / 1 Peter 2:24 / 2 Corinthians 5:21**. The question is, will we accept His will for our lives, or will we resist and choose our own?

IF JESUS IS GOD, DOES THAT MEAN HE WAS PRAYING TO HIMSELF?

The question is a common question which some Christians struggle to understand or explain to others, and it's a question that other religious groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Oneness Pentecostals, use to try and 'prove' that Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh.

The simple fact is that God is a Spirit, **John 4:24**, and Jesus was a physical being. So, while the two are one, **John 10:30**, they are also separate entities. Think of Jesus as the physical form of God, **Colossians 1:15**.

When Jesus said that He and His Father are One, He was saying that though He has the form of a man, He also has the same divine nature as God the Father. This is exactly what Paul stated in **Philippians 2:5-8**. Jesus, therefore, has two natures; He is both God and man.

It's clear from Paul's words that while Jesus was on Earth, He put aside His Godly powers and made Himself only human, working through the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God's will for Him and praying to the Father for guidance.

He did this to give us an example of how we should live, working through the power of the Holy Spirit, in submission to God's will for our lives and praying to the Father for guidance.

According to the New Testament, there were several people who knew that Jesus was God in the flesh. The Gospel writer John knew that Jesus was God, **John 1:1 / John 1:14**, the apostle Paul knew that Jesus was God, **Colossians 1:15**, the Hebrew writer knew that Jesus was God, **Hebrews 1:3**, and of course, Jesus Himself knew that He was God, **John 10:30 / Hebrews 1:8**.

Remember, we're speaking about the humanity of Jesus. As a man, he, like the rest of us, got tired and hungry. He cried, He got angry, saddened, etc. All these references speak of His humanity, that is, Jesus being a real man.

Passages of Scripture which describe Jesus' limitations refer to His humanity. He lived His life as a true man, depending upon His heavenly Father day by day, just as we are expected to do.

Even His miracles and supernatural knowledge were enabled by the Holy Spirit, not accomplished by switching back and forth between His divine and human natures. Jesus was completely human, but He also had a divine nature. Notice the following.

AS GOD

Jesus is worshipped. Matthew 2:2 / Matthew 2:11 / Matthew 14:33 / Matthew 28:9

Jesus is prayed to. Acts 7:59 / 1 Corinthians 1:2

Jesus was called God. John 20:28 / Hebrews 1:8

Jesus was called the Son of God. Mark 1:1

Jesus is sinless. 1 Peter 2:22 / Hebrews 4:15

Jesus knew all things. John 21:17

Jesus gives eternal life. John 10:28 / John 17:2

The fullness of deity dwells in Jesus. Colossians 2:9

AS A MAN

Jesus worshipped the Father. John 17

Jesus prayed to the Father. John 17:1

Jesus was called a man. Mark 15:39 / John 19:5

Jesus was called the Son of Man. John 9:35-37

Jesus was tempted. Matthew 4:1

Jesus grew in wisdom. Luke 2:52

Jesus died. Romans 5:8

Jesus has a body of flesh and bones. Luke 24:39

Why did Jesus pray to the Father despite being God Himself? Like so much of Jesus' life as a man, He left us an example to follow, which includes praying. Remember, the disciples didn't know how to pray, so Jesus had to teach them how to pray, **Luke 11:1 / Matthew 6:10-14**.

While on earth, He modelled dependence on God, and that prayer is more important than food or rest. God is our source of life, strength and hope, and we must remain connected to Him.

We must remain connected to God the Father through Christ. Jesus demonstrated this by remaining in visible fellowship with the Father, **Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 2:17-18**.

Jesus was fully God and fully man, and He left us an example of what we must do when we hunger, thirst, get weary and sorrowful, and so, just like Jesus, we should cry out to our Father in Heaven.

It's all about our relationship with the Father, and Jesus gave us the supreme example in prayer, **John 13:15**. As a man, Jesus needed to pray, and when He was praying, He wasn't praying to Himself but to God the Father.

Jesus prayed to God the Father because it was an appropriate, natural and essential part of His mission on earth. His prayers set an example for us to grow in intimacy with our Heavenly Father.

JESUS ARRESTED

‘Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Rabbi!’ and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ‘Am I leading a rebellion,’ said Jesus, ‘that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.’ Then everyone deserted him and fled. A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.’ Mark 14:47-52

THE KIDRON VALLEY

Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley and went into a garden, **John 18:1**. The Kidron valley east of Jerusalem, separating the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount, was the route taken by David when he fled from the city because of Absalom, **2 Samuel 15:23**.

It has a significant place in the history of the nation, it’s where Asa burned the ‘abominable image’, in **1 Kings 15:13 / 2 Chronicles 15:16**, it’s where Josiah burned the idolatrous vessels out of the temple, in **2 Kings 23:4**, it’s where it involved in the cleansing of the temple by Hezekiah, **2 Chronicles 29:15-17**.

From the altar of sacrifice in the temple, there was a channel down to the brook Kidron, and through that channel, the blood of the lambs drained away. When Jesus crossed the brook Kidron it would still be red with the blood of the lambs which had been sacrificed.

The ‘valley’, ‘cheimorrhos’, literally means ‘winter-flowing’, a stream that flowed only in winter or after heavy rain. A ‘garden’, ‘Gethsemane’, means ‘oil press’, **Luke 22:39**.

It was a private garden, **Mark 14:32**. ‘Place’, ‘chorion’, an enclosed piece of ground, so the owner must have given permission for Jesus and the disciples to use it. The owner was probably a friend of Jesus, as Jesus often went there.

THE GARDEN

Located on the slopes of Mount of Olives, precise location unknown, the present ‘Garden of Gethsemane’ is very old, and the original garden must have been close by, but nobody can say with certainty exactly where it was located. It seems as if the disciples and Jesus had stopped for Jesus’ prayer somewhere in Jerusalem.

Now that the prayer was completed, they continued to the edge of the city, out one of the gates on the Western side of the city and towards the Kidron valley, which runs west of the city along the length of the temple.

They crossed the valley and entered the garden of Gethsemane, which was on the Mount of Olives; this Mount was so-called because of the olives grown on it. Some of these olive trees still exist today, and they are believed to be the same as those mentioned in Jesus’ time. It seems that Jesus slept here on the Mount of Olives each night of the last week of His life.

We see that this was commonplace for Jesus and the disciples to go for prayer and meditation. As a result, Judas the traitor knew where to find Jesus, and it was common for them to go there after the evening meal, **John 18:2-3**.

Judas brought an entire detachment of soldiers with him to capture Jesus. Judas brought with him ‘a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees’.

The word ‘detachment’ of soldiers is ‘speira’, and was the term used for a Roman Cohort, a body of six hundred men. However, it’s also sometimes used to describe a group of two hundred soldiers.

It’s impossible to say how many on this occasion, but it’s certainly used for a large number, **Mark 14:43 / Luke 27:47 / Matthew 26:47**. Imagine two to six hundred Roman soldiers and all the religious leaders, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs and swords, **Mark 14:48 / Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:47**.

‘Their officers’, ‘chiliarchos’, the Roman commander of a cohort, **Luke 22:52-53**, and the temple guard were carrying ‘lanterns and torches’, perhaps expecting that Jesus and disciples would hide, **Luke 22:52**. The chief priests and elders were also present, **Luke 22:52**.

The chief priests had no jurisdiction over Roman soldiers and would need Pilate’s permission to use them; however, he later doesn’t seem keen on the whole event, so it isn’t likely that he would give his permission to use his men to capture Jesus.

The torches were sticks tied together, wrapped in cloth, dipped in pitch or oil; the lantern was an open dish or oil lamp. This seems likely because of their reaction when Jesus uses the term ‘I AM’, **John 18:5**.

WHY DID THEY NEED JUDAS?

The religious leaders didn’t need Judas to recognise Jesus. They didn’t need Judas to find out where Jesus was. Three times in the Gospel of John, they sent guards to arrest Jesus, and all three times the guards couldn’t do it.

I think they were beginning to fear that Jesus was un-arrestable. And they said, ‘We need someone on the inside, someone that can catch Him when his guard is down, someone that won’t surprise Him so that we can get Him before He knows what’s going on.’ And Judas said, ‘I’m your man.’

THE KISS

Under normal circumstances, the kiss was a brotherly kiss of affection, **Romans 16:16 / 1 Corinthians 16:20 / 2 Corinthians 13:12 / 1 Thessalonians 5:26 / 1 Peter 5:14**, but it seems like Judas had other plans; his kiss was more like a kiss of betrayal.

His kiss signalled to the mob who Jesus was; remember, the religious leaders who were in attendance knew exactly who Jesus was, **Mark 14:44-45 / Matthew 26:48-49**, as they had many dealings with Him up to this point.

This shows us the extent Satan had been working on His heart, he even had the audacity to greet Jesus first, **Mark 14:45 / Matthew 26:49**. Jesus tells Judas to do what he came today and even calls him friend, **Matthew 26:50**. This is similar to the last time they spoke when Jesus tells him what he is about to do, to it quickly, **John 13:27**.

When Jesus asked him the question about betraying the Son of man with a kiss, **Luke 22:48**, this tells us that Jesus knew Judas’s motives. I’m sure Judas once again would have been taken aback by Jesus’ question.

Remember, these are the final days of Jesus, and He was well aware of everything which was about to happen, **Revelation 13:8**, and Judas coming to Him was no surprise either, **Psalms 41:9 / Luke 9:44 / Matthew 20:18 / Acts 1:16-17**.

Jesus was well aware of His eventual destination. He knew that His time had now come, but still He asked, ‘Who is it you want?’ They specify Jesus, **John 18:5**. He replies, ‘I am he’, **John 18:5**; this is the old statement used as a

reference to God. Jesus knew everything that was about to happen: John 2:24 / John 5:6 / John 6:64 / John 13:1 / John 13:3.

Notice it was when Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ ‘they drew back and fell to the ground,’ John 18:6, why? The word ‘he’ is merely supplied in the text, Jesus said ‘Ego Eimi’, ‘I AM,’ John 8:58 / Exodus 3:14, which is the Greek equivalent of YHWH, Exodus 3:13-14 / John 5:18. He is Eternal, Psalm 135:13, and self-existent, Psalm 88:6-7.

The expression ‘Ego Eimi’ also occurs in John 6:35 / John 8:12 / John 8:58 / John 10:9 / John 10:11 / John 11:25 / John 14:6 / John 15:1. The Jews understood perfectly well what was alluded to by the term ‘I AM’ used by Jesus, Leviticus 24:16 / John 5:18.

Just as a side note I remember studying with the Jehovah’s Witnesses and brought this text to their attention. At first, they said, ‘Oh, you guys are always making a big deal out of the ‘I AM’ statements’, and then they went on to explain that everyone present ‘drew back and fell to the ground’, simply because Jesus openly admitted that He was Jesus, and everyone was surprised when He did!

REALLY!

Imagine two-six hundred Roman soldiers and all the religious leaders, armed with torches, lanterns, clubs and swords, Mark 14:48 / Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:47, and who knows what else, coming to Jesus, and Jesus asks, ‘Who are you looking for?’ John 18:4 / John 18:7, and they reply, ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, John 18:5 / John 18:7.

Imagine, Jesus replies, ‘Yep, I’m your man’, and because He said, He is the one they are looking for, two-six hundred soldiers and everyone else in their company, not only ‘drew back’ but they also ‘fell to the ground.’ That simply doesn’t make any sense unless there was something about the words Jesus used.

The ‘I AM’ statements are a big deal, but they fail to see the significance of them because if they did, they wouldn’t come out with such dribble to explain passages like this.

After declaring to the mob that He is the ‘I AM’, for the second time, Jesus pleads for His disciples to be released, John 18:8. This was to fulfil a prophecy He previously made, which prevented any from being captured with Him, John 18:9 / John 6:39 / John 18:8.

THE EAR

When the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him, Matthew 26:50, Peter’s reaction isn’t surprising. He was always the impulsive one, who often said things without thinking first, John 13:37 / Matthew 26:33. He drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, who was the high priest’s servant, Mark 14:47 / Luke 22:50 / Matthew 26:51 / John 18:10.

The fact that Peter is carrying a sword, possibly for protection, tells me that maybe He still didn’t understand the nature of God’s kingdom; he was still thinking in terms of a physical kingdom. We know that Jesus never wanted or never intended physical force to establish His kingdom, John 18:36 / Revelation 13:10.

Before Jesus restores Malchus’ ear, Jesus rebukes Peter; this isn’t the first time he has rebuked him, Mark 8:33 / John 18:11, and it certainly won’t be the last time he’s rebuked, Galatians 2:11-21.

The cup, John 18:11, which Jesus refers to is the cup of agony, Matthew 26:39. He reminds Peter if he’s going to fight with a sword, then he will certainly die by the sword, Matthew 26:52 / Romans 13:4.

We must wonder what those who were present were thinking when Jesus restored Malchus' ear back to normal, **Luke 22:51**. Surely after Jesus claimed to be the 'I AM', and then performed this 'sign', **John 20:30-31**, those present would have noticed what He just did!

I often wonder if Malchus himself ever went on to believe that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. If no one else believed within the mob who Christ was on that day, I'm sure Malchus would have believed, and who knows, maybe later He went on to become a Christian. At the very least, it was certainly one of those moments in his life that he would never forget.

Peter, still thinking in human terms, thought Jesus needed help, but little did he know how much help Jesus had at His disposal. If it wasn't for the love of Christ for mankind, He could have easily brought all this to an end, but He wasn't about to play into the devil's hands; He wasn't about to blow His whole mission this close to the end, **John 18:11 / John 10:17-18**.

TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS

Matthew tells us that Jesus could have called numerous angels to rescue Him, **Matthew 26:53**, but He knew by doing that, He wouldn't fulfil Scripture, **Matthew 26:54 / Isaiah 50:6 / Isaiah 53:2-11**.

Twelve legions of angels are estimated to be around seventy-two thousand angels, but notice Jesus says He has 'more than' that number at His disposal, **Matthew 26:53**.

Remember the angel of the LORD wiped out one-hundred and eighty-five thousand of God's enemies in one moment, **2 Kings 19:35**, how much more would these many angels affect those who were present?

The mob were armed with swords and clubs, **Mark 14:48 / Luke 22:52 / Matthew 26:47 / Matthew 26:55**. This tells us that both Roman soldiers and the temple police were present to arrest Jesus.

Luke is the only account which tells us the chief priests were present too, **Luke 22:52**. You have to wonder, how many people does it take to arrest one man? **John 18:12**.

THE TIME HAS COME

Jesus tells them they've had ample opportunity over the past three and a half years to arrest Him, but they didn't, **Mark 14:51 / Luke 22:52-53 / Matthew 26:55**. Now was the time because it was God's timetable they were working under, not theirs.

The commander was usually in charge of a thousand men, but on this occasion, he didn't have a thousand men with him. John simply tells us about him to help us understand that he was a man of high rank, **John 18:12**.

It was now time to carry out the death sentence on Jesus, **Luke 22:53 / John 18:12**. Satan has been working through these people because He wanted Jesus out of the picture but little did he know that the cross was a part of God's plan from the beginning, **Genesis 3:15 / Romans 8:28**.

The devil had no idea what God's plan was, he had no idea that he was actually putting God's plan into effect, **1 Peter 1:10-12 / Acts 2:23**. Christ knew the Scriptures. He knew moment by moment they were to be fulfilled, **Mark 14:49 / Matthew 26:56**.

Jesus is saying that He must die, but He is also saying all these things must happen to fulfil prophecy, **Matthew 18:7 / John 10:35 / 1 Corinthians 15:3-4**. He knew His sheep would be scattered, **Mark 14:49 / Matthew 26:56 / Zechariah 13:7**.

Why the disciples deserted Jesus and fled, **Mark 14:50-52 / Matthew 26:56**, is uncertain. Probably because they were afraid, **John 20:19**, and didn't want to be arrested along with Jesus.

Notice that Jesus didn't try to run away. He surrenders Himself to the authorities, and no attempt is made to capture the disciples. He voluntarily handed Himself over to them, **John 18:12**.

I don't believe there was any need to bind Him, **John 18:12**, but such is the nature of Satan and the people he was using to rid the world of Jesus. There was no escaping for Jesus, but Jesus had no intention of even trying to escape. He only had one thing on His mind, to lovingly fulfil the will of His Father, **Luke 22:42**.

Jesus was in full control of everything which was happening around Him, and He has always been in control of everything going on around Him and will continue to be in control of everything, even to His resurrection and beyond.

As Christians, it's so important to remember that as long as we remain under His control, He will protect us from harm, **John 10:28-29**. We must also remember that it's so easy to abandon Him, especially when people criticise us for being Christians and abuse us for the faith we hold onto so dearly, **1 Timothy 6:12**.

We know that Peter and John stayed kind of close to Jesus during His trial, **John 18:15**, but we don't know why the others fled. One thing to notice is that Matthew includes himself as one of those deserting and fleeing from the scene, **Matthew 26:56**.

The young man who was left naked could have possibly been John Mark, **Mark 14:51-52**. Mark makes this brief statement here in order to identify himself as the writer of the document. I can imagine this event being both sad for the disciples later, but also humorous as they remember Mark running away naked.

From this time on, things begin to happen quickly in reference to the trials, crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Throughout the next three days, the disciples would experience the greatest trauma of their lives. Expectations would be crushed, and their hopes in Jesus would be dashed.

They would be in a state of disillusionment until Jesus redirected them through several appearances that would take place after the resurrection. After the trauma of all these events, they would be prepared to go forth for Jesus.

WHAT DATE WAS JESUS ARRESTED?

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'We should note that if Jesus was arrested on the night of Passover, as some suggest, then none of the chief priests or the temple guards would have been permitted to carry weapons after sundown of Nisan fourteenth. And so, this must have happened the night before, on Nisan thirteenth, technically the fourteenth, that Jesus was arrested. If it had been Nisan fourteenth after sundown, it would have been technically Nisan fifteenth, the night of the Passover meal, **Luke 22:2**.'

THE TRAILS OF JESUS

Jesus went through six trials before His execution. There were six parts to Jesus' trial, three stages in a religious court and three stages before a Roman court. On the night of His arrest, Jesus was brought before Annas, John 18:12-14 / John 18:19-23, Caiaphas, Matthew 26:57-75, and the Sanhedrin, Mark 14:53-65 / Luke 22:66-71 / Matthew 26:57-68 / John 18:12-24, a group of religious leaders.

In these trials, he was charged with blasphemy, claiming to be the Son of God. He was imprisoned at Caiaphas' palace, and the Jewish High Priest and the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, effectively asked Jesus two questions: 'Are you the Messiah? And are you the Son of God?' To both of these, Jesus answered, 'I AM', Mark 14:60-64 / Matthew 26:63 / John 14:61.

This was enough to condemn Jesus for blaspheming God by claiming to be God. The Jews understood perfectly well what was alluded to by the term 'I AM' used by Jesus, Leviticus 24:16 / John 5:18.

THE PRELIMINARY HEARING

Matthew, Mark and Luke don't mention the preliminary hearing, only John.

JESUS BEFORE ANNAS

Jesus was first taken before the powerful Annas, the ex-high priest and the power behind the current one, John 18:12-14 / John 18:19-23. These verses remind us of the important prophecy made by the current high priest, John 11:49-51, which he had said without realising the truth behind his statement. Perhaps he's also underlining the fact that with two such scoundrels involved, Jesus had no hope of a fair trial.

While Jesus is on trial, we find Peter is about to deny Jesus three times just as Jesus said he would, Mark 14:29-31 / Matthew 26:33-35 / John 13:37-38. In John 18:15-18, we read that Peter and it appears John follow the group, including the Lord, to the house of the high priest; it's most likely that Annas and Caiaphas lived at the same address. John is known at the gate and allowed into the courtyard, and he seeks permission for Peter to come in also.

THE COURT OF THE HIGH PRIEST

When we compare this with Matthew 26:57-58, and with John 18:13 / John 18:15 / John 18:24, it suggests that the same court or courtyard is in view in each case. It's probable that Annas lived in a part of the official palace of his son in law. The sending of Jesus to Caiaphas would be merely sending him across the courtyard.

As Peter is denying the Lord, the Lord is making His first defence. He's being questioned by the high priest, either Annas or Caiaphas, about His teaching and His apostles, John 18:19. It may have been that the authorities wanted the apostles as well to make sure that this sect was completely crushed; this would further explain Peter's denials.

It wasn't a judicial trial but rather a preliminary investigation; it would be in character for Annas to try to pin something on Jesus. Jesus is questioned 'about His disciples and His teaching', John 18:19, surely the questioner was well informed about both!

Jesus' answer shows that the high priest's questions were evilly motivated, **John 18:20**. What Jesus means is that He didn't have two kinds of teaching, a harmless one for the general public and a very different one for the secret revolutionaries. The essence of His teaching was public property, **John 18:21**.

Jesus defends Himself by explaining the openness of all His actions; He never hid behind someone or conspired in a closed room. His entire statement had been in the open, for all to hear, **John 18:21**. Because of this answer, one of the officials struck Jesus, who then sought the reason why He was struck, **John 18:22**.

Annas was acting illegally because Jewish law required that evidence be heard from witnesses and that their testimony be shown to be in agreement, then a prisoner might be cross-examined.

The official who slapped Jesus was a member of the temple guard. Jesus is saying, 'if I have said anything wrong, let it be revealed by proper legal procedures. If not, why hit me?' **John 18:23**.

JESUS SENT TO CAIAPHAS

Notice that Jesus was bound, **John 18:24**. Jewish custom was for a prisoner's hands to be tied behind their back. After being bound, Jesus is sent by Annas to Caiaphas as the official high priest, **John 18:24**.

Evidently, the preliminary hearing before Annas has allowed the Sanhedrin time to assemble. This was for the official 'trial' narrated by the Gospels, **Mark 14:53-65 / Matthew 26:57-67**.

If Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same palace and the Sanhedrin met there for this 'trial', then **John 18:24** would merely involve Jesus being led across a courtyard. Jesus is sent to Caiaphas's quarters, where the entire council of the Sanhedrin had gathered to seek cause to have Jesus put to death, **Luke 22:66**.

JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

'They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 'We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.' Yet even then, their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again, the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his clothes. 'Why do we need any more witnesses?' he asked. 'You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, 'Prophecy!' And the guards took him and beat him.' **Mark 14:53-65**

Matthew, Mark and Luke record the account of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, but John doesn't.

THE OFFICIAL TRIAL BEGINS

Though it was very late at night, Jesus was brought before the Jewish supreme court and tried, Mark 14:53 / Matthew 26:57 / Luke 22:66. Peter was following Jesus from a safe distance, and so, he went into the courtyard and sat down beside some guards next to a fire, to see what was going to happen, Mark 14:54 / Matthew 26:5.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for any excuse to put Jesus to death, Mark 14:55 / Matthew 26:59. They bribed false witnesses who told contradictory stories about Him, Mark 14:56 / Matthew 26:59-60.

For a time, it appeared that the court would be unable to find consistent testimony by which to convict Jesus. Another group stood and gave false testimony, Mark 14:57 / Matthew 26:60. They accused Jesus of plotting to destroy the temple and in three days He would build another one, Mark 14:58 / Matthew 26:61.

Their testimony was untruthful because Jesus actually said, ‘You’ destroy this temple, referring to His body, and in three days I will raise it up, that is, rise from the dead, John 2:19.

In context, Jesus’ words were a prediction that the religious leaders would take His life and that He would rise from the dead three days later. There was no suggestion whatever of such a thing as the false witnesses alleged.

Even such a misrepresentative and malicious garbling of Jesus’ words, however, was useless to the chief priests because there was no coherent account of such an alleged statement. One said one thing, and another declared something else, Mark 14:59.

All night long, the preliminary investigation had gone forward, and nothing had come of it. In desperation, Caiaphas, who was beginning to find the judge’s bench a very uncomfortable place, forsook the judicial status, usurped the role of a prosecutor, placed Jesus under oath and demanded an answer, Mark 14:60 / Matthew 26:63, but he would ask a question first. Jesus remained silent, Mark 14:61 / Matthew 26:63.

Finally, the high priest asked Him if He were the Christ, Mark 14:61 / Matthew 26:63 / Luke 22:67. When Jesus said, ‘I AM,’ they used this statement as evidence of blasphemy and convicted Him, Mark 14:61.

Christ’s, ‘I AM’ claim here speaks of His Deity, John 6:35 / John 8:12 / John 8:58 / John 10:9 / John 10:11 / John 11:25 / John 14:6 / John 15:1. Each of His ‘I AM’ claims are claims that He is God, EGO EIMI, is the Greek equivalent of YHWH, Exodus 3:13-14 / John 5:18. He is Eternal, Psalm 135:13, and self-existent, Psalm 88:6-7. The Jews certainly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God, John 8:57-59.

I used to think that sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven refers to the final judgment when all men shall stand before the throne of God for sentencing, Mark 14:62 / Matthew 26:64 / Luke 22:69. However, notice it says, ‘He’s sitting at the right hand.’

It doesn’t say He’s standing or He’s riding a horse; it says, He’s sitting. I think what Jesus is saying there is, ‘Caiaphas, this day you are my judge. You and your people are judging me, but the day is coming, and you’re going to see it when I’m sitting at the right hand of God, and I’m sending my judgement to you.’ And Caiaphas’ generation saw that prophecy come true, Mark 14:62 / Matthew 26:64.

In this text, Jesus is bringing the news of the passing of one era and the establishment of another in which the glory of God isn’t going to be in the temple made by hands anymore.

The high priest had heard enough, Luke 22:71. He tore his clothes in anger and didn’t need any more witnesses and accused Him of blasphemy, Mark 14:63-64 / Matthew 26:65-66.

GUARDS MOCK JESUS

They spat on Jesus, they blindfolded him, punched him, mocked him and beat Him up, Mark 14:65 / Matthew 26:67-68 / Luke 22:63-65. There were six mockeries of Jesus in all, all of which were designed to totally humiliate Christ.

We would expect this kind of behaviour from the Romans, but since this took place in the court of the high priests of Israel, this tells us just how far from God they had come. The religious leaders allowed this to happen right in front of their very eyes.

This was the second of Jesus' six trials, the first having been the arraignment before Annas, perhaps in the same palace where apartments for both Annas and Caiaphas were located around the courtyard, **John 18:12-27**.

The meeting of the Sanhedrin was probably not at full strength, its more noble members, such as Nicodemus, **John 3:1-2**, and Joseph of Arimathea, **John 19:38**, having already withdrawn. It may well be doubted that even a quorum was present, but on the other hand, it may be assumed that every effort was made to attain one.

THE WHOLE TRIAL OF JESUS WAS ILLEGAL

1. No formal charge had been made against Him.
2. The arrest was made by the men who would be His judges.

The High Priests and the Sanhedrin were also the ones who accused Him of violating the Law, which said that the Council was not permitted to lay charges.

3. The trial was held at night. Forbidden by the Law, because it was believed that the darkness might bind the mind of the accused, and cause him to testify against himself.

4. His questioning by the High Priest was alone forbidden by the Law.

The Judges were not allowed to question the accused, because he might be led into providing evidence against himself.

5. The law required the High Priest to 'search, enquire and ask diligently', if the charge against the accused was true, **Deuteronomy 13:14**.

6. A trial could not be held before sunrise.

So that potential witnesses for the defence could be present.

7. A guilty verdict could not be pronounced on the same day as the trial.

A night must intervene between trial and sentence so that the judges can meditate on the verdict.

8. After the verdict, a period of nine hours must be allowed for potential objections to be made to the verdict.

9. The verdict must be pronounced in the Chamber of Stones, the room in the Temple, where the Sanhedrin held its Meetings, before being made public.

10. The death sentence was invalid because it was not the unanimous verdict of the full Council. Joseph of Arimathea was not present, **John 19:38 / Luke 23:50-51**.

11. The testimony of the witnesses, procured by the Priests, on which the 'Guilty' verdict was based, was false.

They claimed that Jesus said, 'I will destroy this Temple'.

12. The Law forbade the holding of a Trial on a Friday.

The trial was illegal because it was held on a day that was followed by an Annual Sabbath, the Passover, **John 18:28**.

PETER DENIES KNOWING JESUS

‘While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. ‘You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,’ she said. But he denied it. ‘I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,’ he said, and went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, ‘This fellow is one of them.’ Again, he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, ‘Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’ He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know this man you’re talking about.’ Immediately, the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.’ Mark 14:66-72

PETER’S FIRST DENIAL

While Jesus is on trial, we find Peter is about to deny Jesus three times, just as Jesus said he would, Mark 14:29-31 / Luke 22:34 / Matthew 26:33-35 / John 13:37-38. Here we read about Peter’s first denial, but who is the ‘other disciple’ mentioned in John 18:15?

Traditionally, this has been accepted as John himself; this would be consistent with John’s habit of not naming himself, John 1:40 / John 13:23-25 / John 19:26 / John 20:2-8 / John 21:20-24.

Also, Peter and John appear to have been constant companions, Luke 22:8 / Acts 3:1 / Acts 4:13 / Acts 8:14. This unnamed disciple ‘was known to the high priest,’ John 18:15, which means he was well enough known for the servant girl to admit him.

Peter and it appears John follow the group, including the Lord, to the house of the high priest, Matthew 26:58 / John 8:15; it’s most likely that Annas and Caiaphas lived at the same address. John is known at the gate and allowed into the courtyard, and seeks permission for Peter to come in also, John 18:15-16.

Peter and John both enter and find a fire with people around and go to it to keep warm, Mark 14:54 / Luke 22:55 / John 18:17-18. It appears as if the other disciples had fled back to ‘his own’, in accordance with Jesus prophecy of John 16:32.

The girl at the gate sees Peter and recognises him as one of Jesus followers, Mark 14:66-67 / Matthew 26:69, she asks him about this and Peter makes that first terrible denial, Mark 14:68 / Luke 22:57 / Matthew 26:30 / John 18:17.

In John 18:17, we see the question asked by the maid is phrased to anticipate a negative answer, You aren’t one of this man’s disciples, too, are you? Remember that the ‘other disciple’ was known to be one of Jesus’ followers; he had openly entered along with Jesus, John 18:15.

HOW EASILY PETER FELL!

Questioned by a maid, ‘paidiske’, girl, he said, ‘I am not,’ Luke 26:69-70 / John 18:17. The other disciple was apparently in no danger, but why didn’t Peter own up?

Perhaps he was taken by surprise when a mere girl challenged him; maybe he was afraid he would be recognised as the one who wounded Malchus. We know that nearby are the ‘officers,’ John 18:18, who had been involved in the arrest of Jesus, John 18:13-14. A few hours ago, he had said he would die for Jesus, John 13:37, but now, a frightened man, he denies his Master.

PETER'S SECOND AND THIRD DENIAL

In John 18:25-27, we see Peter's second, Luke 22:58, and third denial. It's difficult to harmonise the accounts of the denials in the Gospels with that of John. This was during Jesus' trial before Caiaphas, John 18:24-28.

Matthew and Mark relate that before this, Peter had gone out to the 'porch' or 'gateway', Mark 14:68 / Matthew 26:71. Perhaps, deeply ashamed by his first denial, he wanted to slip away unseen but was unable to escape unobserved.

Matthew and Mark both tell of his being approached in the porch by a 'maid'. Accused of having been with Jesus, 'he denied it with an oath', Mark 14:69-70 / Matthew 26:71-72.

Peter 'was standing and warming himself' at a charcoal fire, John 18:18. This charcoal, only mentioned by John, would provide much heat but little light. And he is challenged by bystanders, 'You aren't one of his disciples, too, are you?'

Again, he answers, 'I am not', Luke 22:58. Then he is challenged by a slave of the high priest, who is also a kinsman of Malchus, 'Didn't I see you with him in the garden?' John 18:26.

The Gospels tell what was said both to and about Peter regarding his speech, Matthew 26:73, the bystanders say, 'certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you'. Mark 14:70, the bystanders say, 'Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.' In Luke 22:59, another bystander, probably a maid, says, 'Certainly this man was with him, for he is a Galilean.'

So, we see he was twice challenged about his presence with the Lord. First, by a slave girl, one of the most unimportant persons imaginable. Her question expected a negative answer, and Peter takes the easy way out.

Next, by a relative of the servant whose ear Peter had cut off. Peter again denied any link with Jesus, and as he concluded his statement, the crowing began. John's account is more discreet than the other Gospels; he merely states, 'Peter again denied it, and at once the cock crowed', Mark 14:30 / Matthew 26:34 / John 13:38.

ALLEGED CONTRADICTION

Notice that Matthew, Matthew 26:34, and John, John 13:38, both say that, 'before the rooster crows', Peter will have denied the Lord three times. And now notice that Mark, Mark 14:30, says that 'before the rooster crows 'twice,' Peter will deny Christ three times. Although some see this as a contradiction, when we actually take a moment to slowly read the text itself, we will soon realise there's no contradiction.

Notice how Matthew, Matthew 26:34, and John, John 13:38, don't expressly state how many times the rooster will crow. They both simply say that Peter will deny Jesus three times, 'before the rooster crows', but they don't tell us how many times it will crow.

I believe it's reasonable to accept that Mark is being a little more specific in terms of how many times the rooster will actually crow. In fact, if you look at the word 'twice' in Mark 14:10 and Mark 14:72, you will notice that it has a footnote, which tells us that 'some early manuscripts do not have 'twice'.

In other words, it's possible that different accounts are due to an early copyist error in Mark, which resulted in the insertion of the word 'twice' in early manuscripts.

PETER WEPT BITTERLY

Luke records in his account that at this moment, Jesus was outside, probably on his way from Annas' quarters to Caiaphas's, and he looked straight at Peter, who broke down and cried, **Luke 22:61-62 / Matthew 26:74-75 / Mark 14:71-72**.

We can't help but sympathise with Peter at this point as he saw Jesus and then remembered what He prophesied about his denying Him three times, **Mark 14:29-31 / Luke 22:33-34 / Matthew 26:33-35 / John 13:36-38**. He literally was sobbing his heart out.

CONCLUSION

This was probably one of the lowest points in his life, and it was an event he wasn't going to forget for the rest of his life. It's interesting that things seem to happen in threes for Peter from this point on, **John 21:15-17 / Acts 10:9-16 / Acts 10:17-19**.

What Peter was demonstrating here was genuine godly sorrow, which was the opposite of what Judas was demonstrating, as he went on to hang himself, **Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18 / 2 Corinthians 7:10**.

If we learn anything from Peter, we should learn that he didn't allow this occasion to affect the rest of his life. He went on to become a powerful apostle for the Lord and became bolder when he spoke more openly about the Christ, **Acts 2**.

As Christians, we too will make many mistakes, some out of fear of being persecuted, but we must learn to draw a line under those occasions and move on. Think back upon the contributing factors in their failure.

1. They hadn't listened when Jesus had frequently warned them of His impending suffering.

They had been too eager to argue about who would be the greatest in the kingdom.

2. They were overconfident.

Earlier that evening, Jesus warned them that they would flee, but they didn't believe it.

3. They didn't watch and pray in the garden as He instructed.

Thus, they were not mentally prepared to face the challenge. We could fail in the hour of temptation for these same reasons.

Peter denied Jesus, but he repented. Judas was remorseful and returned the pieces of silver, **Matthew 27:3**. But he later hung himself, **Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18**. There was a difference between the reaction of the two men to their discovery of what Jesus said each would do.

Peter's reaction led him to return to faithfulness with a stronger conviction. Judas' reaction led him to further guilt and subsequently to his own suicide, **Matthew 27:5 / Acts 1:18**.

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

‘Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So, they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate. ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again, Pilate asked him, ‘Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.’ But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.’ Mark 15:1-5

JESUS FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

Note the governor’s movement in and out of the Praetorium.

1. Outside, John 18:28-32. 2. Inside, John 18:33-37. 3. Outside, John 18:38-40. 4. Inside, John 19:1-3. 5. Outside, John 19:4-7. 6. Inside, John 19:8-11. 7. Outside, John 19:12-16.

‘The Praetorium’ was the Roman governor’s official residence when in Jerusalem, which could be one of two locations. If the ‘luthostratos’ pavement, John 19:13, in the church of the Flagellation is authentic, it would be the latter.

1. The palace of Herod on the western side of the city, or
2. The castle of Antonia, which housed the Roman garrison and overlooked the temple.

Notice they wanted to be able to eat the Passover, John 18:28. This appears to contradict the other Gospel writers because it suggests that Jesus is going to be crucified on the day before the Passover meal. In other words, how can Jesus have eaten the Passover meal if the time for eating the Passover meal hadn’t arrived yet?

The answer to this question is fairly straightforward when we remember that the entire Feast of Unleavened Bread is referred to as Passover. We see this in the Old Testament, where Ezekiel refers to the Passover as a feast of seven days, Ezekiel 45:21, and we see this in the New Testament, Luke 22:1.

When we keep this in mind, John 18:28 becomes clearer. The priests didn’t want to defile themselves at any point during the feast of Passover because they would be eating sacrifices every night. According to Numbers 28:16-24, they offered sacrifices to God every day, for the entire seven days of the feast. Jesus is now on trial before Pilate. John doesn’t mention Jesus being sent to Herod Antipas, Luke 23:6-12, or the message received by Pilate from his wife, Matthew 27:19. Pilate is abruptly introduced into the narrative, without any personal details, which suggests that he was well-known to John’s readers.

Pilate was made procurator in 26 A.D. He established himself in Caesarea, a Roman city on the Mediterranean coast. He was extremely harsh in his day-to-day dealings. On one occasion, he set up Roman standards in the temple, causing a riot.

Within six days, they were removed; perhaps this is why he seems now to be more tolerant of Jewish ways. He had the power of life and death over his subjects; he had about one-hundred and twenty cavalymen and over five thousand infantrymen, yet he himself was still subject to Caesar.

The whole assembly, Mark 15:1 / Luke 23:1, that is, all of the accusers who came to the garden, were men with evil on their hearts, men with false accusations with one thing on their mind, to get rid of Jesus once and for all, Luke 23:2 / Matthew 17:27 / Mark 12:17.

Notice the reason the religious rulers didn’t enter Praetorium, ‘to avoid ceremonial uncleanness’ etc., John 18:28. A religious Jew wouldn’t enter the house of a Gentile, Acts 10:38 / Acts 11:3.

Pilate goes out to them and asks what accusation do they bring against this Man? John 18:29. They said if this Jesus wasn’t an evildoer, they wouldn’t have delivered Him to Pilate,’ John 18:30. They also said, they found Jesus

misleading their nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King, **Luke 23:2**.

Notice also the hypocrisy which shows they were determined to have an innocent man killed, **John 18:29-30**, they were prepared to lie to achieve their purpose, **Luke 23:2**.

They charged Him with sedition, rebellion and treason, **Luke 23:2**. Since Jesus was sinless, the only option they had was to make up a bunch of lies about Him to get Him charged.

Pilate tells them to take Jesus and judge Him according to their law, but the Jews reply that they aren't permitted to put anyone to death, **John 18:31**. The word 'yourselves' is emphatic; if the prisoner couldn't be charged with crimes against Roman law, then it wasn't for Pilate to decide.

Their reply reveals their desire, not that Jesus shall be fairly tried, merely that he be killed, 'it's not lawful for us to put any man to death', **John 18:32**. The Jews didn't have the authority to carry out sentences of capital punishment that were determined by their own courts, capital crimes had to be tried by Roman officials.

They wanted to put Jesus to death in accordance with **Leviticus 24:16**, which demands death for the blasphemer, but as they were under Roman Law, they couldn't do it without Pilate's permission. Jesus had predicted that He would die by crucifixion, **John 3:14 / John 12:32 / Matthew 20:19**.

If the Jews had executed Him, it would have been by stoning, the Law's penalty for blasphemy, but He was to be executed by being crucified, a method never used by the Jews.

Most likely, the chief priests wanted Jesus to be put to death by the Romans because of the implications for Jesus' claims to be the Son of God, **Galatians 3:13**, 'Curse. Curse. Cursed.' **Deuteronomy 21:23**.

Notice the words, 'You, 'emphasis', you are the King of the Jews?' **Mark 15:2 / Matthew 27:11 / Luke 23:3 / John 18:33**. All four Gospels record that this was the charge on which the Sanhedrin asked for Jesus to be condemned.

Pilate asked Jesus if He was the king of the Jews, and Jesus replied, 'You have said so,' **Mark 15:2 / Matthew 27:11 / Luke 23:3**. Jesus admits that He is a king. Pilate must have expected a political revolutionary, a self-styled 'king' who posed a threat to the rule of Rome. Jesus was the King of Israel, **John 1:49 / John 12:13**, but His kingdom was spiritual, **John 18:36**.

The word 'My Kingdom', 'basileia', means sovereignty, royal power, dominion. Jesus asserts the spiritual nature of His reign, 'My 'basileia' is not of this world, not from the world,' **John 18:36**. If it were physical, then His disciples would fight, **John 18:36**. It's not worldly in worldly means, 'My kingdom doesn't belong to this world.

If it did, my followers would be fighting to save me from arrest by the Jews.' In the garden, He had forbidden His followers to fight, even to save Him, **John 18:10-11 / Matthew 26:51-52 / Matthew 5:43-48 / Romans 12:17-21 / Ephesians 6:10-17**.

In **John 18:37**, we find an ironic question, 'You are a king then. You!' Obviously, Jesus wasn't a leader of the sedition, just as obviously, He claimed to be King of the Jews. What did he mean?

Jesus' answer is 'you say it correctly, you speak correctly, for I am a King, certainly I am the King!' Jesus says, 'This is why He was born, and for this reason He has come into the world, to bear witness to the truth, **John 18:37**.

Everyone who is of the truth, is a friend of the truth, who belongs to the truth, hears and listens to my voice,' **John 18:37**.

If the governor's sole consideration had been justice, that would have been the end of the matter, but he was influenced by considerations of political expediency and personal safety.

One who is 'of the truth,' **John 18:37**, will put it before every other consideration, **Proverbs 23:23**. The word, 'truth', 'alethea,' means reality, that which is genuine as opposed to that which is false, **John 14:6**. Pilate wasn't 'of the truth', **Luke 8:15**.

Pilate tells Jesus that He is a king, and Jesus tells him that He is a king, and this was the reason He was born, He was born to testify concerning the truth, **John 18:37**. Everyone who is of truth hears Jesus' voice, **John 18:37**. Pilate then asks him what is truth? **John 18:38**.

We don't know what Pilate's attitude was; John merely records the fact. Pilate's question couldn't be answered by a simple yes or no. In the political sense, as Pilate would use the term, he wasn't king, and in the spiritual sense, as Jesus used the term, He was king.

Jesus replies to Pilate and asks if he is saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell him about Me? **Matthew 27:34**. In **John 18:35**, Pilate is basically saying, 'I am not a Jew, am I?' As if to say, 'I am not interested in your theocratic subtleties.'

The governor is impatient and says, 'Your own nation and the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, have handed you over to me. What have you done?' What had caused the Jews, who might have been expected to support their 'king', to demand his death? He must be guilty of some serious crime. What is it? **John 18:35**.

Despite the chief priests and elders accusing Jesus harshly of many things, **Mark 15:3**, Jesus didn't answer, **Matthew 27:12**. Pilate asks Jesus if He hears all the things being testified against Him, **Matthew 27:13**, but Jesus didn't answer, **Mark 15:4** / **Matthew 27:14**. Despite Pilate asking Jesus about the allegations, Jesus remained silent, which amazed Pilate, **Mark 15:5** / **Matthew 27:14**.

The Jews accused Him of many things but Pilate was honest enough to declare that he found no basis to charge Jesus, **Luke 23:4** / **John 18:38**. He was to say this, three times, **John 19:4** / **John 19:6**. This was in accordance with Roman law, **Matthew 27:11** / **1 Timothy 8:13**.

Pilate questions Jesus about His claims but under Roman Law, there were no grounds to have Him executed, **John 18:31**. Jesus' teaching did stir up the people, **Luke 23:5**, but the people who were stirred up weren't the common people; it was the religious leaders, **Mark 7:1-9**. It was no longer the Israel of God, but their nation. Because Jesus was Galilean and Galilee wasn't Pilate's jurisdiction, he sent Jesus off to Herod, **Luke 23:6-7**.

JESUS BEFORE HEROD

Luke is the only writer who records Jesus before Herod, **Luke 23:6-12**. Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and Perea, which was where most of Jesus' ministry took place.

This is where we know that earlier the Pharisees lied about Herod wanting to kill Jesus, **Luke 13:31**, because we see that Herod had an opportunity to do so, but didn't because he would send Jesus back to Pilate, **Luke 23:11**.

Herod only wanted to see Jesus because he had heard of the many miracles that Jesus had performed, **Luke 23:8**. It's clear he thought of Jesus as some kind of showman or magician who was here to entertain the masses, **Acts 4:26-27**.

Jesus didn't answer Herod because He didn't accept his authority; Herod had no place of authority, **Luke 23:9**.

Probably because the chief priests were vehemently accusing him, **Luke 23:11**, Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked Jesus, then even dressed Him in an elegant robe,' **Luke 23:11**.

We also see the tremendous self-control of Jesus; He knew exactly what was happening and what would eventually happen, **John 10:17-18**. Notice that Pilate and Herod became friends, **Luke 23:12**.

The hatred may have started between Pilate and Herod when Pilate had previously put down a probable insurrection in Galilee that was under Herod's jurisdiction, **Luke 13:1-2**. Whatever the reason was for their hatred of each other seems to be laid to rest at this point.

JESUS SECOND APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

‘Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had murdered in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. ‘Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?’ asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. ‘What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?’ Pilate asked them. ‘Crucify him!’ they shouted. ‘Why? What crime has he committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.’ Mark 15:6-15

Pilate now summons the chief priests and the rulers and the people and says to them, they have brought Jesus to him as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Jesus before them, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him, Luke 23:13-24.

He tells them that even Herod didn’t find anything in Jesus which describes death, Luke 23:15. Then Pilate declares that he will punish Jesus and then set Him free, Luke 23:16.

Pilate appears before what was now a mob and offers Jesus as the one to be set free, as was the tradition at that time of the year, Mark 15:6 / Matthew 27:15 / Luke 23:17 / John 18:39. Pilate knew that releasing Jesus would not please the crowd.

So, he tried to please the mob with a series of four cowardly compromises. Giving them what they wanted, without this whole fiasco turning into a gross miscarriage of justice.

It was a custom of the Roman governor to release someone during the Passover feast, Mark 15:6 / Matthew 27:15 / Luke 23:17 / John 18:39. This was done in order to appease the most radical Jews of the Roman Empire who were in Jerusalem at this time. Pilate asks the mob if they wish that he release for them the King of the Jews? John 18:39.

We are told that Barabbas was a notorious prisoner, Matthew 27:16, who had had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection, Mark 15:7, a robber, John 18:40, and a murderer, Luke 23:19.

From this Mark’s account, we learn that Barabbas was a terrorist against the Roman government, Mark 15:7. He was possibly a member of the Zealot group of Jews whose ambition was to free Palestine from Roman occupation.

On this occasion and others, it seems that Pilate was trying to find some reason to release Jesus. Pilate once more asks, Whom do they want him to release for them? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ? Matthew 27:17. Mark records that Pilate asks them if they want him to release for them the King of the Jews? Mark 15:8-9.

Again, we see their hypocrisy; that was the kind of Messiah they wanted, one who would throw off the Roman yoke. They lied about Jesus because they were determined to kill Him, John 11:53. Pilate knew they were motivated by ‘envy’, Mark 15:10 / Matthew 27:18.

Pilate sat on the judgment seat,’ Matthew 27:19 / Acts 18:12 / Acts 18:16-17, was a raised platform on which Roman judges sat to pronounce sentence, and Matthew 27:19 tells us of the message from Pilate’s wife, ‘have nothing to do with that righteous man.’

Notice it was the chief priests and the elders who persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to put Jesus to death, Matthew 27:20. It is the religious leaders who are stirring up the crowd to release Barabbas, Mark 15:11. Pilate again asked the mob, which of the two do they want him to release? And they said, Barabbas.’ Matthew 27:21 / John 18:40.

Pilate then asked what will he do with Jesus, who is called Christ? And they all said, Crucify Him! Matthew 27:22. Mark tells us that Pilate asked them what shall he do with Him whom they call the King of the Jews? Mark 15:12, and they shouted back, Crucify Him! Mark 15:13.

Pilate again asked, why, what evil has He done? But they kept shouting all the more, saying, ‘Crucify Him!’ **Mark 15:14 / Matthew 27:23**. Pilate appears to be determined to release Jesus, and so once again he addressed the mob, but they kept on calling out, saying, ‘Crucify, crucify Him!’ **Luke 23:20-21**.

The word ‘him’ isn’t in the text. This has been called ‘an ominous chant, a monotonous refrain, ‘Crucify! Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!’ manipulated by their rulers, the mob shouted the same demand.

For a third time, he asks them what evil Jesus man has done? He has found in Jesus no guilt demanding death; he will punish Jesus and release Him, **Luke 23:22**.

But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified, and their voices began to prevail, **Luke 23:23**. Believing that the mob wouldn’t want a violent thug released to them, it didn’t work. The mob chose Barabbas, **Mark 15:11 / Matthew 27:20 / Luke 23:19 / John 18:40**.

Pilate wasn’t a Jew and had little understanding or sympathy for Jewish Law. He had the power of life and death over the people, but he would be reluctant to do anything that would disturb the peace; he didn’t want a riot on his hands, **Matthew 27:24**.

The nationalistic emotions of the multitudes, therefore, were running high. As governor of the region, Pilate had to make compromises with the intense Jewish multitudes in order to prevent riots in the city.

With great pomp and ceremony, Pilate had a bowl of water brought to him and washed his hands, **Matthew 27:24 / Deuteronomy 21:6-9**. He tells the mob ‘I am innocent of the blood of this good man, **Matthew 27:24**.

Notice that John doesn’t record Pilate’s ‘hand washing’. The responsibility is yours!’ And they said, ‘That’s fine with us. ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’ **Matthew 27:25 / Acts 20:26 / Matthew 27:24-26**.

Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, **Mark 15:15 / Matthew 27:26**, and Pilate pronounced a sentence that their demand be granted, **Luke 23:24**. He then released Barabbas but delivered Jesus to the mob, **Luke 23:25**.

THE SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS

‘The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again, they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.’ **Mark 15:16-20**

As Barabbas is released, Roman soldiers flogged Jesus, mocked Him, and led Him out to be crucified, **Mark 15:15 / Matthew 27:26 / John 19:1**. Flogging was the governor’s attempt to convince the Jews that Jesus had suffered enough and should be released, **Luke 23:16**.

The soldiers then led Jesus out to be crucified outside of the city, **Mark 15:20 / Matthew 27:31 / Luke 23:26 / Numbers 15:35 / 1 Kings 21:13 / Acts 7:58 / Hebrews 13:11-12**, while a mournful multitude of faithful disciples followed, **Luke 23:27-31**.

The mob rejected Jesus in favour of Barabbas, a criminal, and so, Pilate decides he’ll have Jesus flogged within an inch of His life, and that’ll come close to the real thing and satisfy the mob, **Mark 15:15**.

FLOGGING

Pilate had Jesus flogged, **Mark 15:15 / John 19:1**. Jesus suffered intensely in His last few hours. After being up all night, subjected to the stress of six different trials, Jesus was flogged, Matthew mentions He was scourged, **Matthew 27:26**.

Flogging was usually administered to one who was about to be crucified, Antiochus Epiphanies used it to force Jews to eat swine's flesh, **2 Maccabees 6:30 / 2 Maccabees 7:1**. The flagellum was similar to the 'cat o' nine tails', a handle with leather thongs, tipped with bone or metal.

The prisoner was stripped to the waist and then bound in a stooping position to the post. The blows were applied to the back and loins, sometimes even to the face and the bowels.

So hideous was the punishment that the victim usually fainted and not rarely died under it. Eusebius describes the death of Christian martyrs at Smyrna about 155 A.D., 'so torn with scourges that their veins were laid bare, and the inner muscles and sinews, and even the bowels, were exposed'. Josephus tells of a man who was 'flogged to the bone' before a Roman governor.

Flogging was accomplished by tying bits of bone, metal and glass to a whip and then striking the victim's back. This procedure produced excruciating pain, much loss of blood and sometimes even death. The victim's back became a bloody mass.

Remember the Jews practised flogging, which consisted of thirty-nine lashes, but here, the Romans had no restrictions on how many lashes they delivered on the victim; they would carry on until the one doing the lashing would tire.

Once again, all four Gospels mention the flogging but say absolutely nothing about it; there is no attempt to play upon the reader's emotions. Also, at that age, people were perfectly familiar with it and needed no explanations. After flogging Him, they took thorns, wove them into a crown, put it on Jesus' head, and began to beat on it, causing intense pain.

They put a scarlet robe on Him, **Matthew 27:28**. Mark's account calls it purple, only to later rip it off, **Mark 15:20**, undoubtedly tearing open the blood-dried wounds on His back in the process.

Then came the crucifixion. Imagine striking the very One who created the universe! Imagine striking the very One who created them! **Colossians 1:16**. 'The whole battalion' was involved in everything which is about to happen, **Mark 15:16 / Matthew 27:27**.

THE PURPLE ROBE

Mark records it was 'a purple robe, **Mark 15:17**. John records 'a purple robe', **John 19:2**, whilst Matthew records a 'scarlet' robe, **Matthew 27:28**. Purple, with the ancients, was a vague term for bright, rich colour, and would be used of crimson as well as violet.

It was probably the cloak of a Roman soldier, i.e., an officer. The 'robe', 'himatismos', is used generally of costly or stately raiment, the apparel of kings, of officials, etc., **Luke 7:25**.

CROWN OF THORNS

It was often a prelude to crucifixion, but in this case, it wasn't, as Pilate later tried to have Jesus released, and this flogging was an attempt to satisfy the Jews without killing Jesus.

The soldiers went further than just flogging and placed a crown of thorns upon His head, **Mark 15:17 / Matthew 27:29**. This was a mock coronation for the one claiming to be the king of the Jews, and it was followed by mock worship of Him. There are two thoughts concerning 'a crown of thorns.'

1. That it was an instrument of torture, long, sharp spikes turned inward, or
2. That it was a radiant crown, with the spikes turned outward, similar in appearance to a crown worn by an emperor.

There is a shrub in Palestine called 'spina Christi' or 'palimus shrub' which has long, sharp spikes, and leaves similar to the ivy used for emperors' or generals' crowns; this is the traditional source of the crown of thorns.

Matthew says that they 'put a staff in his hand', **Matthew 27:29**. Notice they spit on Jesus, **Matthew 27:30**, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again, **Mark 15:19 / Matthew 27:30**.

Note the tense, 'they kept coming up to Him, kept striking Him,' **John 19:3**, it was repeated action. The picture is of a soldier after soldier coming up to Jesus, kneeling before Him, slapping Him, spitting on Him and shouting.

The soldiers then bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' **Mark 15:18 / Matthew 27:29 / John 19:3**. They worshipped Him, **Mark 15:19**.

In **John 19:4**, we see Pilate for the second time telling the people that he can find no charge with which to charge Jesus. He ought to have released Jesus at this point; if the prisoner's guilt or innocence had been the sole consideration, Jesus would have been set free before this, but he is afraid of possible political repercussions.

When Jesus comes out, Pilate shows Him to the crowd, 'here is your man!', **John 19:5**. This was an attempt to gain sympathy for Jesus as if to say, 'look at this poor fellow!' How could they accuse such a pitiable object of treason? It's a weak attempt to free Jesus. The governor is almost begging the Jews to show pity for the prisoner. When the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out, 'Crucify, crucify!' and once more Pilate tells them to take Jesus themselves and crucify Him, for he found no guilt in Jesus, **John 19:6**.

They have tried to have Jesus condemned for sedition, **Luke 23:2**. Now, in **John 19:7**, they are forced to reveal the real charge against him: 'He ought to die because he made himself the Son of God'.

The charge was blasphemy, and their 'Law' of Moses called for the death penalty, **Leviticus 24:16**. It was on this charge that the Sanhedrin had condemned Jesus to death, **Mark 14:61-64 / Matthew 27:23-66**, but they don't reveal this until they are forced to do so.

If Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was false, then the Sanhedrin was right in condemning Him to death for blasphemy. Pilate knows that the Jews aren't allowed to crucify someone, and the offer to them here isn't genuine but an attempt to get the crowd to move away.

He is afraid of them, **John 19:8**, and wants this problem to go away as soon as possible. The governor was already a frightened man, **John 19:8**; two things would have made him afraid.

1. His wife's message, **Matthew 27:19**.
2. The words and demeanour of Jesus.

Pilate knows that it's the policy of Rome to allow the natives religious freedom, as long as they worship Caesar, claiming deity as well. The Jews are aware of this policy and hope to use it to persuade the reluctant Pilate.

And so, Pilate takes Jesus into the Praetorium, and asks, 'Where are you from?', 'To what world do you belong?' **John 19:9**. Notice that Jesus didn't answer, **John 19:9**, perhaps because worldly Pilate had already been told, and could not grasp the answer, **John 18:37-38**.

Perhaps also because a man who would scourge a prisoner, he had declared innocent, did not deserve a reply. To the governor, a kingdom based entirely on 'truth' was incomprehensible, for Jesus to have said that He was the Son of God who had come from heaven would have been more so.

He seems to get into a rage, and he can't fathom what Jesus is all about. He arrogantly brags about his power, trying to get a response out of Jesus, even offering his freedom for the correct answers.

Refusing to answer could be regarded as 'contempt of court', Pilate, as Tiberius' representative, had the power of life and death over a prisoner, **John 19:10**.

He says, 'Do you not know that I have power 'exousia' to release you, and power 'exousia' to crucify you?' The governor's 'exousia' was delegated authority, derived from Caesar. Calmly, Jesus tells Pilate of the origin of His power, His authority is 'given from above', from God, **John 19:11 / Romans 13:1**.

God had entrusted Him with the power He has, and He is answerable to God for the way He uses that power. Jesus reassures Pilate that he is not totally to blame for putting the Son of God to death, as he does so out of ignorance of the truth.

Caiaphas, acting officially for the Sanhedrin, had delivered Jesus to Pilate; he had 'the greater sin,' **John 19:11**. The deeper guilt lies with the man who 'handed me over to you'.

This is Jesus' final statement to Pilate, and in it, He affirms God's supremacy, He is in control of human affairs, and also man's accountability; the Jewish rulers and the Roman governors are answerable to God.

John tells us that Pilate knew that Jesus was no leader of the sedition against Rome, he was also frightened, so he 'sought', notice again the tense, 'kept on seeking', to free Him, **John 19:12**.

John doesn't say how he did so, but he records that the governor finally gave up the efforts because of fear, **John 19:12**. The chief priests however had the Law, they ought to have recognised the Messiah but instead, they are about to force His execution.

This short speech of Jesus impresses Pilate, who recognises some characteristics that he doesn't quite understand, and he tries again to persuade the Jews to allow Jesus to go free.

The Jews shouted, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friends', **John 19:12**. This was political blackmail, and it ended the efforts to release Jesus. The Jews were saying, 'Free this man and we will accuse you to the Emperor. The charge against you will be high treason, that you released a man who claimed to be King of the Jews.' Tiberius was a very suspicious ruler; even a hint of disloyalty would be disastrous for a Roman official. Pilate knew that a charge of high treason could cost him position, liberty, and life, and so, this frightened him, and then he decided to put personal safety before justice, to condemn an innocent man to death.

The Jew's new weapon against Jesus is all-powerful against Pilate. Jesus claims to be the king; thus, He opposes Caesar, who is the king of all the vast Roman domains.

This was the ultimate hypocrisy, as all present knew that the Jews didn't consider Caesar their king and held no allegiance to him. This very good argument must have again caused a troubled Pilate to slip into a rage, but they now had him in a corner.

Pilate makes one last attempt to change the mob's mind, but they will not hear of it; they want Jesus dead, **John 19:12**. **John 19:13** could imply that Pilate had Jesus sit on the judgement seat; the Greek could have either meaning. The Jew's threat has decided Pilate, and at once he prepares to pass sentence; he 'brought Jesus out', that is, out of the Praetorium and 'sat down on the judgment seat', **Acts 18:12 / Acts 18:16-17**, this was a raised platform on which Roman judges sat to pronounce sentence.

‘The pavement’, **John 19:13**, ‘luthostratos’, was stone-paved; Josephus states that Temple Mount was covered with a mosaic pavement. Hebrew ‘Gabbatha’ means raised place, elevation. **John 19:14** seems to make this quite possible, Pilate showing the Jews a weak, blood-covered man not able even to stand and needing the seat more than Pilate.

THE DAY OF PREPARATION

The Day of Preparation was the day before Passover, **John 19:14**, which began at the next sunset. John mentions it was ‘about the sixth hour’; scholars and commentators are divided about whether John uses Jewish or Roman time. Jewish time is twelve noon, but Roman time is six a.m.

John is in Asia Minor, writing toward the end of the first century, when Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the Jewish state had ceased to exist. It would be natural for him to give the time according to Roman reckoning. In **Mark 15:25**, Mark would use Jewish reckoning; at 6 a.m., the trial was in progress, and at nine a.m. Jesus was crucified. When Pilate says, ‘Behold your King!’, **John 19:14**, this was a joke in bad taste at the expense of the Jews. ‘They yelled, ‘off with him! Off with him! Crucify Him!’ **John 19:15**. Pilate replied, ‘The King of you shall I crucify?’ **John 19:15**.

The chief priests, who were the religious leaders and teachers of the nation, replied, ‘We have no king but Caesar,’ **John 19:15**. In fact, they claimed that as Israel was God’s special nation, God was their only King, and they hated Caesar and bitterly resented the Roman occupation.

With the use of the argument by the mob, in favour of Caesar, Pilate knows that he has lost to satisfy them, and so, he hands Jesus over to be crucified, **John 19:16**. This declaration was ‘the crowning apostasy of Judaism’ and ‘the utterance of a nation turned traitor to its noblest traditions’.

After they had mocked Jesus, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him, **Mark 15:20 / Matthew 27:31**. Then they led Jesus away to crucify Him, **Mark 15:20 / Matthew 27:31 / John 19:16**.

No doubt he shows them the wounds that have been inflicted in the hope that they would now be satisfied, but alas the appearance of Jesus only makes the mob rowdier and bloodthirsty. You never get rid of a pack of wolves by showing them blood!

CONCLUSION

The trials before the Roman authorities started with Pilate, **John 18:23**, after Jesus was beaten. The charges brought against Him were very different from the charges in His religious trials. He was charged with inciting people to riot, forbidding the people to pay their taxes, and claiming to be King.

Pilate found no reason to kill Jesus, so he sent Him to Herod, **Luke 23:7**. Herod had Jesus ridiculed, but wanting to avoid the political liability, he sent Jesus back to Pilate, **Luke 23:11-12**.

This was the last trial as Pilate tried to appease the animosity of the Jews by having Jesus scourged. The Roman scourge is a terrible whipping of thirty-nine lashes.

In a final effort to have Jesus released, Pilate offered the prisoner Barabbas to be crucified, and Jesus released, but to no avail. The crowds called for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified. Pilate granted their demand and surrendered Jesus to their will, **Luke 23:25**.

The trials of Jesus represent the ultimate mockery of justice. Jesus, the most innocent man in the history of the world, was found guilty of crimes and sentenced to death by crucifixion.

HISTORY OF CRUCIFIXION

Crucifixion is an ancient method of execution, in which the victim was tied or nailed to a large wooden cross and left to hang there until death. It was never performed for ritual or symbolic reasons; usually, its purpose was only to provide a particularly painful, gruesome, and public death, using whatever means were most expedient for that goal.

The history of crucifixion can be traced back to the ancient Persians, and there's evidence to support the Greeks practising this form of torture. As always, the Romans adopted the custom from Carthage and used it for slaves, rebels, and anyone who was their enemy, along with criminals.

While most Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion, if you were a Roman and found guilty of treason, then you could face crucifixion. Crucifixion was considered a humiliating way to die. The prisoner usually had to carry the horizontal beam, patibulum, to the place of execution, not necessarily the whole cross.

Crucifixion was an art form for the Romans, who had specially trained men to carry out the sentence. There would usually be a commanding centurion and four soldiers. When it was done in an established place of execution, the vertical beam, stipes, was sometimes permanently embedded in the ground.

THE CROSS

The horizontal beam of the cross, the transom, could be fixed at the very top of the vertical piece, the upright, to form a 'T' called a tau cross. The horizontal beam could also be affixed at some distance below the top, often in a mortise, to form a 'T-shape' called a Latin cross.

Alternatively, the cross could consist of two diagonal beams to form an 'X'. A single, vertical wooden stake with no transom at all has also been cited by some.

THE NAILS

The 'nails' were tapered iron spikes approximately five to seven inches long with a square shaft 3/8 inch across. The victim was probably affixed to the cross by ropes, nails, or some combination of the two.

In popular depictions of the crucifixion, possibly derived from a literal reading of the description in the Gospel of John, of Jesus' wounds being 'in the hands', the victim is shown supported only by nails driven straight through the feet and the palms of the hands.

However, the flesh of the hands can't support a person's body weight, so some other means must have been used to support most of the weight, such as tying the wrists to the cross beam. Another possibility, that doesn't require tying, is that the nails were inserted just above the wrist, between the two bones of the forearm, the radius and the ulna.

The nails could also be driven through the wrist, in a space between four carpal bones, which is the location shown in the Shroud of Turin. As some historians have suggested, the Gospel words that are translated as ‘hands’ may have in fact, included everything below the mid-forearm.

Another possibility is that the nails may have been driven in on an angle, entering in the palm in the crease that delineates the bulky region at the base of the thumb, and exiting in the wrist, passing through the carpal tunnel.

The Romans would often display the victims, still on the cross, in rows. There would be row after row of condemned criminals lining the streets of the main entrance to the city, so that everyone entering a new city would know what would happen to them if they didn’t adhere to Roman laws and regulations. It also sent a powerful message to any oncoming enemies of the fate which awaits them.

PUBLICLY NAKED

Crucifixion was a very public affair; criminals, rebels, etc., needed to be reminded of the terrible consequences of breaking Roman law. Fear ruled the day.

Unlike what we see in many artists’ impressions of the crucifixion, the victim was usually stripped naked and hung naked. Historian art has most people who were crucified covered in a loincloth, but this simply isn’t true. Nakedness was often a symbol of spiritual shame and ignominy.

CAUSE OF DEATH

Death could come in hours or days, depending on the exact methods, the health of those crucified, and environmental circumstances. It’s widely accepted that the typical cause of death is asphyxiation.

When the whole-body weight was supported by the stretched arms, the victim would have severe difficulty exhaling, due to hyper-expansion of the lungs. The victim would therefore have to draw himself up by his arms or have his feet supported by tying or by a woodblock.

Indeed, Roman executioners were said to break the victim’s legs, after he had hung for some time, in order to hasten his death. Once deprived of support and unable to lift himself, the victim would die within a few minutes.

The Romans often broke the prisoners’ legs to rush the death process. Please note that the Roman soldiers responsible for carrying out the sentence were responsible for the victim until they died. In other words, the Romans weren’t being kind by breaking the victim’s legs; they broke the victim’s legs so that they could get on with their other duties.

Burial afterwards wasn’t usually permitted. According to history, Emperor Constantine abolished crucifixion in the Roman Empire when Christianity became the state religion.

THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

‘A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means ‘the

place of the skull’). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.’ Mark 15:21-25

Notice that the mere fact of the crucifixion is recorded, in **John 19:18**, as with flogging, **John 19:1**, it isn’t described. First-century readers knew well what was involved in these acts.

Roman law didn’t permit a Roman citizen to be crucified; it was regarded as the death of a slave. The punishment was handed out for such crimes as treason, desertion in the face of the enemy, robbery, piracy, assassination, sedition, etc.

Cicero said the following.

‘Let every name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen but even from his thought, his eyes, his ears.’

After Jesus was flogged, we know that He carried His own crossbar, weighing in at seventy-five to one-hundred and twenty-five pounds, and He carried it outside the main city walls. The upright part of the cross was probably permanently mounted in the crucifixion area.

The crossbar would be balanced on the shoulders, and His arms were tied to the crossbar. We can only imagine what this would have been like if he had tripped or fallen. He couldn’t use His arms to break their fall; he would likely fall face-first into the ground.

Jesus went out, bearing His own cross, **John 19:17**. As they went out of the city gates, Simon from Cyrene, **Mark 15:21 / Matthew 27:32 / Luke 23:26**, which is in north Africa, **Acts 2:10 / Acts 6:9 / Acts 11:20 / Acts 13:1**, was forced to carry the cross of Jesus, **Mark 15:21 / Matthew 27:32 / Luke 23:26**. This must mean that Jesus was unable to carry it, an execution party would show no mercy to a condemned man.

Once Jesus reached the place for crucifixion, Golgotha, or Calvary, **Mark 15:22 / Matthew 27:33**, in English, it means ‘skull,’ **John 19:17**. He was offered a drink of wine mixed with myrrh to act as a mild painkiller.

Although this was a kind gesture, usually done by the women, Jesus refused to drink, **Mark 15:23 / Psalm 69:21 / Matthew 27:34**. We need to read **Luke 23:37-41**, for details of the procession to Golgotha. It’s called ‘the place of a skull,’ **John 19:17**, but what and where was this? Here are three proposals.

1. It was a hill resembling a skull, but the Bible nowhere describes it as a hill.
2. It was a place of execution, littered with skulls.

However, the Jews wouldn’t allow bones of dead men to litter the ground close to the city. Joseph of Arimathea wouldn’t have a tomb near such a place, **John 19:41**.

3. That according to legend, it was the place where Adam’s skull had been buried.

The truth of the matter is that we simply don’t know why this place was simply named ‘Skull’, **Luke 23:33**. Whatever the speculation, the fact remains. Jesus is taken by Roman soldiers to the place of execution, called Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, which was probably the hill on the Northern side of Jerusalem. Golgotha was close to the city, and the inscription was read by many, **John 19:20**.

The Gospels suggest it was close to the road as Jesus was insulted by ‘those who passed by’, **Mark 15:29 / Matthew 27:39**. It’s outside the city walls, a wall was present at the time, and the hill has a strange appearance, almost like the face of the skull.

This may well be why it is called the place of the skull and why it was designated the place of execution. Some even say that the crucifixion occurred at the present-day site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but this place is now generally accepted to be inside the city walls during Jesus’ time.

There was a large number of women who mourned and wailed for Jesus. Jesus turns to speak to them and tells them that they should mourn for themselves, **Luke 23:27**.

Jesus knows the calamities that were about to come upon them in the desolation of their city by the Romans, **Luke 23:28-31**. It was at this point that Jesus says, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do, **Luke 23:34**.

Note the numerous prophecies that were being fulfilled at this time. They divided His garments, **Mark 15:24 / Psalms 22:18 / Matthew 27:35 / Luke 23:34 / John 19:24**.

With Him, they crucified two thieves, **Mark 15:27 / Isaiah 53:9 / Isaiah 53:12 / Matthew 27:38 / Luke 22:32-33**. He was numbered with the transgressors, **Isaiah 53:12**. They blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, **Mark 15:28 / Psalm 22:6-7 / Psalm 69:7 / Matthew 17:39-40 / Matthew 27:39**.

Jesus' clothes were then divided up, which was also a fulfilment of prophecy, **Mark 15:24 / Psalm 22:17-18 / Matthew 27:35 / Luke 23:34 / John 19:23-24**, and the soldiers kept watch at the foot of the cross, **Psalm 22:17 / Matthew 27:36**.

The 'four parts' would consist of a head-dress, turban, sandals, outer robe and girdle, the soldiers cast lots for these. Because His tunic was seamless, they then diced for this as a separate item, **John 19:23-24**.

Josephus, in his writings, says the following.

'The linen tunic of the Jewish high priest was a seamless garment; this fulfilled **Psalm 22:18**.'

John's statement in this verse sums up his abhorrence of the whole incident, 'so this is what the soldiers did.' **John 19:24**. We are reminded again that this was to fulfil prophecy, **John 19:23-24 / Psalm 22:18**.

The clothes Jesus had been wearing were split up among the Romans present, and His only possession, His cloth, was gambled for. Jesus was thus left with nothing to give to those He had left behind. He had given His all, even Himself.

The actual physical pain endured by Jesus is too horrific to contemplate, **John 19:19-22**. Over His head on the cross was the inscription, 'THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS'.

It was the custom of those days that the accusation under which men were condemned should, in every case, be posted above their heads and under the circumstances, the inscription posted by Pilate amounted to a sadistic jest. The people passing along the road North all saw Jesus on the cross and read the sign as it was in all three main languages of the time, **John 19:20**.

Aramaic, used by the common people, Latin, used by the elite and legal rulers of the empire, and Greek, used by the forces in the region, **Luke 23:38 / John 19:20**, it was the language that was universal at the time.

Hebrew was being used only by the Jews in their religious dealings. Regarding the 'notice', 'title', 'titlon,' **John 19:19**, this was a board stating the victim's name and crime for which they were condemned. He was adamant, and he refused to change what he had written, **John 19:21-22**. Notice the four different accounts of what was written above Jesus' head.

'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**

When we put the words together, we see that it would read as follows.

'THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

Pilate wouldn't remove it, John 19:20, probably because he wanted to do something to impose his will on the people in response to them imposing their will on him by having Jesus put there. This was, of course, an entirely honest and true statement to make. Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews and the King of all nations.

Pilate had been willing to yield to the ruler's demand for the death of an innocent man because His own safety was threatened, John 19:12-13, and the Jews protested to Pilate about the sign.

The chief priests of the Jews come to Pilate and ask him not to write the words The King of the Jews but that he said, I am King of the Jews, John 19:21. Pilate tells them what he has written, he has written, what he has written John 19:22.

'They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!' In the same way, the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.' Mark 15:26-

32

There were also two thieves who were carrying their crosses with Jesus, Matthew 27:38 / Luke 23:33 / John 19:18. On each side, they crucified a common thief to show their contempt for Him; He was numbered with the transgressors, Mark 15:27 / Isaiah 53:9-12 / Matthew 27:38 / Luke 22:32-33.

When we consider that the One who was struck and mocked in these few passages was the One who created all things, including those who were mocking and striking Him, Colossians 1:16, we realise that God is far greater than the imagination of our minds.

He had the power to call on the angels of heaven for His own deliverance, Matthew 26:53-54, but He didn't issue the command. He allowed Himself to be humiliated in order to provide redemption for those who mocked and struck Him.

This was the darkest hour in the world's history, yet out of the darkness would soon come light as Jesus conquered death and the grave, 1 Corinthians 15:55-57 / Revelation 1:17-18.

Bystanders laughed at the idea that He could rebuild the temple when He couldn't even save Himself, Mark 15:29-30 / Matthew 27:39-40. Come down from the cross, they taunted, and we'll believe in You! They blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, Mark 15:29-30 / Psalm 22:6-7 / Psalm 69:7 / Matthew 17:39-40.

Some Jewish officials standing nearby smirked that He had been able to save others but was powerless to save Himself, Mark 15:31-32 / Matthew 27:41-43. The chief priests are also mocking Him, Psalm 69:19 / Luke 23:34-35. Jesus was certainly the prophesied Messiah.

The soldiers also mocked Him and offered Him vinegar, saying, if you are the king of the Jews, save yourself, Luke 23:36-37. Even the two thieves who were executed on either side of the Lord ridiculed Him, Mark 15:32 / Matthew 27:44 / Luke 23:39-43.

We see in John 19:18 that 'two others' were crucified with Jesus. Matthew and Mark say, 'robbers,' Mark 15:27 / Matthew 27:38, whilst Luke says, 'criminals', Luke 23:32. John says one on each side. This occurred simply to ensure Isaiah 53:12 was fulfilled.

'At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.' Mark 15:33

Jesus' final hours on the cross lasted from approximately 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., a period of about six hours, Matthew 27:41-43. Answering the question of how long Jesus was on the cross is complicated by the fact that two systems of marking time are used in the Gospels.

Matthew, Mark and Luke use the Jewish system of marking time. John uses the Roman System. Using the Jewish system, Christ's crucifixion began at 9:00 a.m., **Mark 15:33**. Also, using the Jewish system of marking time, Matthew says that 'from the sixth hour there was darkness over the land until the ninth hour,' **Matthew 27:45**.

That is, the darkness lasted from 12 noon to 3 p.m. the darkness was a sign of God's personal presence in the crucifixion, **Psalms 18:9**. These were Jesus' final hours on the cross. Whilst Christ hung on the cross, there were four miraculous events which occurred.

1. The three hours of darkness, **Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45**.
2. The veil of the temple was torn into two, **Matthew 27:50-51 / Mark 15:37-38**.
3. An earthquake, **Matthew 27:50-52**.
4. The graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, **Matthew 27:50-53**.

THE DARKNESS

Both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus has been on the cross for three hours, **Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45**. It's now noon, which means the sun would have been high in the sky. All of a sudden, complete darkness falls over the entire land for three hours. Luke tells us that the sun stopped shining altogether.

The word 'land' is the Greek word 'ge', which can mean a region, which would imply all of Palestine, but it can also mean the whole earth. So whether this darkness fell over Palestine only or the whole earth is really difficult to say.

The word darkness is the Greek word 'skotizo', and it carries with it the idea of sudden darkness. This wasn't something which happened over a period of time; it happened suddenly.

We can almost picture the silence as every animal and every person was wondering what was happening. We can almost imagine people speaking with each other, trying to understand exactly what was going on, **Job 5:13-14 / 1 Samuel 2:9**.

PROOF OUTSIDE OF THE SCRIPTURES THAT THIS DARKNESS HAPPENED

Tertullian said the following.

'In the same hour too, the light of day was withdrawn, when the sun at the very time was in his meridian blaze. Those who were not aware that this had been predicted about Christ, no doubt thought it an eclipse. You yourselves have the account of the world portent still in your archives!' Tertullian, *Apology in the Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), Vol. III, p. 35.

Why would Tertullian appeal to Proculus, a Roman senator, if the Roman records concerning this darkness weren't true?

The Greek Historian Rufinus, when writing to Roman historians, says the following.

'Search your writings, and you shall find that in Pilates time, when Christ suffered, the sun was suddenly withdrawn and darkness followed'. Rufinus, Greek Historian

Rufinus would never have asked the Romans to search their records for the account of the darkness if it didn't happen. The point is that this miraculous event did happen, and we know it happened because Pontius Pilate himself wrote about the event. Pontius Pilate sent the following report to Tiberius, emperor of Rome.

Note, the following quote has been debated for years as to whether it is legitimate.

‘And when he had been crucified, there was darkness over the whole earth, the sun having been completely hidden, and the heaven appearing dark, so that the stars appeared, but had at the same time their brightness darkened, as I suppose your reverence is not ignorant of, because in all the world they lighted lamps from the sixth hour until evening. And the moon, being like blood, did not shine the whole night, and yet she happened to be at the full.’
Pontius Pilate, To Tiberius in *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 463.

Who or what caused the darkness? There are a few people who try to come up with answers as to where the darkness originated, but for this study, we'll only look at four possibilities.

A NATURAL PHENOMENON

1. There are those who believe that the darkness was caused by a simple natural phenomenon.

They believe it was probably just an earthquake or some kind of volcanic eruption, after all, Matthew records there was an earthquake around this time, **Matthew 27:54**.

Although a volcano erupting may indeed cause thick dust to fill the air, both Matthew and Luke record that the entire land of Palestine was in complete darkness, but the darkness suddenly left after three hours.

Also, the Bible doesn't mention any other earthquake happening before the darkness came, but it does record an earthquake happening afterwards when an angel rolled away the stone from Jesus' grave, **Matthew 28:2**.

DUST STORM OR DARK CLOUDS

2. There are those who believe that the darkness was caused by some kind of dust storm or cloud cover.

Most people who have witnessed dust storms and thick black cloud coverings tell us that they can be spotted coming on the horizon, whereas the darkness recorded by Matthew and Luke came suddenly.

AN ECLIPSE

3. There are those who believe that the darkness was caused by an eclipse of the sun.

Remember the reason for this darkness was because ‘the sun stopped shining’, **Luke 23:45**. The last total eclipse in the UK was on 11 August 1999. It could be seen over Cornwall and parts of Devon, which were on the path of totality, although cloud cover ruined the view for many areas.

The Natural History Museum says the following.

‘A solar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes between the Sun and Earth. When the Sun, Moon and Earth line up exactly, it causes a total eclipse. This is because the diameter of the Sun is 400 times that of the Moon, but coincidentally, it is also 400 times further away. During an eclipse, the Moon temporarily covers the Sun, blocking out the daylight for a short period and casting a shadow on part of Earth.’

The miraculous darkness recorded at the time of Christ’s crucifixion could not have been a solar eclipse because the Passover always occurred at the full moon. Many of us have witnessed eclipses in our lives, and we know that they don’t happen suddenly.

As I mentioned earlier, the word ‘darkness’ is the Greek word ‘skotizo’, and it carries with it the idea of sudden darkness. The darkness here happened suddenly, and note also that the darkness was all over the land for three hours, **Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45**. A normal eclipse only ever lasts for a few moments.

NAASA say the following.

‘Total solar eclipses last anywhere from 10 seconds to about 7.5 minutes.’

GOD

4. The only possible reason the darkness came was that it was God who caused it.

We only have to cast our minds back to the ninth plague, which God hit Egypt with, it was the plague of darkness, **Exodus 10:21-23**. This was a judgment against the sun god, ‘Re’, who was symbolised by Pharaoh himself. For three days, the land of Egypt was smothered with unearthly darkness, but the homes of the Israelites had light. The Israelites must be utterly shell-shocked by what’s happening. They must have been in awe as they enjoyed the light, but the rest of Egypt is in total darkness. They must have been thinking to themselves, ‘Is there anything that this God cannot control or do?’ I can imagine them saying to themselves, ‘No wonder our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob worshipped this God.’

It was God who created light in the beginning, **Genesis 1:3**, and it’s God who removes the light. God put Egypt in total darkness to the point where no one could see anything, but at the same time, the land where the Israelites were had light. Imagine being in Egypt and witnessing this event, while Egypt is in total darkness, the land where Israel lived was completely sunlit.

DARKNESS IS USED FIGURATIVELY AS GOD’S JUDGMENT

Darkness is often used figuratively in the Scriptures to demonstrate God’s judgment. In **Isaiah 5:30**, we read about God’s judgment against Judah. In **Isaiah 13:10-11**, we read about God’s judgment against Babylon. In **Ezekiel 32:7-8**, we read about a judgement against Egypt.

When a Jew hears language like, the stars are going to be darkened, the moon is going to turn dark, the sun is going to fall. When they heard talk like that, they didn’t think that was the ‘end of the world,’ they thought, ‘What nation is God judging now?’

When Jesus uses that kind of language in His sermon, He's saying that God is sending judgment on Israel, **Matthew 24:19**, just like He did on Judah, Babylon, and Egypt. The Jews certainly believe that the darkening of the sun was a depiction of God's judgment on the world for an especially heinous sin.

DARKNESS IS USED FIGURATIVELY AS PEOPLE'S SPIRITUAL CONDITION

Darkness is also used figuratively in a spiritual sense, where people who don't know God or have a relationship with Him live in spiritual darkness. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they go through life stumbling time and time again without knowing why, **Proverbs 4:19 / Micah 3:6 / John 11:10 / John 1:5**.

The land of Zebulun, Naphtali, etc were the main sufferers in the first Assyrian invasion under Tiglath-Pileser, **Isaiah 9:1-2**. They were the first to enjoy the blessing of Christ's teaching and to see His miraculous works. The land of Galilee, which is the land of the Gentiles, will indeed be honoured. They were in the darkness, but they will be in the light.

Jesus says He is the light of the world and speaks of darkness as a reference to those who are walking in sin, **John 8:12**. In **1 John 1:5-6**, John uses the word 'if' to speak about the terms and conditions for having fellowship with God and His Son.

If we claim to have fellowship with Him, we can't at the same time walk in the darkness, we can't lie, we can't continue to live in sin, and we must live out the truth.

If God can cause the sun to stand still for a full day in order that Joshua can win his battle against the Amorite kings, **Joshua 10:12-14**, then why can't He cover the land of Palestine or the whole earth with darkness?

Hezekiah, on his deathbed, was visited by the prophet Isaiah, who told him that he was not going to die. Hezekiah asked for a sign as proof, and so Isaiah spoke to the Lord, and the Lord brought the shadow ten degrees backwards, **2 Kings 20:9-11**.

If God had put the clock back ten degrees, that's forty minutes, then why can't He cover the land of Palestine or the whole earth with darkness? Why can't the One who created the universe be able to cause the darkness? **Genesis 1:1-5**.

When God spoke to Abraham about Sarah laughing when she was told she was going to have a son in old age. The Lord more or less said to Abraham, nothing is impossible for God, **Genesis 18:14**.

Why did God cause the darkness? God caused the darkness because He didn't want anyone, either in the land of Palestine or everyone on the whole earth, to have any doubts that the death of Jesus was significant for everyone.

His Son came to die for the world, **John 3:16**, in order for us to have a way to be saved, **John 14:6**. Just like the purpose of the miracles of Jesus, God used the darkness to bring about faith in His Son and who He claimed to be, **John 20:30-31**.

When Jesus hung on the cross, and the land of Palestine or the whole earth became totally dark, we can only imagine what people must have thought. I'm sure some would be scared, while others would be intrigued. But make no mistake about it, this was God's doing to prove to the world that His Son was indeed who He claimed to be.

Over and over again, we read of the religious leaders demanding a sign from Jesus during His ministry, **Matthew 12:39-40 / Matthew 16:4**. They asked for any kind of proof, any kind of miracle in order to prove that He was who He claimed to be.

The only miracle they really needed to witness was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus refused to give in to the religious leaders' requests, and as a result, they just wanted to get rid of Him; they wanted to kill Him, John 8:58-59.

As Jesus hung on the cross, many people would have witnessed the miracle of the three hours of darkness, Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45, the veil of the temple was torn into two, Mark 15:37-38 / Matthew 27:50-51, the earthquake, Matthew 27:50-52, the graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, Matthew 27:50-53. They would have to conclude, as the centurion soldier did, that 'Truly, this man was the Son of God,' Mark 15:39.

THE SEVEN SAYINGS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Luke 23:34

'Today you will be with Me in Paradise.' Luke 23:43

'Woman, behold your son.' John 19:26

'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Matthew 27:46

'I thirst!' John 19:28

'It is finished!' John 19:30

'Into Your hands, I commit My spirit.' Luke 23:46

'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?'

'And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?').' Mark 15:34

Matthew only records one of the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). Mark 15:34 / Matthew 27:46.

Many today believe that these words of Jesus clearly demonstrate that God actually turned His back on Jesus whilst He was on the cross, that God somehow, couldn't bring Himself to look at Jesus and so abandoned Him because of the sin He was carrying, Mark 15:34 / Matthew 27:46. Although this idea seems plausible to some, to understand what Jesus meant we have to look to other Scriptures to see if this claim could actually be plausible.

GOD HAS ALWAYS LOOKED AT OUR SIN

To claim that God can't look at sin is foreign to the Scriptures; God has been looking at the sin of mankind since the fall of mankind in the garden and has been ever since.

Even in the days of Noah, the Bible tells us that God SAW their sin which implies He was looking at mankind's sin, Genesis 6:5-7 / Hebrews 4:13. If God can't look at sin, then surely that would imply that He can't bring Himself to look at mankind today, because we're all sinners, Romans 3:23. There's a huge difference between God hating sin and not being able to look at it, in order to deal with it.

WHOSE SIN WAS HE CARRYING?

We also need to ask the question: whose sin was Jesus carrying? He was carrying OUR sin because He Himself was sinless. Jesus wasn't a sinner and there's a huge difference between being a sinner and bearing the consequences of someone else's sin, **1 Peter 2:22 / Hebrews 4:15**.

Jesus became sin for us, but He was still the perfect Son of God, 'Truly, this was a righteous man' **Matthew 23:47**. Ask yourself this question, if you were a judge, and your own innocent son heroically stepped forward at a trial to take a criminal's punishment upon himself, would you be angry with him and reject him? Of course not.

JESUS WAS DOING THE FATHER'S WILL

Why would the Father turn His back on His Son if the Son pleased the Father in every way? When we think about the cross, it was God's plan to deal with sin once and for all, it was Jesus' ultimate act of obedience to the Father, **Philippians 2:8 / Hebrews 5:7**.

And surely if there was ever a time in the life of Christ when the Father would have said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased', it would have been at the cross.

We know that the Old Testament sacrifices to God were 'a sweet-smelling aroma'; how much more would God be pleased with Christ's selfless sacrifice? **Ephesians 5:1-2**.

We have to remember that everything Jesus did was in accordance with the will of the Father; this included Jesus' death on the cross, **Luke 22:42 / Isaiah 53:9 / Acts 2:23**.

The whole point of God coming in the flesh was to deal with our sin problem and fulfil Scripture; the whole point of Jesus having a body was for the purpose of the cross, **Hebrews 10:5-10**. Notice the phrase, 'a body you prepared for me', **Hebrews 10:5**.

The cross was God's plan, even before Christ came into the world. And so, when we look at the cross and Jesus' submission to the Father's will, we clearly see that Jesus was doing everything which pleased the Father with the body He provided for Jesus. So, why on earth would God turn His back on His Son, if His Son was pleasing the Father and doing the Father's will with the body He provided for Him?

JESUS STOPPED BEING GOD AT THE CROSS!

Now we know that Jesus was God in the flesh, as Philippians clearly tells us, **Philippians 2:5-8**. Some people, though, suggest that Jesus stopped being God when He was on the cross, just for that one moment. And so, they ask, when Jesus was on the cross suffering for our sins, did Jesus stop being God? The answer is No.

Was God the Father unable to look upon the judgment that fell upon God the Son? Of course not. Clearly, Jesus never stopped being God, even when He died for the sins of mankind.

Jesus didn't in any sense, to any degree, at any time, or for any season surrender any bit of His deity, **Colossians 2:9**. Likewise, Jesus can't be separated from God the Father because He said, 'I and the Father are One,' **John 10:30**.

PSALM 22

The biggest reason for this misunderstanding of Jesus' words on the cross is that people don't understand **Psalm 22**. When Jesus said, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' **Mark 15:34 / Matthew 27:46**, He was quoting from **Psalm 22**, and therefore fulfilling Scripture prophecies concerning Himself.

The idea of God turning His back on Jesus on the cross would never have been on the mind of anyone present on that day. The problem today is that many people just take one verse and make it mean something which it was never meant to mean.

Now remember the Jews knew these Scriptures really well, and when anyone read out the first line of any Psalm, the Jews would recognise it and be able to recite the whole Psalm in their minds.

This was the Jewish practice at the time of Jesus, and this is exactly what Jesus did here on the cross. **Psalm 22** has many references to the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

To us today, the prophecies are profound and obvious. Likewise, those Jews watching Jesus on the cross being crucified saw the many parallels between the crucifixion and the fulfilment of prophecy. As Jesus was suffering, He was quoting the Jewish Scriptures from the cross.

Can you imagine the expression on the Jews' faces as they remembered the whole of the messianic prophecy as we find in **Psalm 22** being fulfilled in front of their eyes?

And the climax would be Jesus' final words, 'It is finished,' **John 19:30**. Look at the last line of **Psalm 22**. 'He has done it!' **Psalm 22:31**. Jesus isn't saying that His father 'has forsaken Him' or His Father has 'turned away from Him', He's saying that He is the Messiah. **John 19:30**.

Read **Psalm 22:1** again, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?' This doesn't say the Father rejected the Son. First of all, look at the context, look at the parallel verse, 'Why are you so far from saving me?' This is the issue, 'no help', the sufferer is asking why God doesn't save Him from His oppressors. In other words, 'Why do you let my oppressors torment me?'

The Father gives the Son over to suffering. **Psalm 22:1** is the equivalent of Isaiah's statement, 'It pleased the Lord to bruise Him' **Isaiah 53:10**. The Psalm later says, 'You lay me in the dust of death' **Psalm 22:15**.

Secondly, it's a rhetorical question; the sufferer knows full well why God does this. Now you may well think, well, what's the point of asking it, then? He's simply expressing His distress because this is real suffering, He really doesn't want to go through it, and he would rather God save Him instantly out of it. 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.' **Matthew 26:39**.

Maybe the idea is that 'it feels like you have abandoned me' or 'it's really hard in my present circumstances to feel your closeness,' which is a very real human reaction, isn't it?

And again, if God turned His back on His Son, why does the Psalm say otherwise? 'For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.' **Psalm 22:24**. Does 'the Father turn His face away' according to this verse? Not at all.

THE MAJESTY OF JESUS' DEATH

There were multiplied ironies in the events of those final hours. As they ridiculed Jesus, saying that He had saved others, but now couldn't save himself, they were unaware that He was fully capable of saving Himself, but that if He had, He would not have saved others. He died voluntarily.

He had at His disposal thousands of angels that could have rescued Him, but He deliberately chose to lay down His life because He loved us. Jesus had the power to do anything He wanted against His tormentors, but he subdued all desire for revenge and actually prayed for God to forgive those who were treating Him so cruelly, **Luke 23:34**.

By dying as He did, Christ provided the sacrifice that would forgive men's sins. Therefore, the temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom. The veil had blocked access to God's presence; it was a symbol of man's sin. Since Jesus' death atoned for sin, the veil was severed, demonstrating that with sin removed, men could once again enter into fellowship with God.

Truly, this man was the Son of God! Satan had waged war against the Seed of the woman from the time God promised that the Seed would crush his head in **Genesis 3:15**, up to this time, when he certainly believed that he had been victorious over the work of God.

But what he didn't understand was that God had used his evil work all along in order to put on the cross the sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sins of the world, **John 1:29**.

The plan of God's redemption that had been predestined before the creation of the world was accomplished, **Ephesians 3:8-12**. The Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world had now in reality been slain, **Revelation 13:8**.

ONE SOLITARY LIFE

Here is a young man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter's shop until he was 30, and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never travelled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

While he was still a young man, the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.

While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth, which was his coat. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that One Solitary Life.

Author Unknown

JESUS DIES

'When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.' Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down,' he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.' **Mark 15:35-37**

There were some who stood near the cross but clearly didn't understand what Jesus meant, hence, why they thought He was calling on Elijah, **Mark 15:35 / Matthew 27:47**.

The name Elijah means 'Jehovah is my God' and so they thought that was who He was calling out to. Jesus said, 'I thirst', **John 19:28**, and so, one of them compassionately went and got some wine vinegar and offered it to Jesus to drink, **Mark 15:36 / Matthew 27:48 / John 19:29**.

This was cheap wine, a very bitter wine called posca or sour wine commonly drunk by the Roman soldiers. This wasn't the drugged wine usually offered to the condemned man just before the crucifixion. He had refused that, **Mark 15:23 / Matthew 27:33-34**.

Victims often lived for many hours on the cross, and so, giving Jesus a drink was an act of kindness. However, as one man showed compassion toward Jesus, the others told him to leave Jesus alone, to see if Elijah would come and save Him, **Matthew 27:49**.

Coffman, in his commentary, says the following.

'All this talk of Elijah sprang from Pharisaical prejudice and the propaganda they had waged, alleging that Jesus could not be the Christ, 'because Elijah had not yet come.' Theirs was a misinterpretation of the prophecy that 'Elijah must first come'. Christ had already identified John the Baptist as that Elijah who was to come, the Elijah foretold by the prophecies. Doubtless, the Pharisees were still harping on their old argument to the effect that Christ could not be the Messiah, **Matthew 17:10-13**.'

It was a standard act of mercy to give a narcotic to condemned criminals when they were crucified. The drug would dull the pain a bit and allow the victim to pass away more comfortably. Jesus refused this tranquilliser, **Mark 15:36**. He was determined to suffer in full consciousness. After crying out in a loud voice, Jesus breathed His last, **Mark 15:37**. He gave up His spirit, **Matthew 27:50 / Ecclesiastes 12:7 / Psalm 31:5 / Matthew 27:49**. Notice He gave up His spirit, **Matthew 27:50**. In other words, He voluntarily went to the cross, and He died when He was ready to die, **John 10:17-18**.

'The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee, these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.' **Mark 15:38-41**

THE VEIL

When God gave Moses instructions concerning the Tabernacle. He tells him that the veil or curtain, as some translations render it, was to be a divider between the holy place and the Holy of Holies, **Exodus 26:31-37**.

It was over seven feet high, thirty feet wide and was supported by four pillars set in bronze sockets. This curtain separated the people from the outer court of the tabernacle. They could only enter when they brought their sacrifice to the gate as an offering for God upon the bronze altar.

The veil was made using four colours, blue, purple, scarlet and white of the fine linen. These four colours were also used at the Door of the Outer Court, **Exodus 27:16-17**. These four colours were also used at the Door to the Sanctuary, **Exodus 26:36-37**.

This veil separated the people in the outer court of the tabernacle from the Holy Place. Only priests were permitted to enter the Holy Place after they had made the proper sacrifice at the altar and washed at the bronze laver.

These four colours were also used for the Cherubim Embroidered Covering that forms the ceiling of the Tabernacle, Exodus 26:1-6. These four colours were also used for the Ephod that the high priest wore, Exodus 28:6-14 / Exodus 39:2-7.

Josephus describes the temple veil as follows.

‘Before these doors, there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colours without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them having their colours the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other. This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.’ (The Wars Of The Jews 5.5.4)

IS THERE ANY SIGNIFICANCE WITH THE FOUR COLOURS?

Blue indicates heavenly and godly: “Behold your God”, Isaiah 40:9, pointing to John’s Gospel, where doubting Thomas eventually says to Jesus “My Lord and my God”, John 20:28.

Purple signifies kingship: “Behold your King”, Zechariah 9:9, pointing to Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus, the descendant of King David, Matthew 1:1, declares after rising from the dead “All authority in heaven and on earth is given to Me”, Matthew 28:18.

Red signifies blood: “Behold My servant”, Isaiah 52:13 / Isaiah 53:5, pointing to Mark’s Gospel, where Jesus says He “came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many”, Mark 10:45.

White signifies purity and real humanity: “Behold the man”, Zechariah 6:12, pointing to Luke’s Gospel, where Pilate says of Jesus “Behold, I have found not one fault in this man”, Luke 23:4 / Luke 23:14.

The veil we are speaking about is the veil which separated the holy place from the most holy of holies. This is the final door to pass through, to enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies.

Entry was forbidden to all except one, the high priest, but he couldn’t just stroll in there anytime he wanted. He was permitted entry only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, when he brought the blood of the sacrificed goat to sprinkle on the lid, called the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, Leviticus 16:15-16 / Hebrews 9:6-7 / Exodus 25:10-22 / Exodus 37:1-9.

In Herod’s temple, there were two veils in front of the Holy of Holies. The Talmud tells us the following.

‘It was not known whether the veil in Solomon’s temple was hung on the inside or the outside of the entrance to the Holy of Holies. When the Temple was rebuilt after the exile, they hung two veils — one on the outside of the entryway in the Holy Place and one on the inside of the entryway in the Holy of Holies.’

According to the Talmud, ‘the veils were sixty feet long, thirty feet tall and four inches thick’.

Herbert Danby says the following.

‘The veil was one handbreadth thick and was woven on a loom having seventy-two rods, and over each rod were twenty-four threads. Its length was forty cubits and its breadth twenty cubits; it was made by eighty-two young girls,

and they used to make two in every year; and three hundred priests immersed it.’ (Herbert Danby translator, The Mishnah, p 161, par 5)

Jewish tradition claims that the veils were so heavy that it took three hundred priests to hang them.

THE VEIL TORN IN TWO FROM TOP TO BOTTOM

The size of the veil would have made it absolutely impossible for any human to tear this into two pieces, **Mark 15:37-38 / Matthew 27:50-51**. But the fact that it was torn from top to bottom signifies that this was a work of God. The Greek word for top is ‘anothen’ in the New Testament, and it frequently means that something comes from above, that is, from God, **John 3:31 / James 1:17**. God tore the veil from top to bottom to show that it was He who was making a way for us to come into His presence.

THE PRIESTS IN THE TEMPLE

It’s often overlooked that when the veil was torn in two, there would have been many priests within the temple at this time. We can only imagine what they were thinking as they witnessed this happening before their eyes.

Imagine if you were a priest, and you heard this loud noise, and when you go to investigate, you see the veil is torn in two. Imagine, as you examine it, you realise that this hasn’t been cut with a very sharp knife by someone because the tear starts from the top of the curtain, not the bottom.

Wouldn’t you be thinking to yourself what does this mean? Wouldn’t you be speaking to the other priests, trying to figure out what happened and why? Could this event be one of the reasons why a large number of priests would later become Christians? **Acts 6:7**.

THE CENTURION

Matthew and Luke both record that the centurion at the crucifixion saw everything which happened, **Luke 23:47 / Matthew 27:54**. Did he witness the veil tearing in two? Some suggest that this Gentile soldier could see straight into the Holy of Holies, but I personally doubt it.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TORN VEIL

Rabbi Gabriel says the following.

‘In the Jewish Talmud, the Temple veil is spoken of as the ‘tunic of God’. It’s ripping at the time of the death of Messiah speaks of the tradition of tearing one’s clothes as a sign of mourning. God tore His ‘tunic’ when Yeshua died.’

In other words, they believe the veil being ripped in two signified God tearing His ‘tunic’ as a sign of mourning when Jesus died. Some scholars have suggested this was the curtain that separated the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles. This would make sense in light of what Paul said that Christ has torn down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, **Ephesians 2:14**.

I believe the torn veil signifies something much bigger. I believe the veil which was torn in two was the veil that separated the holy of holies from the other parts of the temple. The word ‘veil’ in Hebrew means ‘to separate’.

The veil itself was a symbol of our sin, which separated us from God; it reminds us that we were excluded from the presence of God because of our sinfulness, **Isaiah 59:2 / Romans 3:23**.

However, just as the Passover lamb was slain for the redemption of the children of Israel in Egypt, and the goat was slain so that its blood could obtain God’s forgiveness for the Israelites on the Day of Atonement, so Jesus ‘bore our sins in His own body on the tree,’ **1 Peter 2:24**.

It’s now possible, on the basis of faith in Jesus’ death for our sins, to stand in the presence of God as justified and forgiven people, **Romans 5:1-2**. As **Hebrews 10:19-22** shows, the way to the Holy of Holies has been opened up for us through the veil of Jesus’ flesh being torn on the cross. There is a ‘new’, literally ‘freshly slain’ and ‘living’ way for us to enter.

The Lord Jesus Christ is not just our freshly slain, dead offering; He is also the Living One who rose from the dead, **Luke 24:5 / Revelation 1:18**. He ascended as our great High Priest, with our names on His heart, going into the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence is over the Ark of the Covenant! When Jesus cried out, ‘It is finished’, **John 19:30**, this was a cry of triumph.

He had accomplished the work He came to do. As the Lamb of God, **John 1:29**, He had now finished His work. In the very beginning, we have the promise of the Head crusher, that is, Jesus, **Genesis 3:14-15**.

The Seed of woman, Jesus, would eventually crush the head of Satan by His death on the cross, and so, freeing mankind from the control that Satan has over mankind through sin, **Romans 16:20**.

In crushing the head of Satan on the cross, Jesus would bruise His heel by His own death. However, His heel would only be bruised because He would be raised from the dead.

Satan was now defeated, his rebellion against God was ruined, and his works were destined for destruction, **1 John 3:8**. He was the perfect sacrifice, an innocent man dying in our place in order for us to be forgiven of our sins, **Hebrews 9:22**.

No one else could have done this, no one else could ever do this, Jesus alone was worthy, **Revelation 5:1-10**. The way to God was finally opened to everyone, regardless of their race or gender, **Hebrews 4:16 / Hebrews 9:11-12**.

Why did God tear the veil? God tore the veil in two because it signalled the beginning of the end of the Jewish worship system, **Matthew 24:1-2**. God tore the veil in two because He didn’t want anyone to have any doubts that the death of Jesus was significant for everyone.

His Son came to die for the world, **John 3:16**, in order for us to have a way to be saved, **John 14:6**. Just like the purpose of the miracles of Jesus, God tore the veil from top to bottom to bring about faith in His Son and who He claimed to be, **John 20:30-31**.

CONCLUSION

The tearing of the veil from top to bottom was nothing less than another miracle from God. This miracle signified that He had opened the door for us to come in and have a relationship with Him. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice, so the veil, or separation, was no longer needed. We can now enter His presence through Christ Himself.

As Jesus hung on the cross, many people would have witnessed the miracle of the three hours of darkness, **Matthew 27:45 / Luke 23:44-45**, the veil of the temple was torn into two, **Mark 15:37-38 / Matthew 27:50-51**, the earthquake, **Matthew 27:50-52**, the graves opening up and dead people being raised to life, **Matthew 27:50-53**. They would have to conclude, as the centurion soldier did, that ‘Truly, this man was the Son of God,’ **Mark 15:39**. A centurion and those with him were responsible for guarding Jesus; they had witnessed everything that had just happened and became terrified. They said, surely, he was the Son of God! **Matthew 27:54 / Luke 23:47**. Here are more Gentiles confessing who Christ is, something which the religious leaders refused to accept. Once again, we see the faith of the women who faithfully followed Jesus and took care of His needs. Some of these women were relatives of the disciples who lingered at the cross with John, **Matthew 37:55-56 / Luke 8:2-3 / Luke 23:49 / John 19:25**.

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons were all present, **Mark 15:40-41**. Mark records the name of the mother of Zebedee’s sons as Salome, **Mark 15:41**. The women were the last to wait upon Jesus at the cross and the first to whom He revealed Himself after the resurrection.

WAS JESUS’ BODY BROKEN?

I’m sure we’ve all sat around the table to partake of the Lord’s Supper, and we’ve heard someone make some kind of comment or reference to Jesus’ ‘broken body’ on the cross, either in their talk or in their prayer.

Maybe you are reading this and wondering what the big deal is, concerning the bread representing Jesus’ ‘broken body’! Maybe you’re thinking, well, that’s what the Scripture actually says, isn’t it!

CONFUSION OVER THE BREAD AND JESUS’ BODY

Let’s go ahead and carefully read the four accounts concerning the bread and Jesus’ body.

‘While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he **BROKE IT** and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ **Matthew 26:26**

‘While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he **BROKE IT** and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ **Mark 14:22**

‘And he took bread, gave thanks and **BROKE IT**, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ **Luke 22:19**

‘And when he had given thanks, he **BROKE IT** and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ **1 Corinthians 11:24**

Now notice that in each of these four accounts, the word ‘broke’ is used; however, you will also notice that it is used in reference to the bread which was ‘broken’, not Jesus’ body. When we carefully read these four accounts again, we find that Matthew and Mark record

Jesus saying, ‘This is my body’, in Luke’s account, he writes that Jesus says, His body ‘is given’ for you, and finally, Paul writes and quotes Jesus as saying, His body is ‘for you’. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read that Jesus’ body is ‘broken for you’. So, where do people get the idea that Jesus’ body was broken?

‘And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, take, eat: this is my body, WHICH IS BROKEN for you: this do in remembrance of me.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24 KJV

Notice that the KJV says, ‘this is my body, which is BROKEN for you’. This is where people get the idea that Jesus’ body was indeed broken. It’s not surprising that many people quote this passage of Scripture during the Lord’s Supper because it’s a popular version of the Bible, and people have heard this being quoted time and time again over the years.

Part of the problem is that the word ‘broken’ isn’t in the original text, and it isn’t in a vast majority of manuscripts. My Greek Lexicon has it written as follows:

‘and having given thanks he broke (it), and said, this of me is the body, which (is) for you; this do in of me remembrance.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24

The word ‘broken’ isn’t in the actual text; in fact, when we read through the three Gospel accounts again, we find that none of them actually say, ‘this is my body which is BROKEN for you’. When we read 1 Corinthians 11:24, in most translations, we find it’s very similar to what Luke records, except Luke adds the word ‘given’.

‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ Luke 22:19

‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ 1 Corinthians 11:24

BROKEN BONES!

We also know from Scripture that they clearly teach that Jesus’ body wasn’t broken, even after His death, in order to fulfil Scripture.

‘But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they DID NOT BREAK HIS LEGS. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘NOT ONE OF HIS BONES WILL BE BROKEN,’ and, as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced.’ John 19:33-36

Notice, John says that Jesus’ bones were not broken. What John does here in his account is quote from Psalm 34, to let us understand that this prophecy concerning the Christ was fulfilled in Christ at the cross of Christ, John 19:36.

‘He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.’ Psalm 34:20

Psalm 34 is a psalm of the deliverance of David when he changed his behaviour before Abimelek in order to spare his own life, 1 Samuel 21:10-15. We know that bones are the structural framework of the body, and so, God metaphorically provides structure to the life of the righteous. Though the wicked will reap the reward of their evil, God will preserve those who are His.

Psalm 34:20, points us to the Christ, who is the only truly righteous One, and saw the complete fulfilment of this on the cross, John 19:36. Jesus is ‘our Passover lamb’ who was sacrificed for our sins, John 1:29 / 1 Corinthians 5:7 / Hebrews 4:15 / 1 Peter 1:19 and the Passover lamb wasn’t to have any of its bones broken.

‘It must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. DO NOT BREAK ANY OF THE BONES.’ Exodus 12:46

‘They must not leave any of it till morning or BREAK ANY OF ITS BONES. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations.’ Numbers 9:12

BROKEN BODY!

Over the years, I’ve heard countless arguments suggesting that the body can be broken without the bones being broken. I’ve heard people say, ‘Ah, well, His bones weren’t actually broken, but His body was!’

I hear people say that ‘when they flogged Jesus’ back when they placed a crown of thorns on His head, when they nailed Him to the cross, when they did all these things, they actually broke His skin, which is a part of the body.’

As thought-provoking as that sounds, it appears to me they’re just trying to make sense of the word ‘broken’ in the KJV of 1 Corinthians 11:24. Yes, the Scriptures teach that His body was ‘wounded’ and ‘pierced’, Isaiah 53:5 / John 19:34, but it doesn’t say His body was ‘broken’ for us.

BROKEN SPIRIT!

Another popular idea is that it was Jesus’ spirit, His human spirit, which was broken. I guess when we look at what Christ went through, we could easily conclude that this was true from a human perspective.

But we must remember Jesus didn’t crawl to the cross like some defeated victim, He marched to the cross as a man who totally embraced the will of the Father, Hebrews 10:5-10, and said triumphantly: ‘it is finished.’ John 19:30.

CONCLUSION

It appears that some Christians are a little confused about the word ‘broken’, and so they end up being confused over the ‘breaking’ of the bread with Jesus’ body. I think we’ve seen that the Scripture clearly teaches us that it was the bread which was ‘broken’ and not Jesus’ body.

The next time someone asks you to thank God for the bread at the Lord’s Supper, or the next time you hear someone saying or praying about Jesus’ ‘broken body’, remember the Scriptures teach that Jesus wasn’t broken in any shape or form, His bones weren’t broken, His human spirit wasn’t broken. It was the bread, which was broken, but our Lord’s body was given for us.

THE BURIAL OF JESUS

‘It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So, Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he

rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, saw where he was laid.’ Mark 15:42-47

Since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Mark 15:42, Joseph of Arimathea had to act quickly. He had to act quickly since, according to Jewish law, he couldn’t bury the body on the Sabbath day, which officially began at sundown, Mark 15:42. He wished to give the body a proper burial.

It’s also worth noting that the Romans didn’t take the criminals down from the cross, they left them there to rot, to act as a warning to anyone who walked by if they broke the Roman laws and the soldiers at the cross couldn’t leave to go home until the criminals were officially dead, hence why they drove a spear in Jesus’ side and didn’t need to break any of His bones, John 19:31-37.

He was a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, Matthew 27:57 / Mark 15:43, and also didn’t consent to the execution, Luke 23:50-54. He was ‘rich’, Matthew 27:57, ‘a respected member of the council’, Mark 15:43, ‘a good and righteous man,’ Luke 23:50 / John 19:38, who had ‘not consented to their purpose and deed’, Luke 23:51. He was ‘a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews’, John 19:38 / John 12:42-43.

Evidently, he had kept his belief secret until now. He was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, Mark 15:43. He ‘took courage and went to Pilate’, Matthew 27:58 / John 19:38 / Mark 15:43, asked Pilate for permission to bury Jesus’ body, Mark 15:43 / Matthew 27:58 / Luke 23:52 / John 19:38.

He must have been a very important person because not anyone could go and speak to Pilate. Pilate was surprised that Jesus died so quickly, Mark 15:44. Not one bone in His body was broken, Exodus 12:46 / Numbers 9:12 / Deuteronomy 21:22-23 / Psalm 34:20 / Zechariah 12:10.

Being able to remove Jesus from the cross was a huge privilege for Joseph, Mark 15:45 / John 19:38. He gathered the corpse up in a sheet, Mark 15:46 / Matthew 27:59 / Luke 23:53 / and put it in a hole chiselled into the wall of a cave, Mark 15:46 / Matthew 27:60 / Luke 23:53 / which served as a typical grave in that era.

He closed off the cave by rolling a large rock over the entrance, and went away, Mark 15:46 / Matthew 27:60. The tomb was Joseph’s own and was new, unused, Luke 23:54 / John 19:41; it wasn’t a natural cave, but one dug out of the rock. This was Joseph’s own tomb, in his own garden, which tells us he must have been wealthy, too.

He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away, and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb, Matthew 27:60-61. This was Joseph’s own tomb, in his own garden, which tells us he must have been wealthy, too.

Significantly, Matthew and Mark include the statement that the two Marys saw where Jesus was laid, Mark 15:47 / Matthew 27:56 / Matthew 27:61. These two women knew where the tomb was located, the women knew the exact location of the tomb, Luke 23:55, and so, because of that we can be sure that they were valid witnesses that when they returned three days later, the tomb was empty.

Nicodemus, John 3:1, joined Joseph in preparing the customary burial of the body of Jesus, John 19:39. Nicodemus joined him for His burial, John 19:38-42; he too was a member of the Sanhedrin, and a believer, John 3:1-2 / John 7:50. John 12:3-5 indicates that Nicodemus was a rich man also. The amount brought suggests that they intended to completely cover the corpse with spices, John 19:39.

‘Myrrh’, John 19:39, was a gum resin used as a perfume and embalming fluid, ‘alces’, pounded wood of the aloe tree, also used for embalming, Psalm 45:8 / Proverbs 7:17 / Matthew 2:11. A hundred pounds weight, John 19:39, one hundred litras, one letra being equal to twelve ounces.

The ‘lined cloths’, Luke 23:53 / John 19:40, were linen strips that were bandages. The wrapping of the body in linen and the use of spices was the custom of the Jews, John 19:40. The woman also brought spices, Luke 23:56.

One layer of bandages would have been applied, followed by another layer of the spices Nicodemus brought along, and His body would have been finally wrapped in a sheet-like piece of linen. Both men would have been unclean as a result of this action and wouldn’t have been able to participate in the Passover.

Joseph's 'new tomb' had not been used and was in a garden close to Golgotha, **Matthew 27:60 / John 19:41 / Luke 23:52**. Joseph, the owner of the tomb, was a believer, so Jesus' body was always in the hands of believers. It was now close to the Passover, and they hurried to arrange Jesus' body in a nearby tomb, **John 19:42**.

In keeping with the law of Moses, they had rested on the Sabbath, **Luke 23:56**, but will return to complete the burial rites of the Saviour which they had begun on the day of His death, **Matthew 28:5-6 / Luke 23:54**.

Because this tomb was 'close to hand', and the Sabbath was imminent, **John 19:42**, it appears to be a temporary arrangement. This suggests that Jesus was to be buried elsewhere after the Sabbath. It was very convenient as it was so near the place of the skull and the Sabbath was fast approaching, **Luke 23:54 / John 19:42**.

Constable, in his commentary, says the following concerning **Luke 23:55-56**.

'This reference to the women prepares for the account of Jesus' resurrection. When they went to the tomb on Sunday morning, they did not go to the wrong one. They had previously been there and had seen Jesus' corpse in it. They prepared spices for their return visit on Sunday to honour Jesus further. Luke's reference to the passing of the Sabbath with no disciple activity confirms Jesus' prediction that He would be in the grave three days, **Luke 18:33 / Luke 24:7**. It also shows that Jesus' followers observed the Sabbath as obedient Israelites, **Exodus 20:10**.'

THE GUARD AT THE TOMB

Matthew is the only writer who mentions Pilate giving permission for a guard to be sent to guard the tomb of Christ.

The Preparation Day, **Matthew 27:62**, was the Friday before the Sabbath of the Passover, **Exodus 16:22 / Matthew 26:17 / John 19:31**, and it appears that the chief priests and Pharisees were becoming a little nervous.

They go to Pilate and tell Him that Jesus said, 'after three days, He will rise again', **Matthew 27:63 / Matthew 16:21 / Matthew 17:23 / Matthew 20:19 / Matthew 26:61 / Mark 8:31 / Mark 10:34**.

Barnes, in his commentary, says the following concerning the deception.

'That is, the last 'deception', or the taking him from the tomb, pretending that he rose, will have a wider influence among the people than the first, or his pretending to be the Messiah.'

They are determined to stop any rumours that Jesus would rise and so they ask that His tomb be guarded, just in case one of Jesus' disciples stole His body, **Matthew 27:64**.

And so, to stop anyone from stealing the body of Christ, a security guard was granted, along with a Roman seal, **Matthew 27:64 / Daniel 6:17**. And that is what they did, **Matthew 27:65-66**.

WHERE DID JESUS' SPIRIT GO WHEN HE DIED?

Before we answer this question, I think it would be useful to look at what the Bible says about heaven first. The Bible tells us there are three heavens. Note the plurality in **Genesis 1:1**. Speaking about himself, the apostle Paul says in **2 Corinthians 12:2** that he was caught up to the third heaven. So, we have here three 'heavens'.

1. The heaven which is God's spiritual, eternal home.

This isn't physical and isn't created.

2. The heaven where the stars and planets are.

This is physical and is created.

3. The heaven surrounding the earth where the atmosphere is, and the birds fly.

This is physical and is created.

The word 'heavens' is used in different ways in the Bible.

1. It refers to one of the two heavens that God created.

2. It's also used of the third heaven.

This is the uncreated heaven where God has always been from eternity. God is everywhere, Acts 17:27-28. He is present in all 'three heavens', Psalm 115:2-3. We cannot get away from God, Psalm 139:1-16.

THE TWO HEAVENS GOD CREATED

'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth., Genesis 1:1

So He existed before the heavens and the earth. These aren't the heavens He has always lived in; these are the heavens where the atmosphere is, and the birds fly and the heaven where the stars are.

THE THIRD HEAVEN

The heaven where God has always lived isn't physical; it hasn't been created. Because God is Spirit, He doesn't need a physical place to live in, John 4:24. He doesn't need pictures or images or temples or mosques or churches or shrines to live in, Acts 17:24-25.

Where did Jesus' spirit go when He died? Some suggest He went to preach to the souls in hell based on 1 Peter 3:19-20. A proper understanding of what Peter means will help clarify what Peter means, and that's simply that Christ in His spirit didn't go anywhere to save those who were righteous before the flood because there were none, just Noah and His family, Genesis 6:5-13.

Does Peter mean that the Gospel was preached to those who were already dead? No, what he means is that they were dead whilst Peter wrote this letter, but they were very much alive whilst the Gospel was being preached to them.

What he's saying is that the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, spoke through Noah to the people when they were alive. He's not talking about what happened when Jesus was in the grave, and we shouldn't make a text mean something it doesn't say.

PARADISE

Paradise is a Persian for 'an area enclosed by a wall' or 'garden.' Nehemiah 2:8 / Ecclesiastes 2:5 / Song of Songs 4:13. The Greek word 'paradeisos' is used for the garden in Eden in Genesis, Genesis 2:8-16 / Isaiah 51:3 / Ezekiel 28:13.

The New Testament understands paradise in terms of its Jewish heritage. In **Luke 23:43**, Jesus promises the penitent thief, 'Today you will be with me in paradise.' The intermediate state was transformed by Jesus' emphasis on being with him 'today.' There's no denying where Jesus was going; He was going to 'paradise'.

Wait a minute, didn't Jesus say to Mary, 'Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.' **John 20:17**? Yes, He did, so if we're saying He went to heaven when He died, how do we understand what He said to Mary?

Jesus is telling Mary not to cling to Him because there is work to be done, she needs to tell others what has happened, and so there's a sense of urgency. She wanted to hold on and not let go, but Jesus wouldn't allow her. Remember, later Thomas was invited to touch Jesus, **John 20:27**.

Could it be possible that when He's speaking to Mary, He's speaking in terms of His new glorified body? He hasn't ascended to the Father in His new everlasting body. Isn't that what the resurrection is about? **1 Corinthians 15:35-44** / **1 Corinthians 15:51-54** / **Romans 8:23** / **Philippians 3:20-21**.

We know from these verses that we will be reconciled with our bodies at the resurrection, but they will be new, in terms of glorious. If we know this, then surely, it's possible that this is what Jesus meant when He spoke to Mary.

If we read **1 Peter 4:6** and come to the conclusion that Jesus went to hell to preach the Gospel to those who have already died, we would soon run into trouble with other Scriptures, especially, **Hebrews 9:27**.

In other words, Peter is saying that the Gospel was preached to them, the dead, when they were very much still alive but by the time Peter writes this letter they are now well and truly dead, **1 Peter 4:5**. There is no second chance Gospel, everyone is destined to die once and then face judgment, **Hebrews 9:27**, no second chance to repent and become faithful.

Notice in **Ephesians 4:7-10**, when Paul quotes from **Psalms 68:18**, that he doesn't even mention the word hell.

In **Psalms 68:18**, David is looking forward into the future, it's prophetic, David says, 'received gifts', but Paul says, 'gave gifts'.

This is David looking forward, and Paul looking at the fulfilment of this passage. The words, 'descended to the lower, earthly regions,' aren't a reference to hell, but to Jesus' birth. Paul is referring to Christ's coming to earth as a baby; he's speaking about Christ coming into Mary's womb.

Paul is saying that Jesus, who went up to heaven, that is, in His ascension, is the same Jesus who earlier came down from heaven. Paul isn't speaking about Christ going to 'hell', he's speaking about Christ's birth as a human.

Notice in **Romans 10:6-7** that Paul quotes from the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 30:12**. Again, there is no mention of the word 'hell' in these verses. In this context, Paul is simply asking these Christians not to ask these questions, why? Because Christ isn't far away, in fact, He is very near and faith in him is as near as confessing with our mouth and believing in our heart, **Romans 10:9**.

When we read, **Acts 2:26-27** / **Acts 2:31**, we find the phrase, 'realm of the dead,' which is the grave, the place where the 'body' ends up. Notice it was Jesus' 'body' which went to the grave, not His soul.

It's obvious that Peter is using David's psalm, **Psalms 16:9-10**, to show that Christ's 'body' did not decay. In other words, Jesus wasn't like David, 'who died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day along with his remains,' **Acts 2:29**.

No longer is paradise just an anticipatory condition awaiting the messianic presence at the end of the age. Those who die in faith will 'be with Christ,' **Philippians 1:23**. The dead in Christ will not experience life diminished, but life enhanced, as Jesus' words to Martha in **John 11**, imply, **John 11:23-26**.

Note the term, 'Abraham's side', this is a Hebraism which the Jews understood to mean, 'the paradise of God,' **Luke 16:19-22**. So, clearly, once again the Bible teaches us that Lazarus was in 'paradise'.

It's a figurative phrase that appears to have been drawn from a popular belief that the righteous would rest by Abraham's side in the world to come, an opinion described in Jewish literature at the time of Christ.

The word 'bosom' or 'side' is 'kolpos' and literally refers to the side or lap of a person. Figuratively, as in this case, it refers to a place of honour reserved for a special guest, similar to its usage in **John 13:23**: 'One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him.'

In the case of Lazarus, the reserved place is special because it's beside Abraham, the father of all the righteous. The phrase may be synonymous with the paradise promised to the thief on the cross, **Luke 23:43**. Together, these passages support the conviction that a believer enjoys immediate bliss at the moment of physical death.

When writing to the church in Ephesus, note what Jesus says, 'I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God,' **Revelation 2:7**. According to **Revelation 2:7**, the overcoming church will eat from the tree of life in the eschatological garden.

Sin and death through redemption are now cast out of the human experience. The way is open for the faithful to return to the garden of God. Paradise is the Christian's final home.

Notice that Paul says he was caught up to the 'third heaven', whilst in the same setting says, caught up to 'paradise,' **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**. Surely, the phrases 'caught up to the third heaven' and 'caught up to paradise' mean the same thing! Surely, the 'third heaven' and 'paradise' are one and the same place!

So where did Jesus' spirit go when He died? The 'third heaven', or 'paradise' is God's spiritual eternal home, which isn't physical and isn't created, this is the place where not only Paul found himself, but the place where Lazarus found himself when he died, the place where Jesus and the thief on the cross went to that day, **Luke 23:43**. There is no Scriptural evidence which says Jesus went to or descended down to hell in any shape or form and there would be no purpose in doing so.

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION

'When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb, and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.' **Mark 16:1-8**

THE EMPTY TOMB

When we put all the resurrection accounts together chronologically, a good, clear picture can be constructed.

1. It was very early on the Sunday morning, as the sun was coming up, Mark 16:2 / Matthew 28:1 / Luke 24:1 / John 20:1.
2. Mary Magdala and the other Mary were going to anoint Jesus with spices, Mark 16:1 / Matthew 28:1 / Luke 24:1 / John 20:1.
3. John records only the experience of Mary of Magdala.

She saw that the stone had been ‘taken away’ from the entrance of the tomb; the stone had been moved from the entrance during the night. The other Gospels say that the stone was ‘rolled back’, ‘rolled away’, clearly it was out of the groove in which it had to be to cover the entrance, Mark 16:4 / Matthew 28:2 / Luke 24:2 / John 20:1.

4. The guards had seen this occur and were much afraid; it was done by an angel and accompanied by an earthquake, Matthew 28:2-4.
5. The same angel spoke to the women, telling them the Christ had risen, Mark 16:6 / Matthew 28:5-6 / Luke 24:4-6.
6. Jesus had gone to Galilee, and they will meet him there, Mark 16:7 / Matthew 28:7.
7. This was in accordance with Jesus earlier statements, Luke 24:7-8.
8. The women went to tell the disciples as the angel had told them, Mark 16:7 / Matthew 28:8 / Luke 24:9 / John 20:2.
9. As they were afraid, they told no one else, Mark 16:8.

10. On meeting the disciples, Mary was distressed and didn’t seem to believe what she had heard from the angel, as she says, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him’, John 20:2. As we know they hadn’t removed Jesus; Jesus had removed Himself.

11. Only Peter and John believed initially, both ran to the tomb, and found only the cloth Jesus had been wrapped in, Luke 24:11-12 / John 20:3 / John 20:7.

In keeping with the law of Moses, they had rested on the Sabbath and had returned to complete the burial rites of the Saviour, which they had begun on the day of His death.

Because it was after the Sabbath was over when the women proceeded to the tomb, this tells us that the resurrection of Jesus happened on the first day of the week, that is, Sunday morning, Mark 16:9 / Mark 16:2 / Luke 24:1 / John 20:1.

A few loyal women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had prepared spices and went out to Jesus’ tomb early on Sunday morning, Mark 16:1-2.

They were planning to embalm His body in order to give it a more honourable burial than had been possible in the few minutes that had been available on Friday afternoon.

As they walked down to the cave, they thought about how hard it was going to be for them to roll that large rock away from the entrance of the burial cave, Mark 16:3. When they arrived, however, they saw that the rock had already been removed and the cave was open, Mark 16:4.

Matthew’s account tells us that there was a guard set around the tomb, Matthew 27:65-66. And Matthew also tells us that it was an angel who rolled it away, Matthew 28:2.

Note that Matthew 28:2 says there was only one angel at the tomb of Jesus, while Mark 16:5 says there was one young man clothed in a long white garment. Luke 24:4 and John 20:12 tell us there were two angels at the tomb.

Mark and Luke referred to their human appearance, Mark 16:5 / Luke 24:4, while Matthew and John referred to their angelic nature, Matthew 28:2 / John 20:12.

It’s obvious there were two angels present, but only one of them spoke. Inside was an angel who told them exactly who it was they were looking for, it was Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.

And then says the words that no one, not even the disciples, ever expected to hear, ‘He is not here but is arisen!’ **Mark 16:6 / Romans 1:4 / 1 Thessalonians 4:14**. With these words, the women who had come to the tomb of Jesus at dawn on the first day of the week were greeted by an angel who stood before them.

Morgan, in his commentary, says the following.

‘The resurrection means that God has an eternal plan for these bodies of ours. ‘There was nothing in the teaching of Jesus approaching the Gnostic heresy that declared that the flesh is inherently evil. Plato could only get rid of sin by getting rid of the body. Jesus retains the body and declares that God feeds the body as well as the soul, that the body is as sacred thing as the soul, since the soul makes it its sanctuary.’

He asked them to tell the disciples and Peter what had happened, and that Jesus would meet them in Galilee as promised, **Mark 16:7 / Matthew 28:7 / Mark 14:27-28**. Since Peter was himself a disciple, it seems unusual that he would be singled out and receive a special invitation.

Perhaps it was because the Lord knew that Peter would no longer feel himself worthy to be counted as a disciple after having denied Him, and therefore, Jesus gave him a special invitation to the meeting. What tenderness the Lord showed!

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘If any of you have behaved worse to your Master than others, you are peculiarly called to come to him now. You have grieved him, and you have been grieving because you have grieved him. You have been brought to repentance after having slidden away from him, and now he seals your pardon by inviting you to himself.’

The women fled away very frightened, **Matthew 28:8**. The women went to tell the apostles what they had learned, **Luke 24:10**. However, on the way, Jesus suddenly appeared to them, and after He said, ‘greetings’, **Matthew 28:9**. The King James Version says, ‘all hail’, which represents the normal Greek greeting.

Spurgeon, in his commentary, says the following.

‘Not first to them who were the heads of the Church, as it were, but first of all to lowly women, did the Lord appear; and the apostles themselves had to go to school to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to learn that great truth, ‘The Lord is risen indeed.’

Notice that they didn’t say anything to anyone because they were afraid, **Mark 16:8**. This may appear like a contradiction because we know that they did go and speak about what happened, **Mark 16:11 / Luke 24:9**.

It seems to suggest that the women didn’t discuss among themselves what they had just witnessed at the empty tomb, until they met the disciples, as the angel ordered earlier, **Mark 16:7**.

The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have **Mark 16:9-20**. There are effectively just two Greek manuscripts that don’t have **Mark 16:9-20**.

These are codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, two important manuscripts from the fourth century. It’s almost unimaginable that the copyists who made them were unaware of **Mark 16:9-20**, but at the end of the day, they left it out of their Bibles.

Dummelow, in commentary, says the following.

‘From the second century onwards, in nearly all manuscripts, versions, and other authorities, it forms an integral part of the Gospel, and it can be shown to have existed, if not in the apostolic, at least in the sub-apostolic age. A certain amount of evidence against it there is (though very little can be shown to be independent of Eusebius, the Church historian, 265-340 A.D.), but certainly not enough to justify its rejection, were it not that internal evidence clearly demonstrates that it cannot have proceeded from the hand of St. Mark.’

JESUS APPEARS TO MARY MAGDALENE

‘When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.’ Mark 16:9-11

John’s account gives us the full story, John 20:10-18. Joyfully, the disciples returned home, no doubt to tell the other disciples of the good news, John 20:10. ‘The beloved disciple’ was the first one to believe that Jesus had risen, this without seeing Him, John 20:8.

Mary of Magdala was the first to see Him after His resurrection. She is the woman whom Jesus drove out seven spirits from her, Mark 16:9 / Luke 8:2. Mary however stayed at the tomb, even though she had seen the angel earlier on, Matthew 28:5-6, she still didn’t understand or believe, Mark 9:11.

Mary stood outside the tomb ‘crying’, sobbing, weeping aloud, John 20:11. As she sobbed, she glanced inside the tomb, she saw two angels sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the corpse had laid, the angels looked like young men, Mark 16:5 / Luke 24:4 / John 20:11-12.

They asked why she was in such obvious distress, John 20:13. It’s important to note that she makes reference to Jesus as ‘My Lord’, John 20:13, indicating continued faith in Him, even though He is no longer about.

With these words, she turned around and noticed Jesus standing, although she didn’t know it was Jesus, John 20:14.

Jesus asks her, ‘Woman,’ said Jesus, ‘why are you crying? Who are you looking for?’ John 20:15.

Two things should be kept in mind here.

1. She was crying bitterly, blinded by grief.

2. It was only when He spoke her name that ‘she turned’ towards him, John 20:16.

Until this moment, she wasn’t looking at the speaker. These two facts alone would account for her not knowing it was Jesus. Perhaps Christ’s body is so changed as not to be recognised at once even by those who had known Him well. It has new powers and a new majesty, John 21:4 / Luke 24:16 / Luke 24:37 / Matthew 28:17.

Notice her words, ‘Sir, tell me and I will take Him away,’ John 20:15. How was she to carry a corpse, and where would she take it? Her loving devotion does not measure her strength. This is a beautiful example of the self-forgetfulness of love.

Why she even turned around at that point is open to speculation, but she is now facing an unknown man. He asks why she is crying, the same question the angels had just asked, John 20:13 / John 20:15. In her upset state, thinking Jesus was a gardener, Mary gives Him a brief answer, asking if He had anything to do with Jesus’ disappearance, John 20:15.

The whole conversation with this man is running along very similar lines to the one held moments before with the two angels, John 20:13-14. Jesus now reveals Himself with one word, ‘Mary’, John 20:16.

It must have been in the tenderness of His tone, or the gentleness of His voice, that sparks a memory in the mind of Mary, and she realises who she is addressing, John 20:16.

The word, ‘Rabboni!’ is the Aramaic form of ‘Rabbi’, and it means ‘my great Master’, John 20:16. Jesus tells her, ‘do not hold me,’ ‘do not touch me,’ John 20:17, but we must remember He allowed women to touch Him after His resurrection, Matthew 28:9. He even told Thomas to touch Him, John 20:27.

He isn’t talking here about mere touching, but holding, in other words, He is saying, ‘cease clinging to me’. Her instinctive desire would be to hold on to Jesus, to keep Him and not to let Him go; that wasn’t possible. She couldn’t keep Him physically with His disciples; a completely new period was to begin, involving His ‘going to his Father and her God’, John 20:17.

After that, His ascension, a new kind of fellowship, spiritual, would be available to all His followers. This couldn't be interrupted by any event. Conditions had changed, and the relationship between the disciples and their 'Didaskalos' and 'Kurios' must also change.

She must have run to Him and embraced Him, as He gently tells her not to hold to Him, not to cling to Him, **John 20:17**, referring also to the fact that His current reappearance was just a short and temporary stay.

What did Jesus mean when He said, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God?' **John 20:17**. Remember on the cross, Jesus promises the penitent thief, 'today you will be with me in paradise,' **Luke 23:43**.

The intermediate state was transformed by Jesus' emphasis on being with him 'today.' There's no denying where Jesus was going; He was going to 'paradise', **Luke 16:22 / Luke 23:43 / 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 / Revelation 2:7**.

If we say He went to heaven when He died, how do we understand what He said to Mary? Jesus is telling Mary not to cling to Him because there is work to be done. She needs to tell others what has happened, and so there's a sense of urgency.

She wanted to hold on and not let go, but Jesus wouldn't allow her. Remember, He allowed women to touch Him after His resurrection, **Matthew 28:9**. Later, Thomas was invited to touch Jesus, **John 20:27**.

Could it be possible that when Jesus speaks to Mary, He is speaking in terms of now clinging onto His new glorified body? He hasn't ascended to the Father in His new everlasting body. Isn't that what the resurrection is about? **1 Corinthians 15:35-44 / 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 / Romans 8:23 / Philippians 3:20-21**.

We know from these verses that we will be reconciled with our bodies at the resurrection, but they will be new, in terms of glorious. If we know this, then surely, it's possible that this is what Jesus meant when He spoke to Mary in terms of Him going to the Father.

No longer is paradise just an anticipatory condition awaiting the messianic presence at the end of the age. Those who die in faith will 'be with Christ,' **Philippians 1:23-24**. The dead in Christ will not experience life diminished, but life enhanced, as Jesus' words to Martha in **John 11** imply, **John 11:23-26**.

Jesus now charges Mary with the responsibility of telling the disciples this vital news, He is returning to God the Father, and her God, a reference to His victory, **John 20:17**.

Gladly Mary must have run the road to the disciples to tell them the news and the message, **John 20:18**. Jesus first appeared to the women, and He treated them as always beautifully, notice the first person to tell about the risen Christ was a woman.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

The importance of the resurrection of Jesus is summed up by Paul, **1 Corinthians 15:14-15 / 1 Corinthians 15:17**. Jesus died to atone for our sins. But we could not know that He did so unless we also knew that He arose from the grave, for one who did not have the power to conquer death would not have the power to forgive sins. Only in the light of the empty tomb does the cross have significance.

Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates the possibility of our resurrection. If He could conquer death for Himself, He could overcome it for His disciples. The Christian's hope of eternal life is inseparably connected with the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Christ also shows that Jesus brought an end to the old covenant and its law when He died on the cross. The Mosaic Age, in which Israel had been living for fifteen hundred years, ended at Calvary.

There Jesus blotted out ‘our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross,’ **Colossians 2:14**. From that time forth, all men, Jews and Gentiles, have lived in the Christian Age and are subject to the laws of Christ as recorded in the New Testament.

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

‘Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.’ **Mark 12:12-13**

Here we get a brief statement concerning the two men who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, **Mark 12:12**. Luke’s account gives us the full details, **Luke 24:13-35**.

A few hours after the women had reported that Jesus was resurrected, **Luke 24:22**, we find two disciples, one named Cleopas, **Luke 24:27 / John 19:25**, and the other’s name isn’t mentioned. They were on their way to their home town, Emmaus, which was around seven miles from Jerusalem.

It seems that they had given up hope concerning the Messiah establishing a physical kingdom; they, just like the other disciples, obviously didn’t expect or believe that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, **Mark 12:13 / Luke 24:25**.

Notice that when they were talking, Jesus walked with them, but they didn’t recognise Him. Jesus joined them, but He didn’t allow their minds to notice that it was actually Him in their presence.

In what way were they kept from recognising Him? Who knows, but Jesus Himself. Why did Jesus keep them from recognising Him? Possibly because He wants to hear their thoughts about what happened in Jerusalem, or possibly this was a test of their faith.

One thing is clear, though: all will be revealed later. We’re not to think that Jesus didn’t know what they were discussing, He knows all things, **John 2:24 / Matthew 9:4**.

He simply asked the question in order to partake in the conversation they were having and it seems the question puzzled the two disciples because everyone knew, the religious leaders knew, the Roman government knew, the common people knew and all were very much aware of everything which happened concerning the death of Jesus, **Acts 26:26**.

They all knew about this Jesus who grew up in a small village named, **Luke 1:26 / Luke 2:39 / Luke 18:37**. Notice that they said that Jesus ‘was a prophet who was powerful in word and deed’, they recognised that Jesus performed many miracles and taught many powerful things, **Matthew 21:11 / Luke 7:16 / John 3:2 / John 12:17 / Acts 2:22 / Acts 7:22**.

Jesus wasn’t just a prophet, but the prophet, **Deuteronomy 18:15 / Deuteronomy 18:17-19**. Jesus had a huge reputation throughout all of Palestine, but notice they use the word ‘was’, which is past tense.

In other words, their hope in the Messiah is gone, all their dreams and expectations have gone; how could a dead prophet establish a new kingdom and redeem Israel? And so, at this moment of time, it’s time to go home and get back to living as normal.

They told Jesus that the Messiah for whom they hoped was condemned to death and crucified. They obviously thought that the Messiah story ended at the tomb, despite the women reporting about the resurrection. It’s clear they had witnessed the death of Jesus, but not His resurrection.

We know that the crucifixion of Christ took place on Friday, since Luke here tells us that this event took place on Sunday. **John 21:19** tells us that Jesus appeared to the disciples on this same day.

By the time these two disciples had left the other disciples, Jesus hadn't appeared to any of them yet. Peter and John had gone to the tomb to confirm the report of the women, **Luke 24:12 / John 20:3-6**, but they themselves hadn't seen the risen Lord yet.

I don't believe Jesus was rebuking them by calling them 'foolish', **Luke 24:25-27**. I believe He recognised that these two disciples had fallen victim to the attitude of the Jewish nation as a whole. The Jews were looking for an earthly Messiah, **1 Peter 1:10-12**, who would establish an earthly kingdom, **Acts 1:6**.

Imagine being a Jewish child, going to the temple and the synagogue, listening to the Word of God being proclaimed and explained, week in and week out, all of your life. Imagine wondering who the Old Testament prophets were speaking of and listening to the descriptions of the coming Messiah.

Imagine hearing **Isaiah 53**, which speaks about the suffering Servant of God, imagine hearing how He was to be despised and rejected by many, even His own people. Imagine hearing about how He is a man of sorrows and accustomed to grief.

Imagine listening to every detail about Him who was to be crucified, **Psalm 22**. Imagine hearing this all your life, from a young Jewish child to adulthood, even to the point of reciting many of the texts so that you knew them off by heart.

And yet they didn't get it, they didn't see Jesus as the Messiah, they didn't believe in His resurrection, everything they practised and heard was pointing to Jesus, but they missed it. This is surely a lesson for us today, to get very familiar with the Scriptures.

Jesus tells them that the Messiah had to suffer and was glorified in His crucifixion, **Luke 24:25-27 / John 13:31 / Isaiah 53:5 / Hebrews 5:8-9**. Notice that Jesus began to explain the Scriptures to them. Which Scripture do you think He began with?

Remember, there are over three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament that refer to Jesus and the events surrounding His coming and establishment of His kingdom reign, all of which were fulfilled in Christ, **Ephesians 1:18-21**.

It seems that Jesus was eager to go further with the two disciples, but He wasn't invited as their guest, hence why they urged Him strongly to stay with them as their guest, **Luke 24:28-31**.

We can only imagine the excitement in their minds as Jesus taught them from the Scriptures, for once they were getting a true interpretation of the Scriptures and not some rabbi's opinion. Now they're thinking, 'this all makes sense now'.

Notice that they didn't recognise Jesus until after he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it. **Luke 24:28-31**. Why? I guess it's possible that they remembered how Jesus broke bread when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

There was definitely something in the manner in which Jesus took that bread, gave thanks and gave it to them that sparked something in their minds, **Luke 24:35**.

Their eyes were opened when Jesus decided to open their eyes, we don't know how He opened their eyes but when they did have their eyes opened, they knew exactly who Jesus was, He was the risen Lord, the Messiah.

Notice also that Jesus disappears from their sight, **Luke 24:28-31**. We must remember that Jesus now has a new resurrected body in which He could do things that He couldn't do before, **John 20:19-20 / John 20:26**. This is His real body, but it's not limited like our physical bodies, **1 Corinthians 15:52 / 1 John 3:2**.

There's nothing like studying the Scriptures and learning new things. Jesus interpreted the prophecies so that they could finally understand the true nature of the kingdom of God, which was spiritual, **Luke 24:32 / Luke 17:20-21**.

The Messiah was to be King, but not one who would rule physically here on Earth. After walking seven miles to get to Emmaus, they decided that everything they had witnessed and learned from Jesus was simply too important to keep to themselves, and so, they got up and walked back the seven miles to Jerusalem.

We don't know how many people were assembled, as the text says, 'they found the Eleven and those with them' **Luke 24:33-35**. They are now truly convinced about Christ being the Messiah and, more importantly, convinced that He indeed did rise from the dead.

Luke tells us that Jesus appeared to Peter, as does Paul, **1 Corinthians 15:5**, but there's no Scripture reference to say that He actually did. That's not a problem, though, because we know that Jesus did many other things which weren't recorded in the Scriptures, **John 21:25**.

Why did Jesus appear specifically to Peter? **Luke 24:33-35**. We don't know the answer, possibly to let him know that everything went to God's plan, or to reassure him after he denies Christ. We simply don't know, but we do know that Peter was never the same person again, **Acts 2:16-38**.

Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple explained everything which had happened to all those present, which I'm sure would have brought a lot of comfort to everyone. Their testimonies about the risen Lord would only strengthen the testimonies of the women and all those present.

The resurrection of Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith; everything, our hopes and dreams, is realised in and through the resurrection of Christ, because without it, we have no hope, **1 Corinthians 15:12-19**. We can only imagine the excitement in those two disciples as they learned from the Master teacher, realising that He is the risen Messiah. When was the last time you learnt something new and exciting from the Scriptures? Are we just as eager to learn from God's Word? It's no surprise that the very first disciples sat at the apostle's feet to learn and grow in their faith, **Acts 2:42**.

Imagine all the questions they must have had. It's not surprising that the Scriptures command us over and over again to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, **2 Peter 3:18**.

KEEPING HIS APPOINTMENT

'Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.' **Mark 16:14**

Here we read Jesus wasn't happy with the disciples because of their lack of faith and they totally refused to believe those who saw He had rose from the grave, **Mark 16:14**. This would include, Mary Magdalene, **John 20:11-17**, the other Mary and Salome, **Mark 16:1 / Matthew 28:9-10**, and the two disciples walking to Emmaus, **Mark 16:12-13 / Luke 24:13-32**.

Trapp, in his commentary, says the following.

'Unbelief is a bloody sin, **Hebrews 10:26**; a heavy sin, **John 3:19**; a most ungrateful, inexcusable sin, such as shuts a man up as a close prisoner in the dark dungeon of the law, unto unavoidable destruction, **Galatians 3:23**.'

It's a sad truth that within many of our congregations, we always have those who are late; they're late for worship, late for Bible study, and late for any event that the church has planned. They're never late for work or family events, which does beg the question of priorities.

As Coffman in his commentary rightly suggests, Christ made an appointment to meet His disciples in Galilee, and that appointment He kept. He kept it in spite of the following.

1. His sleeping disciples. 2. His betrayal. 3. Their forsaking Him. 4. His death. 5. His burial. 6. Peter's denial. 7. The big lie. 8. The unbelief of many.

The only people who didn't meet Christ on that mount in Galilee are those who didn't go there to keep their appointment.

Coffman goes on to say, in like manner, now Christ keeps His appointments with His disciples, in spite of similar lapses on their part, and what are those appointments? They are as follows.

1. To meet him in baptism. 2. At the Lord's table. 3. In the trials of life. 4. In death. 5. In the judgment to come.

Only those who will not obey Him shall miss the joy of meeting the Lord in those appointments, but in the case of the judgment, all shall keep that appointment, whether they desire to do so or not.

The time for excuses is over. If Christ can keep His appointment after enduring everything He went through, then surely, we can keep our appointments and come together at the appointed time to worship Him and study His Word!

THE GREAT COMMISSION

‘He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’ Mark 16:15-16

Before His ascension, Jesus gave His disciples a commission. It's recorded in different forms in the first three Gospels. Although He had previously given them a limited commission to go only to the Jews, His new commission was worldwide in its scope, **Mark 16:18 / Matthew 28:19-20 / Luke 24:46-47**.

CHRISTIANITY IS AGGRESSIVE

Jesus insists that His disciples take the Gospel to others. Therefore, He instructed the apostles to go. They were to teach or preach the Gospel, which, as we shall later learn, includes the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. They proclaimed Christ, not politics, science or economics. Their message was to be taken to all nations.

Unlike the law of Moses, the Gospel story is intended for those of every race or nationality who will accept Jesus as their Saviour. Christians cannot allow racial prejudice to confine their efforts to proclaim Christ. The conditions of salvation as given in the commission are simple. A sinner must believe in Christ, repent and then be baptised.

People often suggest that because Jesus did not say, ‘whoever does not believe and has not been baptised will be condemned.’ I want to suggest that He didn't need to mention baptism again, simply because no one who doesn't believe would ever be baptised in the first place.

Notice the Gospel has to be preached, **Mark 16:15**, it has to be believed, baptism follows, and then comes the promise of salvation, **Mark 16:16**. How anyone who truly loves Christ can say, ‘Lord, I don't believe that baptism is necessary?’ is beyond me.

A few people today suggest that BELIEF comes first, then SALVATION and then BAPTISM, but that is not the order that Jesus used. Notice that He did not say ‘Whoever BELIEVES and is SAVED shall be BAPTISED’. No matter how we look at this verse, Jesus clearly put salvation AFTER faith and baptism.

Look at the tenses in this text, ‘Whoever believes and is baptised,’ is present tense, but ‘will be saved’ is future tense. Jesus says in **Matthew 7:7**, ‘Seek, and you will find.’ No one would suggest that we find before we seek. This is the same idea in **Mark 16:16**, salvation follows the believing and the being baptised.

The arrangement of words is very important since Jesus says, ‘FAITH, BAPTISM and then SALVATION’. Since He put salvation after baptism and not before, since He restricts salvation to the person who believes and is baptised, and

since faith and baptism are connected with a view to the same purpose, it is crystal clear that baptism is essential to salvation.

Baptism is a command for believers, **Acts 10:48**, and it's an act done in the name of Jesus, **Acts 8:36-38 / Acts 10:48**. Described in the Scriptures as a burial, **Romans 6:3-4**. Defined by Bible dictionaries as 'plunging, dipping, immersing, submerging.'

An action that always involved going to a place where there was enough water, not bringing a small amount of water to the candidate, archaeology shows early baptisteries as pools of water.

Baptism is not a sprinkling of water on your head but a burial, **Romans 6:4**. It's not a way of joining the church because God is the One who adds you to the church. **Acts 2:41 / Acts 2:47**.

THERE ARE FOUR REASONS WHY WE MUST BE BAPTISED

1. We must be baptised if we want to be saved, **Mark 16:16**, and **1 Peter 3:21**.
2. We must be baptised to have our sins forgiven. **Acts 2:38**.
3. We must be baptised if we want to be 'in Christ', which means to be a Christian. **Galatians 3:27**.
4. We must be baptised if we want to become a part of the body of Christ, His church, **Ephesians 1:22-23**, and **1 Corinthians 12:13**.

The Great Commission concluded by instructing the apostles to teach the converts all of those things which Christ has commanded them, **Matthew 28:19-20**.

It is not enough to show the lost how to come to Christ. They must also be taught how to live for Him so that they may receive the eternal reward at the end of the way, **Matthew 28:19-20**.

Everything which Christ taught His disciples was to be taught to others. This shows us the importance of Bible study and getting to know exactly what Christ taught, in other words, for us to teach others what Christ taught.

This is exactly what the apostles did with the very first Christians. They were taught the Gospel, they responded to the Gospel, and then they were taught again, **Acts 2:42**.

Yes, it's true, in its context, the Great Commission was given to the apostles, but we still have a responsibility to share that same good news with others today, **2 Timothy 2:2**.

Let me ask you, why are people to be taught, and then taught again? Remember, Jesus taught His disciples, and when He left, the Holy Spirit was going to continue to teach His disciples, **John 14:26**. Paul went on to teach Timothy, and now Timothy is to teach others, **2 Timothy 1:1-2**.

Do you see what has happened? The disciple has now become the teacher. And guess what those whom Timothy had taught were to do? They were to go on and teach others.

One of the church fathers is a man named Polycarp, who lived between 69 and 155 A.D. But more importantly, he was a disciple of the apostle John, and what did he do?

Another church father is a man named Irenaeus, who lived around 120/140 A.D. He was the disciple of John and also Polycarp. Do you see what I'm getting at here?

What started off as Jesus teaching His disciples and then the Holy Spirit teaching His disciples, His disciples went on to make other disciples who went on to teach others to become disciples.

The teachings of Jesus have been passed down through the centuries from one person to another. And we are blessed to have our Bibles today so that we can carry on teaching others. It's important to teach, baptise and teach again so that those who are taught can then go on to teach others what they have learned.

That's one reason why John tells his readers that they must 'continue in the teachings of Christ', otherwise, they will lose their relationship with God and His Son, **2 John 1:8-9**. In other words, it's not enough to start with the teachings of Christ; we must continue in His teachings, otherwise, we will lose our salvation.

'And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.' **Mark 16:17-18**

Notice that Jesus gave them 'signs' to confirm their message, **Mark 17-18**. It's very important to remember that Jesus is speaking to His disciples, and He gave them signs to confirm the message. What was the purpose of miracles in the ministry of Christ, or the apostolic age? Their design must be consistent with the lofty theme of redemption.

THE ASCENSION

'After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven, and he sat at the right hand of God.' **Mark 16:19**

After Jesus told His disciples they would be witnesses, and they would receive the Holy Spirit with power in Jerusalem, He led them to somewhere near Bethany, Mount Olivet, **Acts 1:12**, which is east of Jerusalem, where He blessed them. It was then that He was taken up into heaven, **Luke 24:50-51 / Acts 1:9**. This happened ten days before the first Pentecost after the resurrection.

His new resurrected body was raised up into heaven so that He could assume His authority, **Daniel 7:13-14 / Ephesians 1:20-22 / Philippians 2:9-11**. Jesus is now at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords, **1 Timothy 6:15**.

He is now reigning over all things, **Ephesians 1:22-23 / 1 Peter 3:22**. And He will continue to reign until the last enemy, death, has been conquered, **1 Corinthians 15:24-28**.

Notice that Jesus was taken up 'before their very eyes,' **Acts 1:9**. Why? Simply because they had to witness this to further establish their faith in Christ, and when they were sharing the Gospel, they could tell people that what they had witnessed was real and not some made-up story.

We must remember there had been at least ten appearances of Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection, but this was to be an event they would never forget in a hurry.

Luke tells us that a cloud hid Jesus from the disciples' sight, **Luke 23:43 / Mark 16:19 / Daniel 7:13-14 / Psalm 68:18 / Psalm 110:1 / John 20:17 / Hebrews 4:14 / Hebrews 9:24 / 1 Peter 3:22**.

When we think about it, there were clouds involved in His transfiguration, **Matthew 17:5**, Jesus speaks about His coming 'in the clouds of heaven', **Mark 14:62**, and when we read the Old Testament, we read about a cloud being visible to let the Israelites know that the glory of God was present at the tent of meeting, **Exodus 40:34**.

THE TWO MEN

There's no doubt that these two men were angels dressed in white clothing, Acts 1:10-11 / Matthew 28:3 / Mark 16:5 / Luke 24:4 / John 20:12.

THE QUESTION

The angels ask the disciples, 'Why do you stand here looking into the sky?' Acts 1:10-11. To me, this is one of the most unfair questions we find in the Scriptures. Think about it! If you were there and witnessed someone ascending into the heavens, wouldn't you be amazed and just stand there looking up?

Notice that the angels tell them that '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,' Acts 1:10-11.

If this doesn't tell us about how He will return, I don't know what will. There's no secret or invisible return of Christ mentioned here or anywhere in the Scriptures. He left in the clouds, and He will return in the clouds, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

'Coming in the clouds' is simply judgment talk which speaks of God coming in judgement on people or a nation, Matthew 24:30 / 1 Thessalonians 4:17 / Revelation 1:7.

The reasons the angels asked the question, Acts 1:11, wasn't to rebuke them but to remind them that there are more important things to be getting on with, specifically they had to get on with the great commission, Mark 16:15 / Matthew 28:19-20, and wait on the promised Holy Spirit from the Father to come upon them with power, Luke 24:49 / Acts 1:8.

Notice that the disciples worshipped Him, Luke 24:52-53. This would simply be the natural response to witnesses who saw the Lord going up into heaven. If they didn't believe He was the Messiah, the Christ, if they didn't believe He was Deity, up to this point, they certainly would have after witnessing His ascension.

Why did they return to Jerusalem? Simply because this is what Jesus commanded them to do, Luke 24:49 / Acts 1:4. He commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they had received the promise, the Holy Spirit with power, Acts 1:5. Although Jesus brought an end to all the temple ceremonies and traditions, the disciples went back to the temple to praise God. Why? Possibly out of habit or possibly because that's where a great number of people would be gathered, and this could be an opportunity to share the Gospel with others. Remember, the temple is still standing at this point and wouldn't be destroyed until 70 A.D.

CONCLUSION

When we read the account of Jesus' ascension, we read it as if it were a common, everyday event. I can imagine the disciples being a little frightened, whilst being in complete awe as they witness their Master being raised into the sky. This would have been incredible to see, and I'm sure we would speak about it all the days of our lives, to anyone who would listen.

When Jesus returns, it will be personal, 1 Thessalonians 4:16; it will be visible, 1 John 3:2; it will be audible, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 / 1 Corinthians 15:22; it will be communal, 1 Thessalonians 4:14 / Matthew 16:27 / 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7; it will be final, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

The question we all need to ask ourselves, whether we're Christians or not, is simply this: Are we ready for His return?

‘Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.’ Mark 16:19-20

Of the early disciples who were endowed with spiritual gifts, Mark declares, the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it, **Mark 16:19-20**.

The function of the ‘signs’ was to ‘confirm’ the revelatory process, i.e., the word of truth being communicated from God to man. The writer of Hebrews argues similarly, **Hebrews 2:3-4**. Of special interest in these passages is the term ‘confirm,’ ‘bebaioo’. The word denotes evidence that establishes the validity of the divinely given word.

The supernatural gifts of the primitive age, therefore, had as their design the establishment of the credibility of Christ and His spokesmen, and so ultimately, the validation of their message, namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world!

Now observe this very important point. If it can be established that those early miracles do corroborate the testimony of Christ, and those commissioned by Him, and further, that the recording of these events in the New Testament was designed to perpetually accomplish that function, then it stands as demonstrated that the repetition of such signs is not needed today, **1 Corinthians 13:8-12**.

The fact is, that’s exactly what is affirmed by the apostle John. He declares that the ‘signs’ of Christ, which he records in his Gospel account, ‘are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,’ **John 20:31**. Even those who claim that God is working miracles today, when asked if they believe that the recorded miracles of Christ in the New Testament are sufficient to establish faith in Him, will answer affirmatively.

It ought to be abundantly clear, therefore, that since the miracles of the Bible continue to accomplish their original purpose, there is no need for a repetition of them today. They are not being replicated in this age!

If these verses only apply to the apostles, then what about the Great Commission? Would that only apply to them and not to us today? Well, the apostles have given the Great Commission, but we have the responsibility to share that good news with others, too, even today, as I mentioned earlier, **2 Timothy 2:2**.

The Gospel of Mark closes with a note about the results of the great mission Jesus entrusted to the apostles. After He had ascended back to heaven, they went out and began to preach everywhere, just like Jesus told them. The Lord blessed their revelation of the Gospel message with signs to confirm it, just as He said He would, **Mark 16:20 / Acts 14:3 / Hebrews 2:3-4**.