MYSTERIES OF THE MESSIAH

*Mini-Vol. 7: Units 05 & 06*

William H. Heinrich

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Categories of Topics

**Unit 05 The Early Ministry of Jesus**
- **05.01 The Ministry of John the Baptist**
  The unique Jewish baptism of John
- **05.02 The Introduction and Temptations of Jesus**
- **05.03 The Witness of John the Baptist**
- **05.04 The Ministry of Jesus Begins**
  Jewish political-messianic expectations
- **05.05 Jesus Reveals Himself**
  The first miracle at a wedding; first temple cleansing; banking system of the Jews; Nicodemus, Jewish baptisms, and the new birth from above

**Unit 06 - The Ministry of Jesus Accelerates**
- **06.01 The Ministry of Jesus Begins in Galilee**
  Samaritan woman; Kingdom of Heaven
- **06.02 Rejection in Nazareth**
  The unseen miracle; Dead Sea Scroll fragments and Lk. 4:16-30; women voices in the synagogue
- **06.03 The Ministry of Jesus Accelerates in Galilee**
  The incredible “ messianic miracles”
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“It is good to be highly educated; it is better to be educated from on high; but it is best to be both.”

- Author Unknown
# Tables of Content

## Unit 05 The Early Ministry Of Jesus

### 05.01 The Ministry Of John The Baptist

- **05.01.01** Introduction
- **05.01.02** Lk. 3:1-6 (Mt. 3:1-3; Mk. 1:2-4) John Declares His Ministry
- **05.01.03** Mt. 3:4-6 (Mk. 1:5-6) Along The Jordan River: John Baptizes Believers
- **05.01.04** Lk. 3:7-14 (Mt. 3:7-10) John Continues To Preach Repentance

### 05.02 The Introduction And Temptations Of Jesus

- **05.02.01** Introduction
- **05.02.02** Lk. 3:15-18 (Mt. 3:11-12; Mk. 1:7-8) John Announces The Christ
- **05.02.03** Mt. 3:13-17; Lk. 3:23a (Mk. 1:9-11) From Galilee To Jordan: Jesus Is Baptized
- **05.02.04** Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:13b (Lk. 4:1-13) Wilderness Mountain: The Devil Tempts Jesus

### 05.03 The Witness Of John The Baptist

- **05.03.01** Jn. 1:19-28 Bethany: John Explains His Ministry
- **05.03.02** Jn. 1:29-34 John Introduces Jesus

### 05.04 The Ministry of Jesus Begins

- **05.04.01** Introduction
- **05.04.02** Jn. 1:35-51 The First Disciples

### 05.05 Jesus Reveals Himself

- **05.05.01** Introduction
- **05.05.02** Jn. 2:1-11 The First Miracle In Cana
- **05.05.03** Jn. 2:12 Interlude At Capernaum
- **05.05.04** Jn. 2:13-25 First Temple Cleansing, Merchants Driven Out
- **05.05.05** Jn. 3:1-21 Nicodemus And His New Birth
- **05.05.06** Jn. 3:22-36 Jesus And John In Judea
- **05.05.07** Lk. 3:19-20 John The Baptist Imprisoned
Unit 06 - The Ministry Of Jesus Accelerates

06.01 The Ministry Of Jesus Begins In Galilee

06.01.01 Introduction

06.01.02 Jn. 4:1-3 Judea: Jesus Leaves For Galilee By Way Of Samaria

06.01.03 Jn. 4:4-26 The Village Of Sycar; The Samaritan Woman

06.01.04 Jn. 4:27-38 Spiritual Food

06.01.05 Jn. 4:39-42 Samaria: The First Woman Evangelist

06.01.06 Jn. 4:43-45 Galilee: Jesus Returns To The Provincial District Of Galilee

06.01.07 Jn. 4:46-54 Cana: Boy Healed In Capernaum

06.01.08 Mt. 4:12-17; Lk. 4:14-15 (Mk. 1:14-15) Capernaum

06.02 Rejection In Nazareth

06.02.01 Introduction

06.02.02 Lk. 4:16-30 Nazareth: Jesus Rejected In His Home

06.03 The Ministry Of Jesus Accelerates In Galilee

06.03.01 Lk. 5:1-11; Mt. 4:18-22 (Mk. 1:16-20) Sea Of Galilee: Peter And The Catch Of Fish

06.03.02 Mk. 1:21-22 (Lk. 4:31-32) Jesus Teaches At Capernaum

06.03.03 Mk. 1:23-28; Lk. 4:33-37 Man Delivered From A Demon

06.03.04 Mk. 1:29-31; Lk. 4:39 (Mt. 8:14-15) Peter’s Mother-In-Law Healed

06.03.05 Mk. 1:32-34 (Mt. 8:16-17; Lk. 4:40-41) Many Are Healed

06.03.06 Mk. 1:35-38 (Lk. 4:42-43) Jesus Goes Out To Pray

06.03.07 Mt. 4:23-25 (Mk. 1:39; Lk. 4:44) Jesus Travels Throughout Galilee

06.03.08 Mk. 1:40-45 (Mt. 8:1-4; Lk. 5:12-16) The Leper Is Healed, A Messianic Miracle

06.03.09 Lk. 5:17; Mk. 2:2-4a; Lk. 5:17-19 (Mt. 9:1-2) Capernaum: The Paralytic Is Healed Problem ??

06.03.10 Mk. 2:6-12 (Mt. 9:3-8; Lk. 5:21-26) Scribes Question Authority Of Jesus

06.03.11 Mk. 2:13-14 (Mt. 9:9; Lk. 5:27-28) Region Of Galilee: Matthew Is Called
05.01.00.A. THE PREACHING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST by Domenico Ghirlandaio 1475. The message of the coming messiah was a passion for John the Baptist. As will be shown, he did not fully understand the nature of Jesus, including the fact that He would be crucified (even though he is depicted holding a cross).

05.01.01 Introduction
John the Baptist was the herald who announced the coming of the Expected One sent by God. That was the only mission for which he was born and, as an orthodox Jew of a priestly family,
the Baptist began his ministry at age thirty. It is unclear how long he proclaimed the coming of our Lord before introducing Jesus to the Jewish world, but scholars universally agree that it was longer than their age difference of six months, probably a year or two. Therefore, because Jesus began His ministry at “about” the age of thirty, He was actually somewhat older which permitted sufficient time for John to proclaim His coming.

John and Jesus may have been cousins, but they were not alike in nature. John was a stern man of the desert wilderness and his message was one of denunciation and condemnation; calling for people to repent. Jesus had a milder temper, yet both were fearless when boldness and strength was required. They no doubt met once or twice a year in Jerusalem in the observances during the three festival weeks, but there are no records of that.¹ Both were troubled at the social and religious decay and passionately called men to seek God.

As for Jesus, the quiet days of seclusion in the little village of Nazareth were over. After the rejection by his hometown village He had moved to Capernaum (Mt. 4:13). He began His ministry of preaching the divine plan of salvation near the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee and in the surrounding villages, including those of Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Capernaum.

Capernaum was a well-established business center known for the manufacture of basalt (volcanic rock) grinding stones and fishing.² The large number of black basalt³ grinding stones and other utensils uncovered there are indicative of a thriving primitive industry. The village was also a resting point where international caravans traveling on the Via Maris stopped for supplies and to pay toll taxes. The significance of the Via Maris cannot be overstated, as thousands of people traveled on this road every year.

Capernaum was also the home of the Roman centurion and his soldiers. The purpose of the military presence was to protect the caravans from thieves and robbers, insure travelers would pay their taxes, and deter any Zealot activities in the area.⁴ The village of Gamala, located only a few miles to the north, was the hotbed of Zealot activity. For these reasons, pilgrims going to and

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3. Basalt is a volcanic rock that is soft and easily carved into ornamental and architectural shapes as well as grinding stones and wheels. The basalt rocks, which litter the hills around the northeastern Galilee area, came from several dormant volcanoes on the Golan Heights.

from Jerusalem for religious observances traveled in *festival caravans*.\(^5\)

Little is known of Bethsaida. Supposedly it was a fishing town situated on a hilltop along the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological excavations reveal that the village dates to about the ninth century B.C. and it once had a protective city wall, the foundations of which have been dated to the Assyrian era. It is the only known village in Judaea to have had such a protective fortification. But by the time of Jesus it was an insignificant fishing town even though it had been enlarged and fortified by Herod’s son, Herod Philip.

Bethsaida was also the childhood home of Peter (Jn. 1:44). He moved to Capernaum either because the village was more observant of the Jewish laws and traditions, or because it was also the local center for Jewish sages and their schools. His marriage (Mk. 1:29-30) may also have been a reason. The only recorded miracle that took place there was of a blind man (Mk. 8:22-26). As to Chorisim, Scripture is silent about this village.

Jesus evidently spent considerable time in these three villages because He promised destruction because of their unbelief and rejection of the gospel. In fact, he gave the stinging words that the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, known for sodomy and uncontrolled homosexuality, would fare better than they would on judgment day (Mt. 11:24). Clearly hearing His word and rejecting it has profound consequences – as the proverbial saying goes “decisions determine destiny.” Today Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorizim are archaeological ruins and common tourist attractions.

The authentication of Jesus’ message by His works is the major characteristic of His ministry. Moses performed miracles as signs of judgment\(^6\) to authenticate his message, and Jesus likewise performed miracles to authenticate His message (Acts 2:22). But His were not signs of judgment, but miracles of healing, deliverance, love, and compassion. While the ultimate destiny of Moses was to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, the ultimate destiny of Jesus was to die on the cross for the sins (bondage) of humanity and give eternal life. As Moses led the children of Israel in their Exodus out of Egyptian bondage, likewise Jesus would lead anyone who would believe and follow Him out of the bondage of sin and into the Kingdom of God (cf. Isa. 40:3-5).\(^7\)

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6. Signs such as a hand becoming leprous and then restored to it healthy condition; a sea divided that was the escape for the Israelites but drowned the Egyptian army; Aaron’s rod becoming a snake and devouring the Egyptian snake (Aaron’s God destroyed the Egyptian gods).

7. See Appendix 3.
For four centuries after the prophetic ministries of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, God had not sent a prophet to His people. This period of history is sometimes referred to as the “silent years,” because no prophet had spoken. Note the words of two Jewish writers of the time:

Know that our fathers in former times and former generations had helpers, righteous prophets and holy men .... We were also in our country, and they helped us when we sinned, and they intervened for us with him who created us since they trusted in their works. And the Mighty One heard them and purged us from our sins. But now, the righteous have assembled and the prophets are sleeping. Also we have left our land, and Zion has been taken away from us and we have nothing now apart from the Mighty One and His Law.

2 Baruch 85:1-3

When the latter prophets died, that is, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, then the Holy Spirit came to an end in Israel.

Mishnah, Sotah 13:3

The Jews clearly recognized their dilemma, which only added to the expectations of a coming Messiah. Therefore, when John began preaching, the people recognized the silence had come to an end, and he had an immediate audience. However, while there was no prophet, God was very active in the lives of the righteous.

05.01.02 Lk. 3:1-6 (See also Mt. 3:1-3; Mk. 1:2-4) The Wilderness Near Jordan, A.D. 26

JOHN DECLARES HIS MINISTRY

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God’s word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, preaching a baptism

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8. Messianic scholars agree that while no prophet spoke for four centuries, God was clearly active in the lives of His people as demonstrated by divine interventions throughout the Inter-Testamental Period. Therefore, they say that this era was not a period of “silent years.”

9. See also 1 Macc. 4:46, 9:27, 14:41; Josephus, Against Apion 1:41.
of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:\(^{10}\)

**Prepare the way for the Lord:**

A voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

make His paths straight!

\(^{5}\) Every valley will be filled,

and every mountain and hill will be made low;

the crooked will become straight,

the rough ways smooth,

\(^{6}\) and everyone will see the salvation of God. (Isa. 40:3-5)

The divine calling of John the Baptist fulfilled the promise given by the prophet Malachi, who said, “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (Mal. 4:5). John called the Jewish people to repentance, a concept that was somewhat new to them. The common belief was that since they were God’s Chosen People they were already saved, and there was no need for repentance. They were familiar with repentance from the standpoint that sins had to be forgiven, but would not keep them from the future messianic banquet. Only absolutely “pure” Israelites were assured of the messianic salvation – no “impure” blood from heathen nations would be accepted – or so they thought.\(^{11}\) Obviously this was not the opinion of John the Baptist or Jesus.

Jews immersed themselves in a mikvah that was filled with water before entering the temple or synagogue, although that was not for the repentance of sin but for the removal of defilement.\(^{12}\) John proclaimed the old practice of immersion in a new context, that is, the cleansing from a sinful lifestyle. Most scholars believe that John’s baptism was symbolic of true repentance whereas the baptism most commonly thought of by the Pharisees was the conversion of a Gentile to Judaism.\(^{13}\)

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10. See commentary on 05.01.02.Q1, “Is there a mistake in the quotation of Isaiah?”


13. For more information of various reasons for baptism, see baptism as related to Nicodemus in 05.05.05.Q2 and Q3.
The religious establishment was not too pleased with John – he was preaching and baptizing even though he did not even graduate from one of their prestigious schools. Furthermore, he did not acknowledge their cherished high social positions, rather, he used powerful and stinging words against them. He called them a “brood of vipers” (Mt. 3:7) and proclaimed destruction and judgment as symbolized with the phrase, the “axe is ready” (Mt. 3:10). He declared that everyone who did not produce good fruit in this life would be cut down and thrown into the fire (Mt. 3:10). He promised profound judgments to come, yet his threatening prophecies were not fulfilled during the lifetime of Jesus.

John’s message of repentance and holy living had a similar ring to the teachings of the Essenes. They had separated themselves from established Judaism due to the corruption in the temple. Some scholars believe John may have been raised by or lived in the Essene community as a youth. Since Scripture indicates that his parents were old, they, no doubt, passed on while he was still young and the Essenes were known to take in orphaned children, especially those of priestly families.

The baptizer came at a time (mid to late 20s, A.D.) when the social-political tension was near the breaking point; every few years there was a revolt in which hundreds, sometimes thousands, were crucified. Caesar Tiberius expounded Hellenistic thought and lifestyle throughout the empire; Pilate angered his subjects with his cruelties, extortions, indolence, and murders. Herod Antipas was almost as wicked as his father Herod the Great and lived the pagan life of a Jewish apostate with reckless lust. Caiaphas and Annas, the temple priests who received their secure positions from Pilate, used the temple to enhance their own wealth at the expense of the common Jews who came to worship.

The Sadducees and leading Pharisees worked in harmony with powerhouse family – Caiaphas and Annas. The common people had become economic slaves in their Promised Land, a land full of pagan idolatry. Two Hellenistic philosophies, Epicureanism and Stoicism, contended

14. John the Baptist used figurative language that is reflective of agriculture and desert life. Therefore, he uses terms such as brood of vipers, fruits (of repentance), the axe at the root of the tree, baptism of fire, the threshing floor, and the burning of the chaff. It was typical language often expressed by orthodox rabbis to those who did not live or preach biblical principles.

15. The term “fire” was frequently used by Old Testament prophets: Isa. 29:6; 66:15; Ezek. 38:22; Amos 1:4; 7:4; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8; Mal. 3:2; 4:1. The term is also found in numerous extra-biblical books such as Jubilees 9:15; 36:10 and in the Dead Sea Scrolls.


17. Gnosticism would not become influential until the 2nd century A.D.

for popular supremacy. The former concentrated on sensuality and the latter on intellectualism and pride. Both were influencing Jewish thought and culture. To counteract this pagan invasion, the scribes and Pharisees emphasized traditionalism, multiplied the regulations of daily life, and elevated their Oral Law over the Written Law, while at the same time elevating themselves in the eyes of the people.

The Jewish peasants had nowhere to turn, no one to help them. Into this caldron of hostilities, bitterness, anger, revolts and rumors of revolts, John preached a message from Isaiah, “Prepare the way for the Lord.” Finally, the four-century silence of God was broken; four centuries with not a single voice from a prophet. People flocked to hear John, hoping that in some way he would deliver them from their heartache, tears, and Roman overlords. The entire life of John was a sermon. His simple message was an earth shaking: “Get ready for the coming of the Lord.”

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea” Since there was no universal calendar, it was customary for ancient writers to connect the occurrence of a major event to a year of the king’s reign. Each kingdom had its own calendar and followed a formula similar to the following:

In the “X” year of King “Y,” these events occurred….

Two other biblical examples are,

1 In the eighteenth year of Israel’s King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam became king over Judah…. 3a Abijam walked in all the sins his father before him had committed.

1 Kings 15:1, 3a

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20. This formula for dating was used some thirty times in 1 and 2 Kings.
1 In the twenty-third year of Judah’s King Joash son of Ahaziah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria and reigned 17 years. 2 He did what was evil in the Lord’s sight and followed the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat had caused Israel to commit; he did not turn away from them.

2 Kings 13:1-2

Luke used the time formula to emphasize the importance of the ministry of John the Baptist. But reconciling the “fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar” to today’s calendar has been a subject of debate. Four considerations are presented.

1. Since Tiberius reigned with Augustus for a brief time, the question is whether his reign included the time of co-regency. It was not uncommon for kings and emperors to co-reign – meaning that there were two monarchs in power at the same time. Augustus made Tiberius his colleague in the years A.D. 11 or 12. When Augustus Caesar died in August A.D. 14 and Tiberius Caesar took full control on September 17, A.D. 14.21 The question is whether Luke intended to include the time of co-regency and which calendar he was using. There were a number of calendars at the time: Jewish, Syrian-Macedonian, and Egyptian calendars, but the calendar of choice was probably the Julian calendar. Luke, no doubt, thought he was recording a precise date, but could not foresee the challenges that would follow centuries later.22

2. The first year of a king’s reign was often known as the “Ascension year,” and the following year was considered the first year, even though in modern thinking, this would have been the second year of rulership.

3. The Jewish provinces were under the control of the Roman provincial capital in Damascus, Syria, where the calendar year began on September 1. If Luke intended to include the time of co-regency then the fifteenth year would have been from October 1, A.D. 27 to September 30, A.D. 28.23 If the Roman calendar is used, then the fifteenth year began August 19, A.D. 28 and ended on the following August 18, A.D. 29, which would make the date of crucifixion to be in A.D. 30, if Jesus ministered for three and a half years (which in all probability was a year longer).24 If, however, Luke counted the

21. This date is reconciled to today’s calendar. See Appendix 1 for dates of reign.
24. Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ. 30-37; Hoehner presents five interpretations of dating the beginning date of the Baptist. This writer believes that four of them are highly unlikely for various reasons; See Pentecost, The
co-regency of the Caesars, then the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar would have been in A.D. 26, which works very well with biblical chronology.

4. Finally, another clue is the temple remodeling program, which was in its forty-sixth year (Jn. 2:20). John’s use of the verb (was) implies that the construction was still in process. The beginning of this massive project can be reckoned to 20-19 B.C., in accord with the writings of Josephus, who stated this work began in the 18th year of Herod’s reign. However, he also indicated that construction began three years earlier. Some scholars believe the earlier date may have been the preliminary design work. If the most likely beginning date of the temple reconstruction was the 18th year of Herod’s reign, then the forty-sixth year would be late in the year A.D. 28, the year of the beginning of the ministry of Jesus.

Of these possibilities, traditional scholarship has concluded that Tiberius started his reign when he became co-regent in A.D. 11. This would place the start of John’s ministry in the year 26 A.D.

“Tiberius Caesar … Pontius Pilate … Herod … Philip … and Lysanias … Annas and Caiaphas.” These men were not mythical characters but real persons, who, by their position against Jesus, contributed to the spreading of Christianity. One of the outstanding features of Scripture that is profoundly different from other religions is the fact that nearly all personalities and places have been verified from extra-biblical historical sources. Note the years of reign of the following: Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 14-37). Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-36), Herod [Antipas] (4 B.C. - A.D. 39), Philip (4 B.C. - A.D. 34), Lysanias (unknown), Annas (A.D. 6-15) and Caiaphas (A.D. 18-36). Luke, more than any other New Testament writer, was careful to anchor events of Jesus to prominent kings and places. Later, using legal terminology, Peter would write,
For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

2 Peter 1:16

Finally, Herod Antipas is identified as Herod, tetrarch of Galilee. The Greek phrase *tetrarch* (5076) means *ruler of the fourth part.* The title resulted from the division of the Herod the Great’s Empire into four parts. For the Roman senate to convey a title as “tetrarch” was somewhat degrading for whoever received it, but a title such as “King of the Jews” would have stirred great animosity among the Jews.

“God’s word came to John.” This is a literary formula, indicating that the prophetic message is from God. The word “word” in Greek is *rhema,* meaning *spoken word,* as opposed to *logos* meaning *written word.* *Rhema* is similar to the introductions of earlier prophets: Haggai (1:1), Zechariah (1:1), and Malachi (1:1) which made the connection of these prophets to John. In essence, everyone understood that he was in the same office as the post-exilic prophets, a position underscored by his miraculous birth to elderly priestly parents. When the word of God came to John, he preached repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins throughout the remote areas of the Judean Desert. Thus, he was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1.

“Repentance.” (Gk. *metanoias*). This word has dual meanings: a deep mournful sorrow and a complete change of life; a turn-around to seek a moral change. Essentially, however, this compound word connects time and change, so that the final meaning is to think differently after. The definition includes a sense of reconciliation and, furthermore, while there is a sense of turning “from” sin there is also a deeper and more profound sense of turning “to” God. John’s message emphasizes that failure to repent would bring divine wrath and punishment, while obedience would result in entering the Kingdom of God.

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31. While Luke recorded the year in relation to the year of the Caesar, the calendar he used is unknown. The fifteenth year would probably be August 28 to August 29. Less likely is that he used the Syrian calendar, which would have the year reckoned between the fall of 27 and the fall of the following year. See Liefeld, “Luke.” 8:854.


A Lesson in First Century Hermeneutics:

05.01.02.X The Major Prophet Speaks.

It was a common interpretation that when a speaker quoted or paraphrased two Old Testament prophets, the credit was given to the major prophet. Giving credit to only one speaker or writer would never be accepted in today’s academic world, but it was common practice in biblical times. A classic example is the passage of Isaiah and Malachi. But because some critics have not understood the biblical hermeneutic, they have concluded there must be a mistake in Scripture.

05.01.02.Q1 Is there a mistake in the quotation of Isaiah?

The issue begins with the simple statement, “the prophet Isaiah” who was a major Old Testament prophet and that is the key to understanding this passage. John said he quoted the prophet Isaiah (40:3), but the parallel quotation in Luke 3:4 begins with words from another prophet, Malachi (3:1). In fact, Isaiah's poetic phrase barely resembles the complete words attributed to him by any the three gospel writers. NOTE: Concerning Isaiah 40:3, please see the video “Insights into Selected Biblical Difficulties” 04.04.06.V.

The explanation is that the gospel writers combined the key words from two prophets and attributed them to the major prophet, which was common hermeneutics of the first century. This passage is better understood in light of basic knowledge of Hebrew poetry, which in this case, emphasizes the key theme.

\[
\begin{align*}
A & \quad v. 2 & I \text{ will send my messenger ahead of you,} \\
B & & \text{Who will prepare your way.} \\
C & \quad v. 3 & A \text{ voice of one calling in the desert.} \\
B' & & \text{Prepare a way for the Lord,} \\
A' & & \text{make straight paths for him.}
\end{align*}
\]

Malachi 3:1 (NIV 1984)

The poetic parallel style of Hebrew literature quickly demonstrates the relationship of the two Old Testament passages and points to the theme of the message which is always the center line (C). Observing Mark’s quotation as a whole unit, line A (v. 2 is Mal. 3:1) is the “messenger,” identified as the voice in line C (v. 3 is Isa. 40:3). There is a mnemonic here, meaning a play on

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35. See Appendix 30 for other applied hermeneutical principles.
words that is easily remembered by the listeners. Malachi uses the word “messenger,” meaning not an ordinary man, but a prophet. John’s name means “my messenger.” Note that lines A and A’ have a common theme, as do lines B and B’. The focus of the poem is the centered line – line C – “A voice of one calling in the desert.”

“Prepare the way for the Lord.” Some older English Bibles have the word “LORD” in capital letters. The capitalization indicates that the original name of God was “Jehovah,” as it is in this case. The application by the Holy Spirit of what is said about Jehovah in the Old Testament is focused upon Jesus in the New Testament – that is that Jesus is God. The focus of this phrase is the preparation for the coming of Jehovah as reflected in Isaiah 40:3. And while Luke said “Prepare the way for the Lord,” Matthew summed up the entire ministry of John in this statement “Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:2).

Every winter heavy rains washed rocks, trees, and other debris onto the roadways, as well as creating holes and gullies by washing the sandy soil away. The extensive damage to the roads needed to be repaired before the king traveled on them (cf. Isa. 57:14). The king sent road crews out every spring to repair the damage. However, in addition, whenever the king was going to be traveling to a village, a herald would go ahead and tell the villagers that their king was coming.

The villagers would then repair any remaining damage to the highways. John used this imagery to tell the people to get ready for their king, who was about to come. With John’s reference to the prophecy of Isaiah, his listeners realized it was time for the prophecies to be fulfilled. Four centuries of divine silence had ended.

It should be noted that beginning on the 15th of the preceding month of Passover, all bridges and roads leading to Jerusalem were repaired to accommodate the influx of pilgrims. The entire infrastructure of Jerusalem including roads, bridges, water lines, were paid for by funds given to the temple. An example was preserved by the historian who indicated that before Emperor Vespasian traveled, his military went out first to repair the roads. In the early days of the First Revolt (A.D. 66-73), the Tenth Legion first fought the Zealots in Galilee and then marched south to destroy Jerusalem. Vespasian was concerned that the condition of the road would slow down the march and the enemy might then attack from the woods. So among his directives he ordered that,

> Next to these (footmen and horsemen) followed ten out of every hundred, carrying along with them their arms, and what was necessary to measure out a camp withal; and after them, such as were to make the road even and straight, and if it were anywhere rough and hard to be passed over, to plane it, and to cut down the woods that hindereth their march, that the army might not be in distress, or tired with their march.

*Josephus, Wars 3.6.2 (117-118)*

05.01.03 Mt. 3:4-6 (See also Mk. 1:5-6) Along the Jordan River

**JOHN BAPTIZES THE BELIEVERS**

> 4 John himself had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were flocking to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins.

John drew large crowds, in part because of his message, and in part because his miraculous birth was well known. His popularity escalated into what may be considered today as international status. The effect of his ministry can be seen in Acts 19, where the Apostle Paul met Jews in Ephesus who were baptized by John but had not heard of receiving the Holy Spirit. Obviously

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38. Parenthesis insert mine for clarification.
John never traveled to Ephesus, but distant Jews who came to Jerusalem took John’s message home with them. Eventually, some of them met the apostle.

“John himself had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt.” It is often said that John’s clothes and eccentric lifestyle echoed the prophet Elijah (2 Kgs. 1:8). Impoverished people who could not afford woolen clothing wore clothes woven from camel hair.\(^{39}\) But more importantly, it was the custom of the Hebrew prophets to express themselves in a dramatic manner if they felt their words could not adequately communicate the message. John clearly identified with the ancient prophets as well as with the people who were reduced to economic slavery\(^{40}\) by the Romans.

Just as both prophets, Elijah and Zechariah, sounded warnings to their people and predicted future events, and John did the same. He lived in isolation and identified with the misery of the peasant people, rejecting the comfortable wealthy lifestyle of the temple priesthood that he could have enjoyed. John seems to have had an immediate following. It is noteworthy that, centuries earlier, just as Elijah had his archenemies, Ahab and Jezebel; eventually John would have his, Herod and Herodias.

“Locusts and wild honey.” Eating locusts and honey was not a menu most people would consider, even in the worst of times, but the Baptist was different. The Mosaic Law prevents Jews from eating insects, with the exception of locusts, a/k/a “grasshoppers” (Lev. 11:22). However, it is highly doubtful these bugs were a part of John’s dietary plan for two significant reasons:

1. The insect has only a short one or two month life cycle and, therefore, would only have been a brief menu option. Hence, John would have been starving about ten months of the year.

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39. The camel hair garment was also reflective of the prophet Zechariah (13:4), who wrote the prophetic Old Testament book that bears his name.

40 The subject of high taxation that resulted in economic slavery is presented by Josephus, Antiquities 17.11.2 (307-308). See also 02.03.03 “Economy” and 03.06.04 “4 B.C. The Death of Herod the Great.”
2. The most likely definition is that the *locust* was the bean pod of the locust tree.\(^1\) This wild edible plant has a taste similar to chocolate and is commonly known today as *carob* or *carob pod*.\(^2\) The bean pod is found in abundance and would have been dried, stored in clay jars, and enjoyed throughout the year. More importantly, it was also the menu during times of famine, or by desperately poor people – the kind that might wear clothes made from camel hair. Even though this tree does not grow in the desert areas where John did most of his preaching, the pods are easy to carry and preserve well in the desert climate.

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the whole world. In this case, the father of the young man, who may have had some messianic aspirations said,

The whole world will be nourished because of my son Hanina - and a morsel of carob bean will satisfy my son Hanina for a week.

Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anith 24b

Just as the word _locust_ has a definition somewhat different from today’s concept, so does the word _honey_. The definition of the sweet syrup is not restricted to bee honey, but includes any type of sweet syrup originating from a plant or bee. In this context, John’s diet most likely was _date honey_, or _syrup_ from the date palm tree. This is found in the Jerusalem Talmud as well as in Josephus. When Josephus described Jericho, which is near the area where John preached and baptized Jesus, he referred to the honey that was squeezed from the palm trees, as well as honey made by the honeybee.

There are in it (meaning “Jericho countryside”) many sorts of palm trees that are watered by it, different from each other in taste and name; the better sort of them, when they are pressed, yield an excellent kind of honey, not much inferior in sweetness to other honey. This country produces honey from bees; it also bears that balsam which is the most precious of all the fruits in that place.

Josephus, Wars 4.8.3 (468-469a)

Therefore, the phrase _locust and honey_ was not to be literally interpreted according to modern definitions, but according to ancient definitions that were also symbolic of a poor and humble lifestyle of the prophets. This is an excellent example that demonstrates how a New Testament study cannot be complete without thorough study of the Hebrew Bible and, preferably, related rabbinic writings. The focal point is not the diet or lifestyle of the Baptist preacher, but his message, which was “clothed” in the message of earlier prophets. Finally, for those who are die-hard loyalists to believing that John ate the bug locusts and not the bean pod locusts, the following two writers will be of particular interest:

1. Herodotus (484 – 425 B.C.) said that the insects were dried in the sun, ground into a powder, and then mixed with milk for a beverage.

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44. Bacon, _Walking Beside Jesus_. 33; Jerusalem Talmud, _Bikkurim_ 1.3; Hareveni, _Nature in Our Biblical Heritage_. 35.

45. Klausnitzer, _Insects: Their Biology and Cultural History_. 51
2. Diodorus Sisulus (1st century B.C.) wrote of a group within the population of Ethiopia, he called them “Acridophagous,” whose staple food was locusts preserved with salt to last all year.

While locusts and grasshoppers may have been a dietary delight in some cultures, for Jewish people, resorting to eating insects was a sign of poverty.

“Baptized by him.” The term baptize is from the Greek word baptismos or baptisma.46 Its root word bapto means to dip, and as such was used by the Greek poet Homer to describe the dipping of hot steel in cold water to temper it.47 The Hebrew counterpart is tabhal, and is often translated simply as to dip, as when Naaman dipped himself in the Jordan River (2 Kgs. 5:14).48 Therefore, the Jews were already familiar with the rite of baptism. It was afforded to those who had become proselytes to the Jewish faith, of which some scholars believe there were many.49

05.01.03.Q1 What is the primary difference between immersion in a mikvah, and baptism?

Baptism was for the repentance of sin as well as a commitment to something – an office, a calling, or a way of life. It represented a change of lifestyle. Immersion in a mikvah was for the removal of defilement, such as walking over a grave or touching a corpse. However, the ritual of dipping or immersion daily in a mikvah was not for baptism (repentance of sin) but for the cleansing of defilement. Priests immersed themselves daily before entering the temple. Also, the Essenes in Qumran immersed themselves three times daily to remain ritually pure.50 In Jewish thinking, purity (Gk. katharos) was defined within the realm of physical, religious, and ethical purity; a term that has both figurative and literal requirements of behavior.51 There are several unique features of John’s ministry and baptism.52

47. Homer. Odyssey. 9.392.
50. Harrison, A Short Life of Christ. 66-70.
51. Link and Schattenmann. “Pure, Clean.” 3:102-03.
52. According to Scott, Jr. Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament. 146, one of the earliest scholars to research Jewish baptisms was a French scholar, Joseph Thomas, who authored Le Mouvement baptist en Palestine et Syrie (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1935). For more on Jewish baptisms, see 05.05.02 and Nicodemus in 05.05.05.
1. The people remembered his miraculous birth and, so when he began to preach, crowds came to hear him.

2. There were no miracles in the ministry of John, but the Holy Spirit functioned through his sermons of repentance.
3. His baptisms did not have a concept of the death, burial, and resurrection as in the baptism of Jesus.

4. His was a baptism of repentance and purity — that those who were baptized were sorry (repentant) for their sins and they dedicated themselves to live according to the precepts set forth in the Hebrew Bible. The baptisms by the disciples were like those of John.

5. John was the forerunner of the Messiah. Those who were baptized by him also identified themselves with him – and as such – they would identify themselves with the coming Messiah and the Messiah’s message about the Kingdom of God.

In 1947, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, Hebrew and Christian scholars were surprised to learn that the Essenes, who predated Christ by more than a century, had a doctrine and practice of baptism with amazing similarities to early Christianity. Namely, immersion with a repentant heart is a practice that is not found in any other Jewish writings of this time. In one of the scrolls known as the Damascus Document (a/k/a the Community Rule) is a rule in column three that states if a person immerses himself and is not sorry for his sins, he will not be forgiven, even with all the water in the world. Repentance was to be coupled with water immersion; the water cleans the body, the Holy Spirit cleans the inside of the person. Therefore, many scholars believe the doctrine of baptism was not a new concept for the early church, but was patterned from the Essenes and their ritualistic baths. However, this writer believes that the Essene practice of baptism may have been part of the meaning of the phrase “in the fullness of time,” Jesus came to this earth (Gal. 4:4). Men were ready for Him in ways beyond our comprehension.


54. Martinez, The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. 5.

55. For more information on baptism, see 05.05.05.Q2 and Q3.
Finally, for a point of clarification, John’s baptism was a repentance baptism for the forgiveness of sins. The baptism of Jesus is not only for the forgiveness of sins, but also for His redemptive work that is essential for salvation and eternal life. It is the first step in the restoration of mankind to the image of God (see 16.1.18.Q3).

05.01.04 Lk. 3:7-14 (See also Mt. 3:7-10) Along the Jordan River

JOHN CONTINUES TO PREACH REPENTANCE

7 He then said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. And don’t start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones!

8 Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees! Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

9 “What then should we do?” the crowds were asking him.

10 He replied to them, “The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same.”

11 Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

12 He told them, “Don’t collect any more than what you have been authorized.”

13 Some soldiers also questioned him: “What should we do?”

14 He said to them, “Don’t take money from anyone by force or false accusation; be satisfied with your wages.”

In today’s language, John would have been called a “hell, fire, and brimstone preacher.” He used strong language and had a definite point to make – no one was going to challenge him or get him to be quiet. His three points were proclaimed with no uncertainty!


57. His use of the term “fire” is typical of many Old Testament prophets who gave similar warnings of judgment.
1. He preached with the gift of sarcasm, and proclaimed that people were sinful and had to repent. He baptized those who repented telling them it was time to live holy lives before God.

2. Those who repented were to bear the fruit of repentance. In other words, their changed hearts resulted in changed lives.

3. John portrayed an imminent judgment that was about to fall upon Israel. He was big on judgment speeches and apparently rather light on sermons of mercy.

**05.01.04.Q1 How did the religious leaders appraise someone they suspected to be a new self-appointed rabbi or “wanna-be” messiah?**

Nearly everybody was expecting a messiah, most with great anticipation. Hundreds if not thousands heard John the Baptist. They repented of their sins, fasted, prayed, and expected the restoration of the ancient Davidic Kingdom. But the temple leaders and Romans feared anyone who claimed the title of “messiah,” expecting that another rebellion would soon arise. By this time a number of individuals had come forth claiming to be the messiah (and were usually killed by the Romans). But to identify the real messiah, the temple leaders had devised a 2-step plan to evaluate anyone’s messianic intentions.

1. An observation team was sent first, which listened carefully to what was said, but they did not engage in any discussions or debates. The team would have consisted of Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and any other prominent individuals who desired to engage in this field of discovery. The team would return to the temple and report what they had seen and heard. If the president of the Sanhedrin (Annas or Caiaphas) and their fellow leaders believed additional observation was needed, a second team was sent.

2. The second team confronted the individual with a wide variety of questions and the responses were reported to the high priest.

Jesus definitely had the two groups of evaluators before Him, and John probably did likewise. Both John and the Essenes used apocalyptic words concerning the future. John the Baptist proclaimed eminent judgment and destruction (Lk. 3:10), and stated that every Jew who did not

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59. See a short list of false messiahs at Appendix 25: “False Prophets, Rebels, Significant Events, And Rebellions That Impacted The First Century Jewish World.”
produce good fruit in his life would be cast into an eternal fire (Jn. 3:10). Neither the Baptist nor anyone else expected Jesus to be as He was, yet the apocalyptic description is applicable when applied to His return and reign during the Millennial Reign.

“Brood of vipers!” It is commonly agreed among scholars that these stinging words were applied directly to the leading Pharisees and Sadducees (Lk. 3:7), as if to emphatically say, “You brood of vipers!” These religious leaders were supposed to be the spiritual shepherds of the common people, but instead had become like vipers—unclean and poisonous snakes; a corrupt wealthy power group. They most likely were part of the “first team” that did not come to repent, but to spy on John and report back to Caiaphas. Hence, John’s targeted response.

However, the phrase was a typical idiom used by rabbis or theological schools when debating became intense. It would not have been uncommon that at the end of an argument, between students of the School of Hillel and the School of Shammai, that each would call the other by names such as these:

1. “You sons of the devil.”
2. “You sons of hell.”
3. “You brood of vipers.”
4. “You serpents.”

When Jesus applied the phrase to those who argued with Him, he used typical language that was readily understood and in common use.

“Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?” This is the ominous warning that destruction is about to fall upon those who do not repent. In this context, the word “wrath” has a double connotation; It referred to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, as well as to the final judgment of God that every person must someday face. When the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, many Jewish believers fled to the Decapolis cities to take refuge and they escaped the destruction and death that fell upon those who rejected Jesus.

60. John the Baptist used figurative language that is reflective of agriculture and desert life. Therefore, he uses terms such as “brood of vipers;” “the axe at the root of the tree,” “baptism of fire,” “the threshing floor,” and “the burning of the chaff.” These phrases proclaimed that God was angry and judgment was about to fall.


“Children … stones.” In this passage Jesus used two words of similar sound in Aramaic and Hebrew, a word play known as a parechesis. The book of Matthew is full of Hebrew thought and idioms. The word stones (abanim) and the word children (banim) sound alike, but in the context of the verse they underscore opposite meanings. Jesus said the Pharisees and Sadducees were to produce good fruit, but stones naturally produce nothing. However, God could have stones produce good children who would honor Him and be children of Abraham. In other words, stones could be more productive than were the critics of John the Baptist. Unfortunately, some details of these thoughts and idioms become lost in the translation from Hebrew and Greek into other languages.

Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees!” In the pictorial language of Hebrew, this symbolized that judgment was extremely near. It gave a severe sense of urgency to the message of repentance and salvation. All the prophets of the Old Testament preached repentance. John most certainly fit the picture quite well. The common theme was that obedience would bring blessings, and disobedience would bring punishment.

But by this time the mindset of the general population was somewhat different. They believed God would come and punish the imperial Romans for occupying their land. They had just experienced a century of Jewish leadership, which was not much better than the rule of the pagans, and they were very disgusted with the influx of Hellenism. Therefore, the message of pending doom and judgment from John was music to their ears. The irony is when Jesus said that “now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees,” He did that precisely during the Passion Week when He cursed the fig tree – the symbol of national Israel.

“The man with two shirts.” Ownership of multiple garments was a sign of wealth. Therefore, if one owned two pieces of garment, the cultural obligation said that he was to help anyone in need. If someone had only an “inner” or “under” garment he was considered to be “naked.” Modesty of dress is a highly biblical value.

“Tax collectors.” Tax collectors were a small group of Jews who were agents for Rome and therefore, highly despised by their Jewish neighbors. Each collector was required to raise a certain amount of revenue based on the population. Anything above that amount, they were


66. See 15.02.09.Q1.
permitted to keep. Since this was an excellent opportunity for legalized extortion and money
gouging, these agents became extremely wealthy at the expense of their Jewish brothers.
Furthermore, since Roman coins had images of men and pagan gods, the strict Pharisees
considered anyone who touched a Roman or Greek coin as filthy. Such a person was said to have
violated the command against graven images.\(^67\) Hence, tax collectors were passionately hated.

**“Some soldiers.”** Jewish men were not permitted to serve in the military. The fact that these
soldiers asked what they should do is an indication they were Gentiles who came under
conviction. However, some scholars believe that a few Hellenized Jewish men may have been in
the military. Like tax collectors, they had chosen to leave their Jewish faith to attain wealth and
enjoy the permissive Greek lifestyle.\(^68\) Now they were confronted with their sin and asked what
to do.

\(^{67}\) Lang, *Know the Words of Jesus.* 246.

Unit 05
The Early Ministry Of Jesus

Chapter 02
The Introduction And Temptations Of Jesus

05.02.00.A. THE BAPTISM OF JESUS BY JOHN THE BAPTIST. Artwork by William Hole of the Royal Scottish Academy of Art, 1876. The baptism of Jesus was the official inauguration of His ministry. The opening of heaven indicates that there was no barrier between Jesus and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit came upon Him with power. The event occurred about six miles south of Jericho; a short distance north of the Dead Sea.
05.02.01 Introduction

Until this time Jesus was devoted to meeting the physical needs of His siblings and mother because His father evidently had passed away. Now He was to bring spiritual food to His people and to the whole world.

His ministry began with the announcement by John the Baptist that He is the “Lamb of God.” As previously stated, it was the custom that when a king was going to visit his people, he would send a herald to announce to the cities and villages that their king was coming. Likewise, John the Baptist was the herald who announced to the Jews that their “king” was coming. However, rather than referring to Jesus as a “king,” he referred to Him as the “Lamb of God.” The word “king” or “messiah” would have started a riot or revolt in this politically-charged land. Yet the people understood the term to mean the long expected messiah. For centuries, ever since 586 B.C., the Jews had been under foreign domination with the exception of about one hundred years of independence (163/142-63 B.C.). But that so-called “freedom” was a miserable life under their corrupt leaders. Now they were under Roman authority and, while they had some religious liberties, life in general was very difficult.

As a sage or rabbi, John acquired several disciples whom he instructed. His Elijah imagery captured everyone’s attention, especially with the message of repentance, baptism, and living a pure and holy lifestyle. His image was significantly different than the priestly heritage from which he came that included some comforts of wealth. Yet John’s message was one that the temple priests failed to announce.

05.02.02 Lk. 3:15-18 (See also Mt. 3:11-12; Mk. 1:7-8) Along the Jordan River

JOHN ANNOUNCES THE CHRIST

Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were debating in their minds whether John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

69. The demise of Joseph is one of the mysteries of the Bible. However, since Jesus was the oldest son, it was his responsibility to care for his parents in their old age and to bury them when they passed on. We know that He had at least four brothers: James, Joses, Judas (Jude), and Simon, and several sisters who were not named.

70. John the Baptist is not called a “rabbi” or a “sage” anywhere in Scripture or in extra-biblical writings. However, the mere fact he had disciples is indicative that he functioned as a sage or rabbi.

71. A rabbi-disciple relationship was always a teacher-student relationship.
17 His winnowing shovel is in His hand to clear His threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn up with a fire that never goes out.”

18 Then, along with many other exhortations, he proclaimed good news to the people.

The value of the perspectives of the four gospel writers is clearly evident in this case. In the public introduction of Jesus, each writer clearly reveals his passionate message.

1. For Matthew, his message is “repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mt. 3:2; 4:17);

2. For Mark it is “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mk. 1:1);

3. For Luke it was a quotation from Isaiah and concluded that all humanity will see the salvation of God (Lk. 3:6) instead of words of judgment.

4. John’s gospel is considerably more theological. His theme is that readers would “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” and that they would “have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31).

It has been said that the gospels are a unique genre – not a letter (Gk. *epistle*), but a kind of written report that functioned as an informative advertisement.72 Jesus came to reveal that the eternal was not the future, but the unseen that exists now. To know God is not an endless pursuit, but a condition of the present reality that is available to everyone. God is not a philosophy or an abstraction, but a divine being with character and personality who desires all men to attain His character and personality. However, humanity could only understand the divine message, if the Divine lived among them. To communicate this concept, the expressions of “Son of Man” and “Son of God,” express the deity of Jesus,73 but the former title also asserts His humanity.74

“I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals.” It was customary for a slave or servant to untie the sandals of a visitor and wash his feet when entering a house.75 The English word *slave*
or servant is derived from the Greek term doulos. A doulos was a common household slave who performed the most menial of all household chores. Here the gospel writer declares that John was so humbled at the presence of Jesus, that he was not worthy to perform this most menial act of servanthood (cf. 1 Sam 25:41).

Throughout the Middle East, in ancient times and today, feet are considered defiled. The reason is that roads and walkways are dirty, dusty, and covered with animal dung. Throughout most of history, wherever anyone walked, livestock did likewise and, therefore, avoiding animal dung was impossible. That is why sandals were removed when entering a home and if there were no servants or slaves to wash the visitor’s feet, then it was the woman's responsibility to do so.

“Holy Spirit and fire.” Some scholars believe this phrase refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the followers of Jesus; being on “fire” for God. Jesus said that they would be immersed in the Ruach HaKodesh, meaning Holy Spirit, which began at Acts 2:1ff. (See other opinion below.) However, the term “Holy Spirit” must be understood in the Jewish context because the full Christian understanding of it did not occur until after the ascension. In Jewish thought and philosophy the Holy Spirit had two primary functions.

1. To reveal divine truth to men, and
2. To enable men to recognize and accept that truth.

John used the term precisely within the Jewish definition and understanding of the Old Testament time. He was preaching the divine truth and people began to follow Him, listening carefully to His teaching. He did not perform any miracles at this time.

Others believe this phrase to be a purifying event that will separate the wicked Jews from the righteous ones as described in Malachi 3:19-21; 4:1-3, and Psalm 1:6. The separation was described in agricultural terms. When wheat was harvested, the kernel had to be separated from the wheat chaff. To accomplish this, the wheat was placed on a threshing floor and was lightly crushed with a threshing sled pulled by a donkey. The next step is called “winnowing,” when the wheat was tossed into the air so that the wind, blowing across a threshing floor, blew the chaff to

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78. See “Defile” in Appendix 26.
79. Lk. 24:49; Jn. 15:26, 16:13-14; Ac. 1:8.
the side and the heavier wheat kernels fell to the ground. The chaff was collected and burned, hence, the vivid imagery of pending judgment in hell. The prophets stated that the Messiah would destroy His enemies with His fiery breath (cf. Isa. 11:4; 30:27-28). The apocryphal writer 4th Ezra restated this prevailing thought:

After this I looked, and behold, all who had gathered together against him, to wage war with him were much afraid, yet dared to fight. And behold, when he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted up his hand or held a spear or any weapon of war, but I saw only how he sent forth his mouth as if it were a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a storm of sparks. All of these were mingled together..., fell on the onrushing multitude, which was prepared to fight, and burned them all up.

4 Ezra 13:8-11

The Israelites always associated fire with great events in their history. Examples are the great covenant between Israel and God was witnessed by fire (Gen. 15:17) and when God dedicated the tabernacle with fire (Ex. 40:34). When the Israelites traveled through the wilderness they were guided by a pillar of fire; God appeared in the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:2); a fire after an earthquake (1 Kg. 19:1-12); and a fire in a cloud (Ezek. 1:4). In the Old Testament, fire was associated with judgment and destruction of the wicked, as well as purification of the righteous. The early church, on the Day of Pentecost experienced the Holy Spirit and fire as the presence of God.

However, other scholars say that the term “fire” in Matthew’s gospel is never associated with the Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:3) but with judgment. Furthermore, fire associated with Pentecost never suggests the chaff being blown away by the wind.

“His winnowing shovel.” As previously stated, the term “winnowing” is an agricultural term that is associated with the separation of the wheat chaff from the wheat kernel. In this process, a fork or shovel was used to toss the wheat high into the air, at which time a crosswind blew the

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81. Scholars debate on the classification of 3rd Ezra (a/k/a 1 Esdras) and 4th Ezra (a/k/a 2 Esdras). Sometimes these are listed in the Apocrypha (see 02.02.03) and other times they are listed in the Pseudepigrapha (see 02.02.24). The reader is reminded that quotations from non-biblical sources are not to be understood as being of equal authority with the biblical narratives. See 01.02.04.

82. Isa. 31:9; Amos 7:4; Mal. 4:1; Jub. 9:15; 36:10; Enoch 10:6, 12ff; 54:6; 1QH 6.18-19; et. al.

83. Isa. 1:25; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:2ff; 1QH 5.16.

84. Mt. 3:10, 12; 5:22; 7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; 18:8-9; 25:41.
chaff to the side and the heavier wheat kernel fell directly to the threshing floor. In this context, the winnowing fork is representative of God’s separation of the unrepentant from the true people of God.

“Clear His threshing floor.” To clear the threshing floor implied that Jesus would remove the judges of the Sanhedrin. The phrase was a common reference pertaining to divine judgment. The Sanhedrin members sat in a semi-circular pattern that resembled a threshing floor so all could see other members and consider carefully the significance of their judgments. The imagery was preserved in the Mishnah:

*The Sanhedrin was arranged like the half of a round threshing floor so that they all might see one another.*

*Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4.3*

The most famous threshing floor was the floor of Ornan (1 Ch. 21:28; 22:1), which was purchased by David and where later Solomon built his temple, followed by the temple of the first century. This was precisely where Jesus stood before Caiaphas. The image of God was not only that of a judge between the just and unjust, but also that of the Provider for His children.

“He will burn up with a fire that never goes out.” The chaff was burned in clay cooking stoves. John used winnowing as an analogy of judgment by an angry God who will separate the unfaithful from those who accepted salvation. This imagery is common in the Hebrew Bible and, therefore, was familiar to the audience.

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85. The preferred location for threshing floors was on a hill top where there was a constant cross wind.

86. This custom was popular in other cultures as well, such as the Roman senate was seated in a semi-circular fashion.

87. Mishnah, *Sanhedrin 4.3*.

05.02.02.A. A RECONSTRUCTED THRESHING FLOOR. The threshing floor was where villagers would lay down their barley or wheat on the ground. A donkey would then pull a threshing sled (shown leaning against the wall) over the wheat, which would loosen the chaff from the kernel. Then the wheat was winnowed by tossing it into the air. Photographed at the Jerusalem Pilgrim Center by the author.

Bible students have often wondered if John thought that he was living at the end of the age; the age that would bring judgment upon the enemies of Israel? The answer is clearly affirmative – yes. At this point, John appears to believe that the messiah is an agent of God who will bring judgment upon Israel and function as the expected political-messiah. He does not realize that his messiah is the Messiah. As will be demonstrated later, John believed that the messiah would come with fiery judgment on the wicked, and he would most certainly overthrow the Roman tyranny. Little wonder then, that he used such strong language.
05.02.02.B. TWO BOYS WINNOWING WHEAT. Two boys, dressed in authentic first century clothes, are winnowing wheat in an open field. It is a process of throwing the wheat up into the air so the wind can blow the chaff aside while the heavier wheat kernels fall down to the threshing floor. The kernels are then gathered and the chaff is burned. Photographed at the Nazareth Village by the author.

05.02.03 Mt. 3:13-17; Lk. 3:23a (See also Mk. 1:9-11) From Galilee to Jordan

JESUS IS BAPTIZED

Mt. 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. 14 But John tried to stop Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and yet You come to me?”

15 Jesus answered him, “Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed Him to be baptized.

16 After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. 17 And there came a voice from heaven:
This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!

*Lk. 23* As He began His ministry, Jesus was about 30 years old

When Jesus left Galilee, it was not the area by the Sea of Galilee, but the Roman provincial district of Galilee which was a large area to the west of the Sea. The village of Nazareth is within that district. He went to His cousin John who was along the Jordan River a short distance north of the Dead Sea.

“To be baptized by him (John)” The baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of His ministry. This obedient act was performed for several reasons:

1. Jesus was to be consecrated to the complete will of the Father.

2. Jesus was to acknowledge the approval received from the Father (Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1).

3. Here John, the crier in the wilderness, announced the arrival of the Messiah and the beginning of His ministry.

4. Jesus identified Himself with sinners (Isa. 53:12; II Cor. 5:21).

5. Jesus identified Himself with and to Israel (Jn. 1:11).

6. He set the example for others who would become believers to follow.

7. Jesus also identified Himself with the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king.

8. Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

9. Jesus was verbally identified by the Father in a manner all present could hear.

10. Jesus received the anointing of His ministry (Acts 10:38).

**05.02.03.Q1 Why was Jesus baptized (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-23a)?**

Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, but there are reasons or insights that define the meaning of that phrase. The term righteousness (Gk. dikaiosyne) is defined by a number of
phrases such as *uprightness, upright, just acquitted*\(^{89}\) or as said in a simplified manner, *as if I never sinned*. But obviously everyone does sin, and baptism is the symbolic act to declare one has accepted divine forgiveness *as if he never sinned*. But since Jesus never sinned, His baptism was for the fulfillment or purpose of righteousness as follows:

1. According to the Law of Moses (Lev. 16:4) a priest was consecrated to his office by the ritual cleansing of washing with water. While Jesus was to function in the office of Messiah and not as a priest, He still took on the symbolic priestly cleansing in order to fulfill the demands of the Law, which signified He was consecrated to God and ready for public ministry. The baptism itself didn’t result in the forgiveness of sin, but rather, it was an expression of the repentance which already occurred when one accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, including the forgiveness of sin.\(^{90}\)

2. It was to identify with the preaching of the Kingdom of God.

3. To identify with the believing remnant of John’s baptism.

4. To identify with sinners (2 Cor. 5:21). Since Jesus took upon Himself the nature of sinful men, and placed Himself in their position, it was proper that He should submit Himself to every ordinance of God’s appointment concerning sinful men.


His baptism was the last act of his private life and first act of his public ministry. While the baptism has symbolism (described above), so does its location. Note the following:

1. It was the same place where Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to enter Canaan some fifteen centuries earlier.\(^{91}\) Joshua’s entrance into the new land symbolized a new life for God’s people and new era. The crossing point was named “Beth-Abara,” meaning “house of the crossing.” In the course of time it was abbreviated to “Bethany,” but the term “beyond the Jordan” was also attached to it as not to confuse it with the village of Bethany located near Jerusalem, the home of Lazarus (Jn. 1:28). Therefore, the baptism at this site represented a new era; a new beginning.

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91. Older references to the location identified it as being just south of the Sea of Galilee. However, more recent scholarship agrees with ancient witnesses who place the location north of the Dead Sea.
2. It was where Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind on a chariot of fire.

3. It was where Gideon defeated the Midianites and killed two of their princes.

The Jewish people practiced two rituals in water:

1. Baptism (which most Christians are unaware was practiced by Jewish people)

2. Ritual immersions (which most Christians do not understand)

Baptism was a one-time event for the repentance of sin. It was usually practiced for a number of reasons, such as when someone became a member of the Sanhedrin. The Essenes also baptized new members into their sect, and many scholars believe the Pharisees did likewise, but evidence for a firm conclusion on this matter is still lacking.

The ritual immersion in a mikvah was in response to defilement caused by a physical transgression (touching a dead body, walking over a grave, etc.), whereas baptism was for repentance of sin and the coming to faith. Since there is no Christian counterpart to ritual immersion, it is difficult for Gentile believers to understand its purpose.

"After Jesus was baptized." The ministry of Jesus was inaugurated with the symbolism of entering the water, which was equated with death, and then brought out of the water, which was equated with the rebirth of new life. By His baptism, He identified Himself with the sinful and lost people, in order to become the sacrificial Lamb of God. As Jesus publicly dedicated Himself to do His Father’s will (Lk. 22:42; Mt. 3:15), the “voice from heaven” confirmed His calling.

At the close of His ministry, Jesus brought a sense of reality to the symbolism of death and life when He died on the cross and arose three days later. It has been a doctrine of the church for

92. For more information of various reasons for baptism, see baptism as related to Nicodemus in 05.05.05.Q2 and Q3.

93. See 05.01.03 and 05.03.02.Q1 “Was the baptism by John similar to the baptism ritual that the Jews performed when a proselyte joined them?” 05.05.05.A “Dead Sea Scroll 4Q414 With Baptismal Liturgy;” see also chapter 7 of the Didache.

94. See 05.05.05.D “First Century Mikvah;” and the video of Dr. Paul Wright who discusses the mikvah at the southern temple steps (04.04.03.V).


96. Also see comments on baptism at 05.05.05.Q2 and Q3.
believers to declare that they have died with Christ to the passions of the world and have been raised to live in the newness of His life. 97

Over the centuries there have been numerous church discussions on the mode of baptism. Some churches today teach that a new convert needs to be completely submerged in water, because the definition of baptize in the Greek is to submerse or put under the water. Others teach that the full meaning of the doctrine can be found in the symbolism of sprinkling water on the new believer and, therefore, submersion is not necessary. Such discussions have, unfortunately, led to arguments and church splits, all of which could have been prevented if they had known what the early church fathers taught about the matter. The Didache (ca. A.D. 90-120) is the earliest known book on church doctrines, rules, and procedures. The authors understood not only their language but also their culture and context. They had an interesting interpretation concerning the mode of baptism.

As for baptism, baptize in this way: Having said all this beforehand, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water. If you do not have running water, however, baptize in another kind of water; if you cannot do so in cold water, then do so in warm water.

But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Before the baptism, let the person baptizing and the person being baptized and others who are able fast; tell the one being baptized to fast one or two days before.

Didache 7:1-4 98

Obviously, there was a preference as to how a baptism was to be performed. Note that fasting was a part of baptism, probably because the church considered conversion a serious decision during a time of persecution. Finally, it should be understood that baptism did not begin with John and Jesus, as it was an old Jewish custom for new converts. The observers of John knew precisely what he was preaching and doing.

The site where Jesus was baptized was not difficult to find. Several accounts written by visiting pilgrims centuries ago gave archaeologists strong clues as to where the event occurred. The

97. For other references that pertain to the doctrine of baptism, see Mt. 29:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38, 8:36-38, 10:47-48, 16:14-15; Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12.

98. The Didache is a book on church order that was written within a century of the life of Jesus. For more information, see 02.02.08.
primary difficulty with opening the area for modern tourism was that the large area was filled with explosive land mines that remained hidden since the Israeli-Jordanian wars. Once both governments cleared the area, it was opened to the public.

One of the accounts was written by a Spanish nun, Egeria, Etheria, or perhaps Atheria, in the years 381-384. All that is known about her must be taken from the surviving parts of her book, *The Tree of Life: A Brief History of the Cross*. She was not a merchant or one who held office in government or the church, but rather, she was a pious woman from northern Spain or southern France who was sincerely interesting in walking the steps where her Savior once walked. In 384 she visited the home of Peter (06.03.04) when it was standing complete in Capernaum. In her description she said that it had been turned into a church that consisted of three concentric octagons. She also mentioned that the small church was occupied by many monks and that,

**Between the church and the [monk’s] cells was a plentiful spring which flowed from the rock.”**

**Pilgrim Egeria**

A century and a half later, another pilgrim, Theodosius, is believed to have visited the site between the years 515 and 530. He described the Church of Saint John the Baptist as being on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

**At the place where my Lord was baptized is a marble column, and on top of it has been set an iron cross. There also is the Church of Saint John Baptist, which was constructed by the Emperor Anastasius. It stands on great vaults which are high enough for when the Jordan is in flood …. From the Dead Sea to the Jordan, where the Lord was baptized by John – there are about five milles.**

**Theodosius, De Situ Terrae Sanctae 20**

Like the Bordeaux pilgrim, Theodosius located the hill from which Elijah was taken up, which he called the Little Mount Hermon, across the river from the baptismal site. He continued to say


101. Quoted by Wilkerson, *Egeria’s Travel’s*. 120.

that the site was near the intersection of the Roman Jerusalem-Jericho road and the road that connected with the *Via Nova Traiana* on the Transjordanian high plateau located to the east.\(^\text{103}\)

Only a few decades later, in 570, Antoninus Piacenza, a pilgrim from the Italiam village of Piacenza,\(^\text{104}\) toured the Holy Land and was a somewhat more descriptive of the site. He said,

> We arrived at the place where the Lord was baptized. This is the place...where Elijah was taken up. In that place is the “little hill of Hermon” mentioned in the psalm.... By the Jordan, not far from where the Lord was baptized is a very large Monastery of Saint John, which has two guest houses.

*Pilgrim of Piacenza, *Itinerarium* 12.4\(^\text{105}\)*

Finally, a pilgrim named Arculf, visited the site around 670 or 680 and also mentioned a church and gave this description (speaking of himself in the third person):

> The holy, venerable spot at which the Lord was baptized by John is permanently covered by the water of the River Jordan. Arculf, who reached the place, and swam across the river both ways, says that a tall wooden cross has been set up on the holy place...The position of this cross where, as we have said, the Lord was baptized, is on the near side of the river bed. A strong man using a sling can throw a stone from there to the far bank on the Arabian side. From this cross a stone causeway supported on arches stretches to the bank, and people approaching the cross go down a ramp and return up by it to reach the bank. Right at the river's edge stands a small rectangular church which was built, so it is said, at the place where the Lord's clothes were placed when he was baptized. The fact that it is supported on four stone vaults, makes it usable, since the water, which comes in from all sides, is underneath it. It has a tiled roof. This remarkable church is supported, as we have said, by arches and vaults, and stands in the lower part of the valley through which the Jordan flows. But in the upper part there is a great monastery for monks, which has been built on the brow of a small hill nearby, overlooking the church. There is also a church built there in honour of Saint John Baptist which, together with the monastery, is enclosed in a single masonry wall.

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\(^{104}\) It was not unusual for people to take on the name of their town or village as a last name.

The Writings of Arculf

05.02.03.Z THE MOSAIC MADABA MAP DEPICTING “BETHANY BEYOND THE JORDAN.” This section of the 6th century Madaba Map preserved the village of “Bethany beyond the Jordan” as “Ainon where now is Saphsaphas” meaning “the place of willows.” It also depicts a ferry crossing the Jordan just north of Bethany in an area where now is the Allenby Bridge. Many old maps as this one were oriented toward the east and, therefore, north is toward the left. Wikipedia Commons.

Critics have pointed to the fact that Arculf said that the baptismal site was on the western side of the River rather than on the eastern side as all other sources indicated. There are two possible reasons for this discrepancy.

1. He may have made a error, as it is unknown how long after his visit he had the time and the writing material to record his comments.

2. The distance from the lower end of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea is about ninety miles, but within that ninety mile space the Jordan River winds so much that it nearly doubles its length – one hundred eighty miles. The river is known to have changed its

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course from time to time, especially as the result of a severe earthquake. Arculf may very well have written accurately in light of the fact that the river could have shifted. It is unknown if the earthquakes of 363 and 749 caused a change of the Jordan River, but the riverbed has certainly changed numerous times in the past thousand years.\footnote{http://israel-tourguide.info/2011/01/10/earthquakes-history-archaeology/ Retrieved August 25, 2014. The Jordan valley is one of the most active earthquake zones in the world. There have been hundreds of minor earthquakes, and major ones have dammed the Jordan River repeatedly, sometimes for days, in 1160, 1267, 1534, 1834, 1906 and 1927. At such times, buildings are destroyed, thousands of lives are lost, and the river often redirects itself as a new river bed is formed.}

Few sites have as many ancient witnesses as does the place where Jesus was baptized. The mosaic Madaba Map\footnote{See “Madaba Map” in Appendix 26; See also 14.02.03.D and 05.02.03.Z.} these descriptions of the hill and buildings enabled archaeologists to find the old church foundations and, thus, secure the site identity.\footnote{Khouri, “Where John Baptized: Bethany beyond the Jordan.” 36.}

**05.02.03.A. THE BAPTISMAL SITE OF JESUS.** Tourists look at what historians believe to be the original baptismal site of Jesus. It is located a short distance north the Dead Sea – the same location where Joshua crossed the River to enter the Promised Land of Canaan fifteen centuries earlier. The baptism at this
location marked the beginning of a new era. Across the narrow river is the Hashmonite Kingdom of Jordan. Photograph by the author.

“The Spirit of God descending like a dove.” The Holy Spirit (Shekinah Glory) came upon Jesus in a dynamic manner to empower and equip Him to do the will of the Father who voiced His delight. The Trinity made the first dynamic action. Just as centuries earlier the dove announced to Noah the end of the flood and death to humanity, now it had announced the beginning of eternal life through Christ Jesus. The promise of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus was the prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 11:2 and 42:1. Luke’s intention here was not only to report the actual event of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus, but obviously, also to reflect upon a similar event that occurred in the days of Samuel the prophet. When Samuel anointed David as king of Israel, the Spirit of God came down mightily upon David (1 Sam. 16:13). In the Jewish tradition as recorded in the Talmud, the Spirit of God is described as descending or hovering over the waters as a dove in Genesis 1:2 and another Talmudic passage makes the clear association between the Spirit of God and the dove. It reads as follows:

And the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters - like a dove, which hovers over her young without touching them.

Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 15a

Those who were present at the baptism, who undoubtedly included some representatives from the Sanhedrin, could not have missed this association. Just as God ushered in a new creation (Gen. 1-2), so likewise would Jesus be the One who would usher in a “new creation” of a New Covenant. Genesis 1:2 was predictive of the significant event that came upon Jesus. Might not the Spirit, Who as a dove brooded or rested on a troubled earth at a crisis time produce light, life, and love? In later years when God destroyed the inhabitants of the earth with a great flood, it was a dove that encouraged Noah to face the crisis with high hopes (Gen 8:8-12). A similar image of the Spirit of God “hovering” was found in the Dead Sea Scrolls as follows:

And over the poor will His Spirit hover and the faithful will He support with his strength.

Dead Sea Scroll

110. The Shekinah Glory appeared four times in the life of Jesus: 1) to the shepherds (Lk. 2:8-9), 2) at His baptism (Mt. 3:16), 3) at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:5) and, 4) at His ascension (Acts 1:9).

111. Babylon Talmud, Chagim 15a.

The conclusion is obvious; the passage is to be interpreted as meaning that just as the Spirit of God hovered over His new creation, so the Spirit of God hovered over Jesus who was about to usher an age of new creation in men’s hearts and lives. Unfortunately, as the church lost the heritage of its Jewish roots, it also lost spiritually enlightening insights such as this one.

“The Spirit of God descending like a dove.” In this phrase all three persons of the Trinity are present.\textsuperscript{113} Unfortunately, some have attempted to translate this phrase to mean “a spirit of a god.” The key is in understanding Greek grammar, which states that it is not necessary for a noun to have an article for it to be a definite noun. Both the head noun and the genitive noun can have either an article or lack thereof and it makes little semantic difference. The result is that the statement is a definite noun. Hence, the phrase “a spirit of a god” is clearly a misinterpretation.\textsuperscript{114} The theological significance is enormous. Furthermore, the imagery of a peaceful dove has a clear reflection to the Old Testament account of a dove in the flood narrative (Gen. 8).

“This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!” One of the unique features of reading Scripture with Jewish eyes is how various segments of verses are tied together to create a powerful message. One of the most profound uses is this statement spoken by God at the baptism of Jesus. The statement consists of three phrases and each one points to an Old Testament verse that intensifies its impact. See 11.01.02 concerning the same thought at the Transfiguration. The three phrases are:

1. “This is My beloved Son.” All in attendance heard the voice from heaven. The statement is based upon Psalm 2:7.  

   \textbf{You are My Son, today I have become your Father.}

   \textbf{Psalm 2:7}

   For centuries rabbis had pondered the reference to the word “Son” and concluded it was a messianic prophecy. Therefore, this interpretation was well-established by the first century and the divine voice clearly affirmed the deity of Jesus, a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. While the voice identified Jesus as the Son, it did not confer the status or

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\textsuperscript{113} Erickson, \textit{Christian Theology}, 861. This doctrine is so basic to Christianity that some theologians do not single out this passage in their writings.

\textsuperscript{114} For passages that refer to the deity of Christ, see Mt. 1:18-25, 3:17, 17:5; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:14, 18, 33-34, 3:16-18; 1 Jn. 4:9; Isa. 9:6; Phil. 2:7-11.
office (priest/king) upon Him at this time. According to Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, and 5:5, Jesus was installed into this office (priest/king) at His resurrection/ascension.

2. **Beloved son** This phrase could also be translated as “whom I love.” It originated in Genesis 22:2 and refers to the time when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son Isaac. Today’s scholars are unsure if this passage was considered to be a messianic prophecy in the first century, but apparently the early church did recognize it as such.

   “Take your son,” He said, “your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

   **Genesis 22:2**

While the phrase reflects upon the sacrifice that Abraham was about to make, after the resurrection of Jesus it was recognized to be prophetic, reflecting the future sacrifice that Jesus would make. This astounding message was sandwiched between two incredible verses and those in attendance must have wondered what kind of person this Jesus was.

3. **I take delight in Him.** This phrase is rooted in Isaiah 42:1, which reads as follows:

   This is My Servant;  
   I strengthen Him,  
   this is My Chosen One;  
   I delight in Him.  
   I have put My Spirit on Him;  
   He will bring justice to the nations.

   **Isaiah 42:1**

Whereas Psalm 2:7 refers to a royal announcement, Isaiah 42:1 refers to a servant. First century Jews believed these two passages to be of a messianic nature, but they could not understand how a king could also be a servant. This apparent contradiction became known as the “Messianic

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116. See Appendix 6 concerning Old Testament sacrifices and Jesus.
problem,” and would be resolved only when they understood the identity of Jesus as their Messiah.

Finally, theologians have often called this event the “theocratic anointing.” The term applies to a special intervention by the Holy Spirit Who equips someone who is called to fulfill a special mission. Moses and the seventy elders (Num. 11:17; 25) are among several examples of the Old Testament era.

05.02.03.Q2 Why did Jesus have to wait past age 30 to begin His ministry (Lk. 3:23)?

The age of ministry according to Moses was from the age of 30 until 50 (Num. 4:3-43). Scripture states that “Jesus was about 30 years old” which is obviously indicative that He was not age 30 when He began His ministry. That raises the question of why was Jesus “about thirty years old,” when He began.

John and Jesus were cousins who were six months apart in age. John had to obey Numbers 4:3-43 and could not begin his ministry until he was the age of 30. In the meantime, Jesus had to wait until the “time was fulfilled” (Gal. 4:4) before He could begin, and that included waiting for John to,

1. Get his ministry established, including the acquisition of disciples, and

2. Sufficiently proclaim that the Messiah was coming. This most certainly required more than a year, possibly two.

3. Furthermore, since there were many itinerant preachers in the countryside, John had to establish himself as a trustworthy and respectable rabbi. Being dressed as the prophet Elijah brought people’s attention to him and his message, and distinguished him from all the others.

Therefore, it can be assumed that Jesus was probably between the ages of 31 and 33 when He began His ministry.

117. See further details in Appendix 26.

118. See further details in Appendix 26.


120. Joshua, (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9), Othniel (Jg. 3:10), Gideon (Jg. 6:34), Jephthah (Jg. 11:29), Samson (Jg. 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).
**THE DEVIL TEMPTS JESUS**

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.  
2 After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, He was hungry.  
3 Then the tempter approached Him and said, “If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”  
4 But He answered, “It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Deut. 8:3)

5 Then the Devil took Him to the holy city, had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,  
6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: He will give His angels orders concerning you, and they will support you with their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.” (Ps. 91:11-12; LXX)

7 Jesus told him, “It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God.” (Deut. 6:16)

8 Again, the Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.  
9 And he said to Him, “I will give You all these things if You will fall down and worship me.”

10 Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only Him.” (Deut. 6:13)

11 Then the Devil left Him, and  

Mk. 1:13b He was with the wild animals, and the angels began to serve Him.

The temptations offered by Satan have three interesting reflections on the Roman Empire. Hellenized Jews, tax collectors like Matthew and Zachaeus, and many others were lured in by the Roman promise of the life of wealth and materialism. Caesar Augustus and the emperors who followed him gave the Roman citizens the same three temptations as Satan offered to Jesus.

1. Satan told Jesus to turn stones into bread (Mt. 4:3); the Romans offered bread and circuses (entertainment) for the masses.

2. Satan told Jesus angels would protect Him if He jumped off the temple pinnacle (Mt. 4:5-6); the Romans offered protection to the citizens by crushing any rival enemy.
3. Satan offered Jesus all splendors of the nations of the world (Mt. 4:8); the Romans offered prosperity and Roman peace (Latin: *Pax Romana* meaning *peace to Roman and quiet in the provinces*).

The term “wilderness” means a desert wilderness without inhabitants. The Judean wilderness was a rocky and hilly land, with mountains close to the Jordan River and Dead Sea. The ancients believed angels were needed for protection from natural desert elements and the wild animals that roamed there (Ps. 91:11-13).

The Dead Sea Scrolls and extra-biblical writings attest to the common belief that the wilderness was a cursed land full of wild animals and demons, but God will restore the land at a future time. So to the first century Jews, when Jesus went into the desert wilderness, He was walking into the proverbial “hell on earth” to meet the devil on His own turf.

“To be tempted by the devil.” The phrase “devil” is translated from the Greek word *diabolos* (1228) and its Hebrew counterpart is *Satan*, meaning *adversary, opponent, rebel or a slanderer*. At times it was applied to evil men. While Satan is the evil one who brings evil temptations that cause men to sin, God will test someone in certain situations to challenge his character and faithfulness. Jesus was led by the Spirit to confront Satan, and the evil one responded aggressively in his attempt to test Jesus. However, it must be recognized that the reason Jesus was led by the Spirit, was because He, Jesus, was the aggressor and Satan, eventually became the victim.

There is a need to further discuss the Greek word for *tempt* which is *peirazein*. The translation difficulty is that in English the word *tempt* always has a negative connotation to it. However, it

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122. The wilderness regions had wild animals such as the wolves, Syrian brown bears (05.02.04.D), and the caracal lynx (05.02.04.E).

123. Dead Sea Scrolls - 1 QM 1; Isa. 13:19-22; Ezek. 34:25; Lk. 11:24-28. Demons and wild animals are associated with each other in the Extra-biblical works of the *Testament of Issachar* 7:7; *Testament of Naphtali* 8:4; and *Testament of Benjamin* 5:2.


126. Reference to Judas is in John 6:70, other references are in 1 Tim. 3:11 (slanderers) and in 2 Tim. 3:3 and Titus 2:3 (false accusers).

127. Ps. 26:2; Jn. 6:6; Heb. 11:17; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rev. 2:2.

would be better translated as *tested*, as to prove one’s worth, faithfulness, or fidelity.129 Jesus was tested to prove His worth or fidelity. Jesus was being tempted by Satan; any obedience to Satan is sin.

“**If you are the Son of God.**” This phrase would be better translated “because you are the Son of God” 130 or “since you are the Son of God,” as the indicative mood in Greek means that the question assumes Jesus was the Son of God.131 It is interesting that Satan did not question the deity of Jesus. Rather, he asked Jesus to tell the stones to become bread, something only God could do.132 Stones are found in abundance nearly everywhere and changing them into bread would meet the needs of the people for centuries to come. Bread was the staple of the ancient diet; the basic food for survival, so much so that bread became a synonym for food.133 But Jesus never affirmed a request presented by the evil one. Notice that Jesus never argued or debated with Satan, He simply said “It is written ...” with an obvious reference to the power of the Old Testament and the will and command of God, the Father (see phrase explanation below).

The phrase, “if you are the son of God,” also demonstrated a special relationship to God, as well as a Messianic significance (Ps. 2:7). This relationship had existed eternally. It was even more astounding when Matthew wrote this gospel to the Jews and told them that Satan recognized that Jesus was the Son of God and did not question it.134 In this encounter the identity and power of Jesus was firmly established.


“Tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus, who was very hungry, could easily have given in to the cravings of His human desires and needs (lust of the flesh) and have performed a miracle. But to obey Satan, even for a good reason, is a sin. Jesus chose not to use His Sonship for His own advantage and continued to have faith that God would provide for His needs. He recognized that the highest good for God was not to satisfy His physical urges and needs, but to obey the will of the Father. It should be noted that Jesus truly was tempted to turn stones into bread because,

1. He had strong physical hunger and
2. He had the power to provide food for Himself.

The pangs of hunger are more powerful when stimulated by temptations and imaginations. Jesus was not only faced with physical and spiritual challenges, but also the calling to be the sacrifice for the sins of humanity. To be starving in the desert for more than a month is bad enough; to resist the onslaught of temptation causes a horrific situation to go beyond human comprehension. The significance is constantly understated because, for mortals, it is impossible to fully understand the agonies Jesus experienced in those forty days in the desert or for an evening in Gethsemane.

“It is written.” The term in Greek is gegraptai, and the perfect passive of grapho, that means “to write.” The perfect tense expresses a completed action and the permanent result from it. More specifically, Jesus said this in the perfect tense, meaning it has been written or it stands written. Therefore, “It is written” can be translated in more detail as meaning, It is written and still stands. This obviously affirms the strong and unchangeable nature of God’s Word, and that the Old Testament was not eliminated by the work of Jesus, but it was fulfilled.

When Jesus was confronted by Satan, His weapon was the written Word (Old Testament), not the Oral Law. This quotation is from Deuteronomy 8:3, which summarizes the main ideas of the

Deuteronomic teaching. The chapter has three key words: life, commandments, and sustenance. The rabbis taught that life was based on keeping all 613 Mosaic Laws. In doing so, one served our Lord and, consequently, enjoyed prosperity. It was believed that the study of the Torah was the essence of life and brought one into harmony with God. However, Jesus introduced a new concept at this point, that if one was firm in his faith in God and the Torah, he could meet the challenge of Satan and win. The temptations should be understood as an opportunity to attack Satan, not as a struggle or challenge caused by Jesus. Satan thought he could tempt Jesus to sin as he did Adam, but Jesus turned the challenge around and Satan lost the contest. Throughout His ministry, Jesus always based His arguments upon the Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible. What is significant is that Jesus conquered and rejected the temptation by expressing absolute trust in God, as written in the Old Testament. That lesson is all the more dynamic today in that He has risen from the grave and is seated at the right hand of God.

“On the pinnacle of the temple.” The term temple refers to the sacred complex with its porticos, courts, sacred holy of holies, and various subordinate buildings. But it can also mean primarily the most holy sacred building itself. The pinnacle was the highest part of the temple, an estimated 216 feet above the rocky pavement below. There is an interesting comment recorded in the Midrash that reflects a first century messianic belief and, therefore, sheds light as to why Jesus was at the top of the temple for this temptation. Note the following:

Our teachers taught, at the time when the King Messiah will appear, he will come and stand on the roof of the temple. He will proclaim to Israel and will say to the humble, “The time of your redemption has arrived! If you do not believe - behold my light which shines upon you...”

Midrash, Pesikta Rabbati 36

136. The 613 laws were observed only during the times of the tabernacle or temple. Today, only 271 of those Mosaic commands can be observed. See Parry. The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Talmud. 221.

980. Quoted by Young, “The Political Messiah and the Temple.” Yaro Digest 1:5, 15, 18.
The teachers (rabbi) taught that the messiah would declare himself as such on the temple. Satan most certainly knew of it and was delighted to tempt Jesus at this point. But the evil one must have been disappointed when Jesus did not accept the invitation. That leaves a question to ponder: Shouldn’t the Jews have considered the possibility that maybe they missed the Messiah after the temple was destroyed?

05.02.04.A. THE INSCRIBED PINNACLE STONE OF THE TEMPLE.
Archaeologists working at the southwest corner of the Temple Mount discovered an inscribed stone that identified the pinnacle of the temple. The inscription reads, *leveit hateki’ah* or the place of trumpeting. It was here that the trumpeter announced the opening of the city gates and the beginning of the Sabbath by the blowing of the ram’s horn trumpet. It was probably beside this stone, high upon the temple, where Jesus was tempted. Decades later it was from this same pinnacle that James, the brother of John (Acts 12:2), was thrown to his death by angry priests and Pharisees. Photograph by the author.


05.02.04.B. AN ILLUSTRATION OF A PRIEST WITH A TRUMPET UPON THE PINNACLE. This illustration is of a priest blowing his trumpet for daily prayers from the highest pinnacle of the temple. It was also from this point that the trumpets were blown every three hours during the night – including the 3:00 a.m. trumpeting known as “the cock’s crow.”\textsuperscript{141} Illustration by the author.

“\textbf{Throw yourself down.}” This temptation was a manipulative bribe wherein the evil one quoted Psalm 91:11-12, which essentially states that if the Messiah would fall, the angels would catch Him. Satan attempted to challenge Jesus and to force God to rescue him.

“\textbf{All the kingdoms of the world.}” The Roman Empire encompassed many smaller empires. Its vast region spanned from the mouth of the Rhine River in modern Germany to southern Egypt and it belted the Mediterranean Sea. Historians have often said that the Mediterranean Sea was, in the truest sense, a Roman lake. The throne of Caesar Augustus was seen like an “exceedingly high mountain” and the Roman Empire like “all the kingdoms of the world.” Tradition says that mountain was Mount Quarantania near Jericho. If so, what Jesus saw in the distance was the oasis city of Jericho and the surrounding farmland in the midst of a desert wilderness. What a difference this was compared to the beautiful Galilee area where He grew up and spent most of His time in ministry.

\textsuperscript{141} For more information on the “cock’s crow,” see Appendix 16, 26, and 14.02.22.Q1.
“I will give You all these things.” Satan made a legitimate offer to Jesus when he offered Him the kingdoms of this world, and Jesus did not deny that. At one time Adam had complete reign over the earth, but when he sinned, that authority to reign was taken from him and transferred to Satan. Since then the kingdoms of the earth have been established by force and maintained by power and deceit. These are his own degraded forms of Paradise, and Satan offered these to Jesus.

But Jesus did not wish to be the conqueror of God’s people or dominate them by deceit. God offered kingship to Jesus via the cross, which is in stark contrast to Satan who claims that he can offer “eternal life” without the cross. But Satan’s eternal life is eternal death in flames. The kingship of Jesus begins with the Kingdom of Heaven in His believers. Any day when a soul has repented and turned to righteousness, the eternal Kingdom of Heaven has been enlarged because it has acquired a new citizen.

Beginning with this narrative, Matthew presents a number of ironies throughout his gospel; ironies that reflect the sacrifice of Jesus for our blessings that are recorded in poetic form:

- He was hungry (4:2) but He fed others (14:13-21; 15:29-39)
- He grew extremely tired (8:24) but He gave others rest (11:28)
- He was the Messiah king but He paid taxes (17:24-27)
- He was accused of being the devil but He cast demons out of others (12:22-32)
- He died a sinner’s death that sinners might live (1:21)
- He was sold for the price of one slave but gave His life as a ransom for many (20:28)
- He did not turn stones into bread for Himself (4:3-4) but He is the bread of life for the world (26:26)

Satan would eventually see Jesus perform many miracles and convince thousands of His Deity, such as the time when He would multiply great quantities of bread for thousands, so the bread would be as common as the stones (Mt. 14:18-21). He would preach of a Kingdom of God that is more glorious than any earthly kingdom. He would not jump off a building, but simply walk across the water. Furthermore, casting evil spirits out of people was one of the most dramatic miracles of His ministry – much to Satan’s disappointment. While the evil one thought these
temptations would be the end of Jesus, instead these events turned out to be points of victory for Jesus and all those who would eventually place their faith in Him.

“Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” This phrase is the first of the Ten Commandments, all ten of which were eventually confirmed by Jesus.\textsuperscript{142}

“He was with wild animals.” The environment of nature is often forgotten in biblical studies. Many wild animals roamed freely throughout the land. It would not have been unusual for travelers to see a Syrian brown bear, a lion, or other animals that could threaten the life of a sole traveler. Furthermore, the Jordan River was known to have crocodiles.\textsuperscript{143} Small children who strayed from their village or traveling caravan were just as vulnerable as sheep and goats, as history records that at one time two small children were devoured by ravenous wolves in a village beyond the Jordan. Communities then proclaimed a fast for mourning and divine protection.\textsuperscript{144}

People from the communities throughout Israel came to Jerusalem in festival caravans. They traveled together in groups not only for protection from bandits, but also for protection from wild predators. The Mishnah recorded that:

\begin{quote}
The wolf, the lion, the leopard, the panther, and the serpent rank as an attested danger.
Mishnah, Baba Kamma 1.4
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
142. Appendix 4.
\end{flushright}
05.02.04.D. THE SYRIAN BROWN BEAR. The Syrian brown bear was one of several vicious animals that Jesus could have encountered in the wilderness. Wild animals were a constant threat to travelers and shepherds with sheep. Therefore, shepherds, travelers, and even the disciples carried swords. Photograph by the author at the Haifa Zoological Garden.

“The angels began to serve Him.” Unless one experiences an hour or two in the desert wilderness of Israel, he has no concept of the potential torture that the natural elements and desert sun can have on a person. Add to that situation the fact that Jesus fasted without food for forty days, and the confrontations with the devil. He was completely famished and exhausted – which is why angels were needed to serve Him. BUT, He was victorious!

Satan failed three times, but that did not deter him. Satan later tempted Jesus numerous times, especially at the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His crucifixion. Satan repeatedly influenced the
disciples, such as when Jesus responded to Peter by saying, “Get thee behind me” (KJV). The Apostle Paul told the early church in Ephesus to put on the armor of God to fight Satan and his demons (Eph. 6:10ff.). Likewise the fight continues for believers today.

05.02.04.E. THE CARACAL LYNX. This lynx was among the predators that threatened livestock and people throughout the centuries. Photograph by the author at the Haifa Zoological Garden.

Finally, Matthew connected Jesus with the mighty men of old, Moses\textsuperscript{145} and Elijah (1 Kg. 19:8) who were tempted prior to their divine assignment. He does not attempt to explain the evil or temptation; he makes no mention of Satan in history\textsuperscript{146} nor does he distinguish between God’s testing and Satan’s tempting. He gives opportunity for future generations to struggle with those answers. He does, however, say that Jesus “wrestled” with Satan and won!

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\textsuperscript{145} Three times Moses fasted for 40 days: Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 10:10. See also Deut. 9:9.

\textsuperscript{146} See Gen. 22:1 and Jub. 17:16 [cf. Heb. 11:17]; 2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Chron. 21:1; Ex. 4:24 and Jub. 48:2.
05.02.04.Q1 In Matthew 4:6 and Luke 4:10, did Satan speak the truth?

Satan gave the appearance of quoting Scripture. But a careful reading, however, reveals that he misquoted it. For example, in Matthew 4:6, Satan incorrectly quoted Psalm 91:11-12 when he failed to mention the phrase “to guard you in all your ways” in verse 11. Satan cannot communicate divine truth, but he does very well with half-truths, misapplied truths, or revengeful truths for the purpose of deception, hurting people, and furthering his evil kingdom.

05.02.04.Q2 Was Jesus capable of committing a sin?

Absolutely! Otherwise, He would have been immune to temptations. The two most grievous struggles He experienced were at the beginning and the end of His ministry: Forty days in the desert wilderness and one night in the Garden of Gethsemane followed by six trials and the crucifixion. The miracle of Jesus is that He was tempted in every area of life as we are – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – yet He remained completely sinless (Heb. 4:15). He was totally God and totally human, a concept that mere mortals find contradictory and impossible to understand. If He had not experienced victory over the temptations of humanity, then He would not have been the promised sinless and spotless Lamb of God.

On a related issue, Satan is the archenemy of God as well as mankind, since mankind was created in the image of God. Therefore, Satan is the archenemy of mankind as well. Since Satan’s principal method of attack is temptation, this makes the temptations of Jesus especially significant.

05.02.04.Q3 Whose account of the temptations is accurate, Luke’s or Matthew’s (Mt. 4:1-11 or Lk. 4:1-13)?

Matthew and Luke recorded the same three temptations, but in a different order. Only Luke said earlier that he wrote his gospel in an orderly (chronological) account (Lk. 1:3). Each writer wrote from his own perspective with an emphasis on whatever he thought was significant. Luke, a physician by trade, wrote in chronological order because that was important to him. On the other hand, Matthew, who was previously gaining personal wealth as a tax collector, emphasized the kingdoms of the world displayed before Jesus as a significant temptation. In first century Judaism, the chronology of events was not as significant as was the meaning of the events that the writer was attempting to convey.

147. See 02.02.11 and “An orderly sequence” in 04.01.04.
05.02.04.C. THE TRADITIONAL TEMPTATION SITE OF MOUNT QUARANTANIA. This site tradition is believed to have originated with the Crusaders because from this viewpoint one can see great distances. Whatever Jesus was, the desert is known for its unforgiving heat and barrenness. Photograph by the author.

Jesus was not compelled to go into the wilderness, but He was guided by the Holy Spirit.\(^{148}\) For forty days He prayed and meditated in the desert wilderness. The number forty appears to be associated with temptation and retribution, because for forty days Moses stayed in the Sinai and Elijah stayed in the wilderness for forty days. (Both Moses and Elijah would meet Jesus later on the Mount of Temptation.) Jesus was conscious of new power within His human body as well as an overwhelming sense of being near to God. He not only had to prove Himself to God, but also to Himself and to His people.

The Jewish people believed that a man would not be seen as being great in the eyes of God unless he had first been tested – tested not to sin, but to avoid sin.\(^ {150}\) They reflected upon five great men as examples.\(^ {151}\) Therefore, when Jesus faced several temptations, it was not only the

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149. Three times Moses fasted for 40 days: Exodus 24:18; 34:29; Deuteronomy 10:10, and Exodus 34:28.


beginning of His leadership, but one that followed a well-established biblical pattern that was well known to the Jews. Note the following:

1. Adam was tempted in a beautiful garden;  
   Jesus was tempted in a desert wilderness.

2. Adam enjoyed delicious food;  
   Jesus hungered during a forty day fast.

3. Adam was given the entire world;  
   Jesus was tempted with the kingdoms of the world.

4. Satan appeared as a serpent to Adam,  
   but as himself to Jesus.

5. Adam failed  
   but Jesus passed the tests (temptations) and was without sin.

Furthermore, there are two interesting comparisons to be considered; comparisons between Jesus and Adam as well as Jesus and Israel.

**Jesus and Adam.** There are two significant temptation stories in the Bible. The first is the temptation of Adam in the book of Genesis. It was there where God’s first created man who lived in a beautiful garden and was at peace with the animals and world around him. Adam fell to the challenge of Satan, which brought ruin to man and the world.

Jesus, on the other hand, was the “second Adam,” and challenged Satan in the desert where there were wild and destructive beasts, symbolic of the ruin brought on by the sin of Adam. All temptations in the history of humanity relate in some manner to these two accounts. If we are tempted by Satan and decide to accept his temptation, we fail and fall. However, if we resist Satan when tempted, then Satan fails and falls. The first Adam of creation failed, but Jesus, who is the “second Adam,” had victory. Adam fell into sin in the lush green environment of the Garden of Eden. What a contrast to Jesus who had total victory in the harsh desert wilderness after a forty day fast. Adam and Eve failed the same temptation tests in the Garden of Eden. Jesus succeeded where mankind failed.

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152. On an interesting side note, the forty days of Lent observed by many Christians throughout the centuries is a tradition based upon the forty days Jesus spent in the desert wilderness.

At times, His baptism and the temptations have been interpreted as two separate events, but these are in fact, fundamentally interwoven. God the Father had just audibly proclaimed His approval of Jesus, after which Jesus faced Satan, His challenger. While in heaven, it was Satan who attempted to place himself in the position of God. Later he motivated Herod the Great to kill the infant Jesus and now he desired to cause Jesus to sin. Had Satan been successful, then the plan of God for man’s salvation would have failed. However, since Jesus successfully passed the test of temptation, His success became Satan’s failure. It should be noted that Jesus resisted temptations throughout His entire life. However, these three temptations were radically different from other ones, because Satan not only attacked Jesus physically when He was at His weakest, but he also attacked Jesus as the Messiah to destroy His messianic calling.

**Jesus and Israel.** The temptations of Jesus provide clear reflections upon the history of Israel. When the Israelites left Egypt (Ex. 14), they walked across the dry bottom of the Red Sea and, thereby, went from death unto life, the symbolism of baptism experienced by Jesus. Soon, after reaching the other side, they tempted God and were punished. Hence, they spent forty years wandering in the desert, at the end of which Moses fasted for forty days and nights on behalf of his people. Like Israel’s testing of forty years, Jesus went into the wilderness for a time of testing for forty days.\(^{154}\)

The scenic horizons of the kingdoms of the world which were shown to Jesus, although similar to the scenic beauty God showed Moses on Mount Nebo, were not parallel because Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. The point is that where Israel failed, Jesus accomplished victory!

Finally, the epistle to the Hebrews adds understanding to the temptation experience of Jesus. The writer said that because Jesus suffered when He was tempted and did not sin, He is able to help believers in their temptations (Heb. 2:18). Furthermore, He is now our high priest and advocate before the Father, defending us from the accusations of the devil.

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05.03.00.A. JOHN THE BAPTIST PREACHING IN THE WILDERNESS, Illustration by Godfrey Durand, 1896. John the Baptist, more accurately known as John the Baptizer, preached in the small villages throughout the Judean Desert and along the Jordan River. He not only told them to repent and be baptized, but also told them they needed to be ready to receive the One they were expecting.
JOHN EXPLAINS HIS MINISTRY

19 This is John’s testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, “Who are you?”

20 He did not refuse to answer, but he declared: “I am not the Messiah.”

21 “What then?” they asked him. “Are you Elijah?”

“I am not,” he said.

“Are you the Prophet?”

“No,” he answered.

22 “Who are you, then?” they asked. “We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?”

23 He said, “I am a voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord — just as Isaiah the prophet said” (Isa. 40:3).

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 So they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?”

26 “I baptize with water,” John answered them. “Someone stands among you, but you don’t know Him. 27 He is the One coming after me, whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie.”

28 All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

During the previous four centuries not a single prophet spoke to the Jewish people, even though expectations of a messiah were growing exponentially. Then the miraculous births of two babies caused a public sensation. John the Baptist, the first of these infants, when he reached the age of service had a following that evidently grew quickly. As the son of a priest, the temple personnel anticipated his immersgence as a prophet – and he did not disappoint them. But they were not thrilled about his message. The Pharisees could not accept John’s lifestyle of self-denial, of fasting, avoiding wine, but neither could they later accept Jesus who did not fast and enjoyed wine.
John preached to those living in the desert areas near Jericho and the Dead Sea, but it is unknown if he traveled extensively elsewhere. Jesus preached in the Galilee area through which ran the Via Maris, an international route of many caravans and travelers. John’s area of ministry appears not to have crossed the Via Maris, although he was close to the major roads leading to and from Jericho. So his message was more confined to the Jewish population, especially to the priests and Levites, many of whom lived in Jericho. Yet his message was carried far and wide as evidenced in Acts 19 when the Apostle Paul met a couple in Ephesus who were followers of John, but they had not heard of Jesus.

As stated previously, the Jews and many other people groups were expecting a messiah (small “m”) who would be a political leader and resurrect the Davidic Empire of a millennium past. Therefore, the Sadducees, priests, and Levites asked John if he was the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet. Each time John denied the identification but said that One greater than he was about to come.

“John’s Testimony.” When the New Testament writers used terms such as “testimony” or “bore witness” or “I have seen and testify,” these were statements of legal terminology. These were also common in the Roman and Greek cultures whereby the author placed himself under an oath concerning the truthfulness of the statement made.155

“When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites.” The priests and Levites were usually Pharisees, and in this case, the leading Jews156 of the temple sent them.157 This group was an official delegation from the Sanhedrin that came specifically to ask questions to determine if John claimed to be the Messiah.158 (Later, when Jesus confronted the leading Pharisees, they were part of the same aristocratic leadership.159) The temple was controlled by the high priestly family of Annas whose son-in-law, Caiaphas, held the position of High Priest. The more conservative religious party, the Pharisees (v. 24), accompanied them. Everyone listened carefully to what John had to say so they could determine if he could be the expected


156. The leading Jews in this case would have been the Sadducees and or leading Pharisees.

157. The priests and Levites were the two classes of religious leaders employed in the temple. See Josh. 3:3; 2 Chron. 30:27; Ezek. 44:15; Bookman, When God Wore Sandals. CD Trac 5.

158. When the gospel writers used terms such as “Jews from Jerusalem” or “Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem” or similar statements ending with “from Jerusalem,” these persons were generally representatives of the Sanhedrin who came to listen, observe, and eventually challenge both John the Baptist and Jesus. Bookman, When God Wore Sandals. CD Trac 5.

revolutionary political-messiah. The Sadducees did not want a political-messiah to ruin their comfortable and corrupt lifestyle. The common people, however, were anxiously waiting for a messiah who would relieve their economic oppression and cleanse the temple of the religious corruption.

Into this religious caldron came John the Baptist, who had the audacity to publicly condemn all of the religious leaders. Everyone was aware of their corruption and arrogance, and while many priests and Levites were not within that greedy clique, their leadership definitely was. Some may have remembered John’s miraculous birth to an elderly priestly family, but others were so steeped in a corrupt lifestyle that they cared little about any miracles or the truth of God’s Word.

“I am not the Messiah.” Since the expectation of a coming messiah was so intense, John knew what the priests and Levites were going to ask, “Are you the messiah (Christos in Greek)?” The word “messiah” to Jewish minds was the one whom God was to send who would restore adherence to the Torah, overthrow the Roman Empire, usher in the Davidic Covenant, and expand the land of Israel to the geographical boundaries of the Davidic Kingdom. Most significantly, their concept of the messiah would make the Jewish nation the international superpower. They had to ask, if John was this man or was he the return of Elijah who would announce the coming of their Messiah. He immediately responded and his incessant words left no peace with anyone. He made his point clear and precise.

The declaration clearly reveals the expectation of the messiah. The term Messiah means the Anointed One and was used in reference to anointing a king for his special service (1 Sam. 16:1, 13; 21:11). It was also applied to the priest and his special service (Ex. 40:13-15; Lev. 4:3). While the Old Testament language describes the anointing of any king or priest, John specifically spoke of the Anointed One.

But there was a reason when they asked the question, “Are you Elijah?” The question had to be asked because John’s dress and lifestyle was that of the ancient prophet. By doing so John followed the Jewish tradition of emphasizing the importance of his message and work. Two examples are Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

1. Jeremiah once instructed the people not to mourn for their deceased loved ones to symbolize the coming disaster for Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 16:5-9).

2. Ezekiel refused to mourn the death of his wife as a sign of the pending destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (Ezek. 24:16-24).

After John’s 30th birthday, the priests, Levites, and even Sadducees took special attention. So when they saw him dressed like Elijah and listened to his message, they immediately recognized him to be a prophet – the first in nearly four centuries. Later, when Jesus said Elijah had already come, He meant that John fulfilled the Elijah prophecy – John was not the physical return of Elijah, but fulfilled the prophetic words of earlier prophets.

“Are you the Prophet?” There clearly was some serious questioning taking place. But the word “prophet” often had direct implications for the expectant political-messiah who would defeat the Romans. Among the various Jewish sects, there were debates as to whether Deuteronomy 18:15 was a reference to a prophet like Elijah, or if this was a messianic prophecy – a deliverer. But most were thinking of a political-messiah like Moses led his people out of Egyptian bondage. People interpreted Malachi 4:5 to expect a literal return of Elijah because he never died (2 Kg. 2:11). Some believed Elijah would return and announce the end of the world. The message of John, however, was a fulfillment of the prophecies of Elijah, namely that he (John) was the one who would announce the coming of the true messiah. Therefore, John denied that he was the Christ, Elijah, or “the prophet” of Deuteronomy 18:15. He was not the reincarnation of Elijah; but he did hold the office of Elijah. Within that office, John prepared the people to hear the words that would come from Jesus (Mal. 4:5-6). Yet he did not replicate any of the profound miracles that Elijah performed; he functioned only within the limits needed to prepare the way for Jesus. Those who accepted the messages of the Baptist and of Jesus had recognized that Elijah had come.

“Make straight the way of the Lord.” Kings would go to war in the springtime after the winter rains produced abundant crops, but the roads were frequently damaged by those rains. Therefore, they sent out road crews to repair roads not only for their armies, but also for commerce. The phrase, “make straight the way for the Lord,” had direct implication that a king was soon to come.

From the Dead Sea Scrolls is a comment that shows that even the Essenes were expecting the messiah to come. They also believed that they needed to be purified from the evils of this world and go out into the desert wilderness and prepare the way for the Lord. For new members, that
“purification” was defined not only by holy living, but also by studying the Torah. Note the following:

And when these become members of the Community of Israel according to all these rules, they shall separate from the habitation of unjust men and shall go into the wilderness to prepare there the way of Him; as it is written “Prepare in the wilderness the way of …, make straight in the desert a path for our God” (Isa. 40:3). This (path) is the study of the Law which He commanded by the hand of Moses, that they may do according to all that has been revealed from age to age, and as the Prophets have revealed by His Holy Spirit.

Dead Sea Scroll, The Community Rule 8:13-17

“All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan.” The name of the village, Bethany, is believed by many scholars to be the shortened version of “Bethabara,” meaning house of the crossing. The area east of the Jordan River was known as Perea, although that name was seldom used. Bethany/Bethabara was located a short distance above the Dead Sea in modern Jordan and was where John the Baptist preached and where he baptized Jesus. The phrase, “house of the crossing,” is an extremely powerful image because John was ushering a new era of the Messiah at the same site where the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and entered the Promised Land – a new era for life.

05.03.01.Q1 Why did John the Baptist say he was not Elijah (Jn. 1:21), but Jesus said that he was (Mt. 11:13-14; Mk. 9:13)?

Clearly there is an apparent contradiction between these two passages. However, the meaning goes beyond the literal understanding of the words. Assume for a moment that the conversation would have taken place with modern terms. When John was asked “Are you Elijah?” he probably would have said, “No. My name is John.” The context of the passage is a request for a physical identity, not a prophetic one. John also denied being “the Prophet” because that had messianic implications.

161. 8:13-17 = Column 8, lines 13-17; Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English. 109.


05.03.01.Z MAP OF THE TRAVEL ROUTE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Little is known of the travels of John the Baptist. Scholars believe his primary area of ministry was above the Dead Sea, on both sides of the Jordan River. See also the 6th century Madaba Mosaic Map (05.02.03.Z) depicting “Bethany beyond the Jordan.” Courtesy of International Mapping and Dan Przywara.
05.03.02 Jn. 1:29-34

JOHN INTRODUCED JESUS

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the One I told you about: ‘After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me.’ 31 I didn’t know Him, but I came baptizing with water so He might be revealed to Israel.”

32 And John testified, “I watched the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He rested on Him. 33 I didn’t know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One you see the Spirit descending and resting on — He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ 34 I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God!”

There were two aspects to the message of John.

1. The arrival of the prophetic Kingdom of God (Mt. 3:2).

2. The salvation of humanity, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29).

These two themes encompassed the entire ministry of the Baptist.

“The lamb of God.” From the time of the Exodus, God had instructed the Hebrew children to sacrifice a lamb to God at Passover (Isa. 53:7; Jer. 11:19) to commemorate their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Ex.12:3-6). After the resurrection, that lamb was symbolic of Jesus who was crucified on Passover to remove the sins of the world. The Baptist made a three-point declaration that Jesus was

1. The Lamb of God of Isaiah 53

2. The One who was to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and

3. Is the Son of God. The lamb has become a symbol of Christ in Christian art and in Communion services throughout church history.

Ironically, there was no mention that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, would be sacrificed on the cross as a sin offering for the people of the world (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19). The ancient prophets did mentioned the sacrifice of Jesus (although not by name), but neither the disciples nor Jews of His day contemplated His death.
After me comes a man who has surpassed me, because He existed before me.” Another translation of this paradoxical phrase is, “after me comes a man who is before me.” John recognized that he was six months older than Jesus, but Jesus pre-existed throughout all eternity past.

“I didn’t know him.” John most certainly would have known Jesus personally; they were cousins. But John also admitted that he did not completely comprehend the majesty of his kinsman who was born of a virgin.

05.03.02.Q1 Was the baptism by John (Jn. 1:26, 33) similar to the baptism ritual that the Jews performed when a proselyte joined them?

The public ritual to “baptize with water” and repent from sin is the major similarity of the two baptisms. The Jews required a Gentile convert to renounce all evil, to be completely immersed in water, accept circumcision (for men) and to wear new clothing that identified him as a member of the Jewish community. John required complete repentance and immersion, but not a change of clothing, as his ministry was only to the Jews.

05.03.02.Q2 How does John 1:29 reconcile with Luke 7:19?

John 1:29 is in reference to a completely different context than is Luke 7:19. The John 1:29 passage was written when Jesus began His ministry and Luke 7:19 has reference to a later time when John the Baptist was in prison. In the latter situation, John remembered that the messiah would set the captives free, so he naturally questioned why he was sitting in the prison dungeon of the Machaerus Fortress. Under this stressful situation, he also questioned his ministry and the work he had been doing on behalf of his Cousin.

Furthermore, John had his own opinions of what the messiah would be like. He spoke repeatedly and forcefully of the One coming after him as the One who would bring fire and judgment. But Jesus was not a “fire, hell, and brimstone preacher” calling for repentance. Rather, Jesus was mild mannered who taught thousands and performed many, many miracles. So it did not take very long for John to have some additional doubts and he asked the question recorded by Luke, especially when he (John) was sitting in prison. That is why the Baptizer sent a disciple to Jesus to ask this important question, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” But what John did not know was that he was correct about his apocalyptic

message – because when Jesus returns He will come as the divine judge precisely as he (John) preached.
Chapter 04
The Ministry Of Jesus Begins

05.04.00.A. JESUS AND HIS FIRST DISCIPLES. Artwork by William Hole of the Royal Scottish Academy of Art, 1876. Jesus and His disciples are shown walking on the road from Jerusalem to Shekem and Galilee (Jn. 1:43-45) that runs through the beautiful Wadi Haramuyeh, south of Bethel.
05.04.01 Introduction
Jesus was now about to begin His ministry. The day after He was baptized, John again identified Him as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:35) and, in response, two of John’s disciples became disciples of Jesus. Soon Jesus and His small band of disciples began walking through the towns and cities of Israel, the Decapolis, and even into the region of Tyre and Sidon. The ministry of Jesus was primarily in small villages. People did not live “in the country” as they do today in a Western rural setting, but rather, rural people lived in small villages.

05.04.02 Jn. 1:35-51

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

35 Again the next day, John was standing with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God!”

37 The two disciples heard him say this and followed Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and noticed them following Him, He asked them, “What are you looking for?”

They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

39 “Come and you’ll see,” He replied. So they went and saw where He was staying, and they stayed with Him that day. It was about 10 in the morning.

40 Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Him. 41 He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which means “Anointed One”), 42 and he brought Simon to Jesus.

When Jesus saw him, He said, “You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which means “Rock”).

43 The next day He decided to leave for Galilee. Jesus found Philip and told him, “Follow Me!”

44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!”

46 “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked him.

“Come and see,” Philip answered.
Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, “Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him.”

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you,” Jesus answered.

“Rabbi,” Nathanael replied, “You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Jesus responded to him, “Do you believe only because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then He said, “I assure you: You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus in the following manner:

1. His preaching prepared the hearts of the people for what Jesus would say, especially in the lives of those who would become disciples of Jesus.

2. He acquired disciples who would eventually leave him and follow Jesus.

3. His ministry would be a fulfillment of the prophetic Scripture of the “voice in the wilderness (desert).”

Simon Peter, Andrew, in partnership with James and John, had a fishing business with employees and a home that was much larger than the average house in Capernaum. Peter and Andrew were originally from Bethsaida, but probably moved to Capernaum for a number of reasons. Bethsaida was in the territory of Herod Philip and Capernaum was in the territory of Herod Antipas. Transporting goods from one region to another meant paying taxes at the border. So one of those reasons could have been to legally avoid paying Matthew (a tax collector at this time) the tax on transporting on fish they caught. Another reason, for Peter anyway, was that he got married and established his home in Capernaum, which may have been the home of his bride.

The passage in John 1:35-51 clearly reflects the typical anticipation of a coming messiah. Andrew was evidently a disciple of John the Baptist, heard John identify the “Lamb of God” and, therefore, “followed Jesus.” These two words provide an important clue as to how first century disciples became associated with their teaching rabbis. There were many itinerant rabbis who went throughout the countryside teaching in synagogues, at the temple, or elsewhere. They
generally had a group of disciples who went with them, not only imitating their teaching, but also
the lifestyle of their teacher.\footnote{Bauder, “Disciple, Follow, Imitate, After.” 1:480-87.}

The association or relationship between rabbi and potential disciple began in this manner: A
young man would listen to the teaching of a certain rabbi, and if he was interested in becoming a
disciple, he would follow the rabbi for several days or weeks. The act of following was done in
a polite manner as not to be invading the rabbi’s privacy, but not so distant as to be out of sight
or hearing. After a while, the rabbi would ask the follower a question of what he wanted. In a
polite manner, the “wanna-be” disciple would ask the rabbi – in this case Jesus – \textit{“Where are
you staying?”} (cf. Jn. 1:38b). The question was not necessarily to be taken literally, but in
essence meant, “Do you want me to be your disciple (or student)?”\footnote{Fruchtenbaum, \textit{The
Jewish Foundation of the Life of Messiah: Instructor’s Manual}. Class 6, pages 1-3.}

If the rabbi invited the young man to come and see (cf. Jn. 1:39a), that was a polite way of the
rabbi accepting him. If the rabbi refused to tell him, the message was that the rabbi did not
accept him as a disciple. In the case of Jesus and the two disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus
accepted both of them by saying, \textit{“Come … and you will see”} (Jn. 1:39a). With this statement,
the rabbi would tell the followers to continue following him. The courtesies of saving face and
preventing humiliation reflect a high degree of respect and dignity lost in modern Western
culture. Not knowing where the rabbi was staying for the evening was not as humiliating as not
being accepted as a disciple. For more information on the establishment of a disciple-rabbi
relationship, see 02.03.04.Q1 “How did one become a rabbi or a disciple of a rabbi?”

\textbf{“Rabbi.”} This was not an official title, but a word spoken with the highest respect meaning,
\textit{teacher}, or \textit{great one}. In a similar manner, the title also meant \textit{lord}.\footnote{See Appendix 26 and 02.203.04.Q1.}
This was not a title of
divinity, but rather a synonym for \textit{master} or \textit{great one}, in the same manner that kings and other
figures of royalty were addressed. It was not until the disciples recognized and confessed Jesus
as Messiah that the title \textit{Lord} took on a meaning of divinity.\footnote{Edersheim, \textit{The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah}. 737-38.}

At this time, to be a rabbi all what one had to do was to have disciples.\footnote{Bookman, \textit{When God Wore Sandals}. CD Trac 7.} But for that to happen,
most men first went to a \textit{yeshiva} (seminary). Jesus, of course, did not attend a yeshiva, but
gathered disciples once they heard His excellent teaching. The term \textit{rabbi} did not have any
reference to an ordained position in the synagogue until later in the first century.
Finally, there is an interesting irony related to John 1:38 above. In that verse, as well as in John 20:16, Jesus isn’t just called a rabbi, but he is called a didaskalos, a Greek word meaning *master teacher*. Luke, however, used the word *epistata* meaning *knowing* or *knowledgeable* person. The only other document with this Greek term is found the Mishnah which was written in the second century (A.D.).

As an interesting side note, critics claimed the Mishnatic text was proof that the gospel of John was written in the second century. The implication is obvious – in effect, they said that this gospel has errors, as it was written more than a century after Jesus. However, in 1930 E. L. Sukenik conducted archaeological excavations on Mount Scopus, near Jerusalem, and discovered an early (B.C.) ossuary. On the side of the stone bone box was inscribed the title *didaskalos* of a man named Theodotion. Again, the proverbial “stones cried out” the truthfulness of God’s Word, yet the opinions expressed by textual critics remains unchanged.

“We have found the Messiah.” This was spoken with a great deal of excitement! According to John, the term *Christ* meant the Messiah or the Anointed One. By definition, the title in Hebrew is *Mashiah*, in Aramaic, *Meshiha*, and Greek, *Messias*, while the Greek, *Christos*, means Anointed One. The Septuagint translated *Mashiah* some forty times to *Christos.* The Messiah was a key figure in Hebrew prophecies whom the Jews thought would deliver them from the bondage of the Romans. Instead, Christ delivered them from the bondage of sin. Moses had written of the coming Messiah who would crush Satan’s head (Gen. 3:15). Isaiah (53:6) said He would carry the sins of the world and Daniel had counted the years of His coming (Dan. 9:24-26). Little wonder then, that Peter referred to Jesus as the One for whom Israel had been waiting for centuries (Mt. 16:16). Evidently, others were also waiting for His coming.

“You will be called Cephas.” Peter grew up in Bethsaida, and like other villages in northern Galilee, it had a very nationalistic passion. His father Jona probably named him “Simon” in honor of the high priest who sacrificed his life during the Maccabean Revolt. In fact, during the time of Jesus, many boys were named after Maccabean Revolt heroes. Therefore, when Jesus changed Peter’s name, more was said than merely a name, but rather, a nationalistic destiny was changed to a heavenly destiny that would establish the kingdom of God. Simon was derived from the Old Testament name of Simeon, meaning *to hear*, as to *hear the voice of God* (Gen. 29:33).

“Follow me.” As stated previously, usually a student would go to the master teacher and ask indirectly to become one of his disciples. But this time Jesus broke the traditional custom; it was not the custom to have the master select the disciples. Therefore, to hear the words “follow me” from a rabbi was considered a sacred calling. One had to make an immediate decision whether to become a life-long disciple of a master teacher. The invitation was an honor because most people did not feel worthy of such a calling.\(^\text{174}\) One of several examples from the Talmud reads

Rabbi Shesheth said “Whoever teaches the Torah in this world will be privileged to teach it in the next, as it is written, ‘And he that waters shall water again too’ ” (Prov. 11:25).

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 92a

A good rabbi, or teacher, was considered to be as one who provides someone a refreshing drink. Its significance is emphasized in a land that has no rain for half the year. Therefore, the imagery here is quite remarkable in that there is an association of the Word of God with water (living water?). The disciples who dropped their nets understood the sacredness of being asked to enter the ministry of being teachers and preachers.\(^\text{175}\)

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” The history of the village is rather humble and unbecoming. Some archaeological evidence of human occupation has been found dating from the Iron Age 1 (1200 – 1000 B.C.), but that has been minimal and the village clearly did not have a continuous occupation. The village was in the land that was allotted to the tribe of Zebulun by Joshua. His book identifies some fifteen villages in the area of Nazareth (Jos. 19:10-15), but the village of Mary and Joseph is not among them. Centuries later Josephus named approximately forty-five lower Galilean towns when he was a military commander, but he failed to mention this insignificant town. Ironically, nothing has been discovered to suggest any wealth or Greek influence in Nazareth, which may account for the number of temple priests who settled there after the A.D. 135 destruction of Jerusalem.\(^\text{176}\) More specifically, archaeological evidence reveals it was founded in the second century B.C. and the oldest extra-biblical reference is from the third century A.D.\(^\text{177}\) Scholars believe that as a result of the victorious Maccabean Revolt many Jews left Babylon and relocated in the Galilee region, including Nazareth. Therefore, the new villagers had some distinct cultural differences that were different from their fellow Jews in


\(^{175}\) Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 91b; Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 328.

\(^{176}\) Lauterback, 92; Geikie, The Life and Words of Christ 1:467-68.

\(^{177}\) Rivkin, 311.
Jerusalem. Among those differences was their language dialect as demonstrated by Peter during the Passion Week.

As little as the land of Israel was, there was plenty of room for regional discrimination. Not only were there serious cultural conflicts between the Jews and Samaritans, there were also social stigmas between Jewish communities. The Jews of Jerusalem looked down upon those in Galilee, and those in Galilee looked down on Nazareth. This is evident by the fact that Nathanael, a Galilean, made a degrading comment about the village that was the home of Jesus. An example of the negative attitude toward Galilee is found in the Mishnah concerning the beginning of the Passover observance.

**Rabban Simeon ben Gabaliel says:** “A man should always behave as the disciple of the Sages.” Moreover, the Sages say: “In Judea they used to work until midday on the eve of the Passover, but in Galilee, they used to do nothing at all.”

**Mishnah, Pesahim 4.5**

The suggestion is obviously that the men of Nazareth are lazy. As to the question, did “anything good” ever come from Nazareth? Yes! Today the world recognizes the small village as the place that brought forth the greatest gift that God ever gave to humanity.

**“Under the fig tree.”** When rabbis were not teaching in the village synagogue or temple, it was customary to teach under a fig tree. It was a tradition that after a lesson students would depart to a quiet area, sit under a different fig tree, meditate, and pray about what they had just learned. Not only did the tree provide a comfortable shade, but also a desirable fruit as they meditated upon the Word. In the course of time, the fig tree not only became symbolic of national Israel, but also as a place to study the Scriptures. 178 Therefore, to sit under a fig tree was an ancient body language that said one was a serious student of Scripture. 179 In fact, the Torah was associated with the fig tree because most trees, such as olives, dates, and pomegranates, have fruit that ripens at the same time. The fig tree, however, is harvested continuously because there are figs that ripen throughout most of the year. And so it is with the Torah, one learns a little today and a little more tomorrow and a little more the next day. 180 The man who “sits under the fig tree” is a man whose passion is God. The tradition of sitting under the fig tree started centuries earlier when rabbis taught their students that the Word of God was as sweet as the fresh fruit of the fig tree.

Therefore, when Jesus said that He saw Nathanael under a fig tree, it was more than a literal meaning. Jesus saw both his godly character and the fact that he was meditating on God’s word. Jesus saw that Nathanael had a heart for righteousness and for God – an ideal candidate for a disciple. Oddly enough, little is said about him after this encounter.

“The Son of God ... the king of Israel.” Again, Jesus is thought to be a political figure. To this Jesus responded by saying that He is much greater than an earthly king. The phrase “son of God” was evidently in common use, especially among the Essenes, whose writings mention it. This small scroll fragment has caused great interest, study, and debate among scholars because it reads, in part,

“… All shall serve [him and he] shall be called [son of] the [gr]eat God, and by his name shall he be named. He shall be hailed the Son of God, and they shall call him Son of the Most High. As comets [flash]to the sight, so shall their kingdom …”.

Dead Sea Scroll Fragment, 4Q246

While this fragment cannot be attributed to Jesus, it does indicate that some Jews of the early first century B.C./A.D. expected their messiah to come with the title “son of God.”

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The phrase "Son of God" was found on a fragment, one of 15,000 in Dead Sea Scrolls Cave Four. It predates the birth of Jesus.

"Then He said, 'I assure you.' " In John 1:51, there is a Hebraism that has been lost in most modern translations. It is translated in the King James Version as "Verily, verily I say unto you." Yet even with a high degree of accuracy in translation, the significance of the meaning is lost unless one understands the cultural meaning of the archaic English words *verily, verily*, which could also be stated as *true, truly*. The meaning of the phrase *I assure you* or *verily* is that the spoken message is true, dependable and certain. The lost Hebraism is the cultural significance of a repeated word.\(^{182}\) The term *amen* (Gk. *amen*, 281)\(^{183}\) is a confirmation of truthfulness, as seen in Isaiah 65:16 where God is a witness to a particular confirmation, and He is called *the God of the amen*, in Greek – *theos alethinos* (the Revised Standard Bible reads *the God of truth*).\(^{184}\) When numerous Old Testament passages are examined, *Amen* is said by God to mean, *it is and shall be so*, and by men, *so let it be*.\(^{185}\)

The repetition of *true, truly*, was the ancient way of emphasizing the importance of what was spoken.\(^{186}\) Repeating a word does not double its value, but the duplicated term can best be understood with a simple illustration from mathematics. If a number such as "10" were multiplied by the power of "10," its value would be far more increased than if it were merely doubled. Furthermore, there is an increased degree of emotion associated with such a duplicated Hebrew expression. Later, when the crowds were shouting passionately and relentlessly to Pilate to crucify Jesus, Luke wrote, "Crucify him, crucify him," to emphasize the increased passion of the mob at the moment.\(^{187}\)

The most unusual feature of this passage, and the parallel passages that record only one "amen" or "truly," is the fact that the word(s) is/are at the *beginning* of the sentence. This is totally out of character with other authors of the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, New Testament, and rabbinic writings where "amen" is *always* at the end of a sentence. The most probable solution to the

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186. Lang, *Know the Words of Jesus*. 279.

mystery is that the word is not part of the verse, but is in fact an independent sentence, such as “amen!” or “amen, amen!” Since Jesus was a dynamic teacher it would be natural for him to hear either a statement or say one, followed by a hearty “amen.” Therefore, this one or two-word phrase is a confirmation of the preceding statement. Keep in mind that ancient Hebrew and Greek did not have punctuation marks. Consequently, proper translation of Scripture was a challenge for translators of the early Reformation Period.188

“Angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” John painted a picture reminiscent of Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28:12, when the patriarch saw a ladder that reached into heaven. There were angels ascending and descending on the ladder and at the top was the Lord. Then the Lord promised him land and a great number of descendants that would cover the earth. In fact, the whole earth would be blessed by what the Lord promised Jacob in this dream.

Now John moves on to Jesus and in the next chapter he begins to describe the miracles Jesus did in and among the descendants of Jacob. John now used that imagery to say that the Lord was among His people bringing a divine presence to them. There was no literal ladder, but it was obvious that our Lord had come down to them.

Finally, the phrase *Son of Man*, or *Bar Enosh* in Aramaic,189 in the book of *Enoch* is a figure who is waiting in heaven until God sends Him to earth where He would establish His kingdom and rule over it. This popular book was common knowledge, so when Jesus used the phrase about Himself, He was clearly claiming to be the long-awaited Messiah. That is quite interesting, because the book of *Enoch* was written in the Inter-Testamental period, and the expressions of “son of Man” and “son of God,” when used of Christ, do so to express His deity.190 Of course scholars have questions if the writer of *Enoch* knew that the Son would be Deity?

05.04.02.Q1 What were the Jewish expectations of the Messiah?191

There is no question that Jesus came during the time of great messianic expectations as evidenced by various writings in extra-biblical literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls. The historian Josephus provided a series of hostile yet tantalizing glimpses of various characters who claimed

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191. See 12.03.01.Q1 “What ‘Messianic problems’ did the Jewish leaders have with Jesus?” and 12.03.01.A “Chart of Key Points of the Messianic Problems.” See also 02.03.09 “Messianic Expectations” and Appendix 25: “False Prophets, Rebels, Significant Events, and Rebellions that Impacted the First Century Jewish World.”
prophetic and/or nationalistic inspiration. The heightened expectations of the public must also be considered as part of the fulfillment of Galatians 4:4, that states that “in the fullness of time,” Jesus came.

The Jewish expectations are addressed numerous times throughout this e-Book, because understanding their opinions is so critically important. There is no question that they expected a political figure that would redeem them from Roman occupation. If the Jews were unified on anything, this was it. However, on other issues, such as how long he would rule and reign, there was a great diversity of opinions. For example, in the Talmud are statements from several rabbis concerning the length of the messiah’s reign.

1. Rabbi Eliezer said the “days of the messiah would be forty years.”

2. Rabbi Dorsa said it would be four hundred years while another rabbi said three hundred sixty-five years.

3. On the other hand, Rabbi Abbahu said the messiah would reign seven thousand years.

While these periods of rulership may seem rather ridiculous to the modern reader, they are significant because these rabbis believed the messiah would be “like the son of man” (Dan. 7:13), Daniel’s prophetic phrase was interpreted to mean that the messiah would not be an ordinary human, but in some manner be super-human. They examined the various terms expressed by Daniel, such as “weeks,” “70,” “times, time, and a half time,” and attempted to calculate when the messiah would arrive. They used all forms of Gematria and mathematics. Obviously they were confronted with a major paradigm shift because Jesus looked like an ordinary man and He was not the mystical deliverer they expected. Therefore, He had to carefully change their preconceived opinions.

192. Josephus, Antiquities 18.1.1; 20.5.1-2; 20.8.6; Wars 2.13.4-6. See also a partial listing in Appendix 25.

193. The opinion of a 400 year reign probably originated in 2 Esdras 7:27-31. For more information, see William Barclay, Jesus. Ch. 7.


Without a spoken word concerning Malachi’s prophecy (Mal. 3:1), but by suddenly appearing in the temple and driving out the merchants, Jesus not only announced His Messiahship, but also demonstrated that the House of God was to be a holy sanctuary and not a market place for corrupt businessmen. His appearance in the temple has definite messianic overtones!
05.05.01 Introduction
Since His baptism Jesus acquired five disciples, and they were invited to a wedding in the small village of Cana. It was at this wedding that, due to a shortage of wine, His actions revealed His identity. In the time that followed, He revealed His identity repeatedly, not by a confession, but by His actions and teachings. This, in turn, made people ponder, search their Scriptures, and discover for themselves His identity.

05.05.02 Jn. 2:1-11 The First Miracle in Cana

**JESUS TURNS WATER INTO WINE**

1 On the third day a wedding took place in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and 2 Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding as well. 3 When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother told Him, “They don’t have any wine.”

4 “What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?” Jesus asked. “My hour has not yet come.”

5 “Do whatever He tells you,” His mother told the servants.

6 Now six stone water jars had been set there for Jewish purification. Each contained 20 or 30 gallons.

7 “Fill the jars with water,” Jesus told them. So they filled them to the brim. 8 Then He said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the chief servant.” And they did.

9 When the chief servant tasted the water (after it had become wine), he did not know where it came from—though the servants who had drawn the water knew. He called the groom 10 and told him, “Everyone sets out the fine wine first, then, after people have drunk freely, the inferior. But you have kept the fine wine until now.”
Jesus performed this first sign in Cana of Galilee. He displayed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

People have always loved weddings, and in ancient times the wedding was rather unique – and in some ways – like a game. As the evening sun set upon the horizon, the bridegroom and his friends went to the bride’s home to “steal her away.” She anticipated his coming and was prepared to meet him with her bridesmaids, but wasn’t exactly sure when to expect him. Both bride and bridegroom were then carried off on the shoulders of young men while others carried torches, played flutes and drums, sang and danced in the streets, as they went to the appointed place of the wedding. Bride and groom were treated as they were a king and queen – a profound image in a culture of economic slavery. The celebration is one of the most joyful events in Jewish life, because a new family was established and God was honored for the creation of new life.

“On the third day a wedding.” In Judaism, the days of the week do not have names, but rather, are numbered. Weddings were held on the third day of the week because, at the time of Creation, that was the day God twice said that “it is good.” Since the day begins at sunset, the wedding occurred Monday after sunset which is the beginning of the third day and went far into the night. Maidens were married on the third day of the week, and widows on the sixth day. So the wedding at Cana was clearly for a young maiden. Families of wealth could afford an ample supply of wine that would last seven days – the length of wedding celebrations among the proverbial “rich and famous.” However, among the poor, weddings were no more than three


197. The custom of numbering the days of the week, instead of giving them names, continued in the early church and is recorded (A.D. 100-110) in a text known as the Didache (8:1); Throckmorton, Gospel Parallels. 45; Funderburk “Calendar.” 3:320.


200. For further study on first century weddings, see Geikie, The Life and Words of Christ 1:471-79.

days, if that. The fact that this family ran out of their beverage of choice, is indicative of their economic status – poor. In addition, among the common people, the host did not provide wedding garments for the guests. Only the very wealthy and those of high rank could afford to provide wedding garments to all their guests.⁹²

It was the custom for the host (the bridegroom or the father of the bridegroom) to employ a toastmaster for the wedding feast to insure that all the needs were met for the guests, and especially for the bride and groom. Therefore, when the wine was all consumed, it was a social tragedy and a supreme insult for him. Such an error on the part of the toastmaster would not only haunt him but also the newlyweds for the rest of their lives. It was a problem beyond modern comprehension. The fact that they did run out of wine underscores the probability that the wedding party was a poor Jewish family. This gross embarrassment was averted when Jesus changed the water into wine with the taste of aged mellowing.⁹³

05.05.02.A. TWO RITUAL STONE WATER VESSELS. Stone vessels were considered ritually pure, as opposed to vessels made of clay (Mishnah: Kelim 10:11; Parah 3:2). They were made of a limestone block that was turned on a

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primitive lathe. These vessels each have a capacity of eight and one-half gallons.\textsuperscript{204} Photograph by the author.

**“Cana of Galilee.”** It was in this obscure village of Cana where Jesus performed His first miracle. Not before crowds in a splendid amphitheater, but before a few peasant farming families who worked hard, who struggled to keep afloat under Roman oppression, and who were about to have an ordinary wedding – or so they thought. If a son of Mary and Joseph was getting married, then the wedding would have occurred in Nazareth. If a daughter was getting married, the wedding would have been at the bridegroom’s home – which in this case, was in Cana. The identity of the wedding couple may never be known, but scholars are comfortable with the assessment that one individual of the bridal couple, most likely the daughter, was closely related to Mary and Joseph.

On a side note, since the seventeenth century, the village of Cana that is adjacent to and just north of Nazareth has claimed to be the traditional site of the miracle. In fact, the local church contains two vessels said to be of the biblical wedding. However, this village was established solely for tourists and has no biblical, historical, or archaeological significance. In fact, recently archaeologists identified the actual site of the Khirbet Kana ruins about ten kilometers north of Nazareth. Excavations there have revealed a first century occupation and local Arabs for centuries have called it the Cana of Galilee.

**“What has this concern of yours to do with Me, woman?”** To modern readers this hardly seems like a statement that Jesus would make, especially when Hebrew law and the cultural hospitality demanded respect for parents. It seems very unkind and harsh, but in the Aramaic language, it did not convey that negative emotion.

The word 	extit{woman}, or 	extit{gunai}, is a word of endearment and great respect, so much so that emperor Augustus addressed Queen Cleopatra of Egypt by the same word 	extit{gunai}.\textsuperscript{205} Jesus used it again when he hung dying on the cross and said, “Woman, behold your Son.” Another translation could be, “What have I and you to do with that?” Or, “Never mind; don’t be worried.”\textsuperscript{206} Yet, as previously stated, English translations do not convey the emotion of the common Aramaic phrase (\textit{mal li velak}), that is perfectly consistent with the most delicate courtesy and feelings of consideration.

\textsuperscript{204} Josephus, \textit{Antiquities} 8.2.9


Why did Mary ask Jesus to resolve the crisis at the wedding (Jn. 2:1-11)?

When Mary asked Jesus to do something about the crisis, He said that His commands come from His Father in heaven, not her. That sounds rather harsh in modern English. This was followed by His statement, “My hour has not yet come,” which can also be translated as “I must wait for the right opportunity.” Nonetheless, He did as she requested, not out of obedience, but for her honor. He was in His thirties and the parent-son relationship still had to be cherished. Therefore, Jesus performed His first miracle, changing water into wine, which would later symbolize His life – bringing joy to life. But the fact that Mary asked Jesus to resolve a serious problem presents the question of why – why did she ask?

The only reason Mary could have asked Him to do anything was because she was an important figure in the wedding party – someone in her immediate family was getting married. Because weddings were times of great celebration, the entire extended families of Mary and Joseph were probably there. One tradition says that the reason she asked Jesus for help was because the bride was either her sister or daughter. Another tradition says the bridegroom was Alphaeus and the bride was Mary, a sister of the Virgin Mary. Note that at times parents did name two or more children with the same first name.

However, some scholars have suggested that it is too much of an assumption to consider Mary as a member of the wedding party because such an opinion cannot be sustained by an exegetical study – and they are correct! However, from a cultural perspective, it is almost certain that she was a member of the wedding party. If Mary was a guest, it would have been most inconsiderate of her to make this request and cause further embarrassment to the host. There are several reasons why she asked Jesus to do “something,” meaning, to perform a miracle of some kind. Consider these –

1. She certainly did not forget the angel that told her of her pregnancy. No one would forget that event – and she wondered about it for three decades. But now she knew that He was past the age of 30 and His ministry would soon begin.

2. It was Mary, when told she would conceive and bear a child (Lk. 1:46-56; 04.03.05), who once magnified her Lord when she proclaimed “My soul proclaims the greatness of our Lord.”


209. Geikie, *The Life and Words*. 1:582. Volumes could be written on the various legends that surround the life of Jesus. However, these two traditions are listed because one of them has a real possibility of being historically accurate. In addition, while it was not common, at times a family did have two children with the same name.
3. Who, but a mother would have known her son better than anyone else, especially if He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and she gave Him birth while still a virgin?

4. She knew of Zechariah and Elizabeth and their miracle son, John, who would by now have been preaching in the less populated areas north of the Dead Sea.

5. She remembered the words of Simeon who, when he held the infant Jesus, thanked God for the opportunity to see the salvation of God for all people (Lk. 2:25-35; 04.04.04).

6. She reflected upon the words of Anna, a prophetess in the temple.

7. She remembered the magi and the trip to Egypt so Herod would not kill her son, and possibly herself and Joseph too.

8. What was it like to raise a perfect sinless child? Mary and Joseph, as well as their relatives and neighbors, were most certainly aware of the unusual character of Jesus as He grew into manhood.

9. She knew her Son already had five disciples and was a great teacher. She probably questioned that if some Hebrew prophets performed miracles, would her son do likewise?

10. She knew that John, the son of her cousin, was already in ministry and had disciples.

With all these incredible experiences, she knew there was something profoundly different about her Jesus. She most certainly did not know of His divinity, but she knew her Hebrew Bible well enough to understand that since the prophets of olden times performed miracles, maybe her Jesus, who was now past the age of 30, could do something the wine situation. Especially since this was a socially desperate situation.
This miracle must have had a special effect upon His siblings who most certainly were wondering what kind of brother they had. Yet in spite of His incredible teachings, the fact that He had five disciples at this point, and the incredible miracle He performed, yet they had no respect or honor for Him (Mk. 6:4).

“Jewish purification” Orthodox Jews observed the ceremonial washing of hands prior to eating. The washing of hands (2 Kg. 3:11) meant washing the forearms from the elbows to the finger tips prior to eating with prayers of thankfulness. So serious was the matter of hand washing, that those who failed to wash properly were said to be subject to the attack or influence of a demon named Shibta. Because most Christians have never observed ritualistic ordinances as this one, the significance of ceremonial washing is difficult for them to understand.

At the wedding, the vessels were present so the attendees could to wash their hands in ritually-pure water before eating. Vessels of clay pottery were considered to be ritually impure because of the possibility of dung being in the clay. The fact that there were six stone jars indicates that this was a huge wedding – with many guests not only from the small village of Cana, but nearby Nazareth as well.

Since the stone vessels were for water to be used in ritual washing, why did Jesus use them for His miracle? The answer is that there were probably no other vessels available that would have contained the sufficient amount of wine needed for the large crowd. Furthermore, since the miracle occurred in ritually pure vessels, in Jewish eyes that was a positive reflection upon His miracle.

“The chief servant.” The chief servant (Gk. architriklinos) was not a slave, but the master of the banquet; either the headwaiter or a guest who served as the steward or host. Since this was a multi-day event, he presided over the series of evening meals that were an integral part of the lengthy wedding feast. It was his responsibility to insure that the entire feast was properly conducted, assign seats for family and guests, and maintain a lively spirit throughout the celebration. As the chief steward, he tasted the wine before it was served to the guests. He

210. The word “siblings” is used here with the understanding that they were the natural children of Mary and Joseph and, in effect, not full siblings in the normal sense of the word.
211. 1 Sam. 9:13; Mt. 15:35; Lk. 22:17.
213. Barclay, “John.” 1:99; Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 75-76.
214. Freeman, The New Manners and Customs. 513.
was also responsible to insure that no one had too much to drink, as intoxication would have been an insult to him and the wedding couple.\textsuperscript{216} Whether for religious or civil occasions, there was always plenty of food, wine, pomp, and speeches as the order of the day. The master scheduled everything in its due time for the host.\textsuperscript{217} But his reputation as the master of the banquet was largely determined by how well he mixed wines. The Talmud recorded that a Rabbi Rava excelled in this art and had established a renowned reputation for being the best wine mixer.\textsuperscript{218}

\textbf{“Fine wine . . . the inferior (wine).”} Wines were normally consumed within three to four years of the grape harvest, with the best wines aging ten to sixteen years.\textsuperscript{219} The best wines were presented first to the guests of honor in the beginning of the feast, with the lesser quality consumed near the end of the festival. To acquire the best taste, it was common practice to mix wines, especially in the royal courts.\textsuperscript{220} The wine Jesus produced was of such excellent quality that it did not have to be mixed with other wines. Since new wine had a potent effect the Talmud forbade giving it to a Jewish servant.\textsuperscript{221} This is a very interesting reflection upon the quality of wine. What Jesus produced apparently had the full flavor of fine aged wine, not the fresh potency of new wine. The Bible says that the Jews related wine with the joy of life (Ps. 104:15), which is why the Second Temple Period sages said,

\textbf{One in whose house wine does not flow like water is not blessed.}

\textit{Babylonian Talmud, Eruvin 65a}

Obviously, if the prevailing opinion was that a house without wine was not blessed, imagine what running out of wine at life’s most important occasion, a wedding, would have been like. A huge social embarrassment! To insure that no one drank too much of the beverage, the rabbis insisted that it be diluted with water, but they disagreed on the ratio of wine to water. Note the following:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{216} Freeman, \textit{The New Manners and Customs}. 513.
\item \textsuperscript{217} Manser, \textit{The Saying of Jesus}. 37.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Babylonian Talmud, \textit{Baba Metzia} 60a.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Dayagi-Mendels, \textit{Drink and be Merry}. 33.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Dayagi-Mendels, \textit{Drink and be Merry}. 54-55.
\item \textsuperscript{221} Babylonian Talmud, \textit{Kedushim} 22a.
\end{itemize}
1. According to one source in the Babylonian Talmud, wines were normally diluted with two parts water to one part wine, but a mixture that consisted of three parts water and one part wine could not be considered wine.222

2. The ancient writer Pliny said it was diluted eight parts water to one part wine.223

3. Jason of Cyrene, who authored 2 Maccabees from an extended narrative, said,

   For just as it is harmful to drink wine alone, or, again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one’s enjoyment, so also the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work.

   2 Maccabees 15:39224

4. Two writers of the Mishnah said that wine diluted with two to four parts water and the mixture was known as *mazug*.225 Furthermore, they said this was a normal practice. It would have been nearly impossible to become intoxicated with this diluted beverage.

The point being that wine was seldom consumed without first diluting it with water. This was done for two reasons:

1. To decrease the opportunity for abuse and intoxication. A constant concern was the abuse of a blessing to the point it would become a curse, namely, drunkenness. Judaism, as well as the church, has always condemned drunkenness. Clement made this comment concerning Jesus:

   For if He made water [into] wine at the marriage, He did not give permission to get drunk.

   Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor226

222. Babylonian Talmud, Pesahim 108b; Babylonian Talmud, Shabbath 77a; Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 618-20.

223. Pliny. Natural History 14.6.54.

224. First and 2nd Maccabees belong to a classification of extra-biblical books known as the Apocrypha. These two literary works are deemed highly reliable historically. See 02.02.03 “Apocrypha” for more information.

225. Mishnah, Niddah 2:7; Mishnah, Baba Metzia 3:27; Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 619.

2. To kill the bacteria in water that had been stored in cisterns for long periods of time. By the end of a long hot dry summer with no rain, the water that was stored in cisterns generally had some bacteria or other microbes that could cause stomach problems. The small alcohol content of the wine made the water safe to drink.

To honor the command, “You should be holy,” even rabbis were forbidden from entering the temple, blessing a congregation, or rendering a legal-religious decision if they were even slightly under the influence of wine. Because wine “gladdens the heart” (Ps. 104:15), it was the symbol of joy, along with love, marriage, and repentance. Jesus performed his first miracle that was symbolic of a wedding. His last miracle was also symbolic of a wedding. His miracle at Cana is in sharp contrast to the first miracle of Moses, where water in the Nile turned into blood and suggests that the Old Covenant symbolized judgment. The Cana miracle was clearly symbolic of the contrast between the Old and New Covenants. But could there have been another purpose for the miracle at Cana?

“Jesus performed this first (miraculous) sign.” John clearly indicated the miracle at Cana was the first in the ministry of Jesus. The Greek word for sign is semeia which John used to point the readers toward Jesus. Whereas Jesus used the miracles to reveal His glory; to reflect upon past prophets (as in the healing of Jairus’ daughter), John used the word semeia to point specifically to Jesus.

Miracles were designed to authenticate the message and messenger of God (Acts 2:22). In the Old Testament, miracles were generally punitive, whereas those of Jesus were redemptive. The Jews were persuaded by miracles, which were signs of the continuation of God in their midst, but the Greeks were persuaded by logic and reason (1 Cor. 1:22). It is interesting that Jesus did not come primarily as a miracle-worker, but He came to reveal the Father and to preach that the Kingdom of God was about to come to those who placed their faith in Him. Three times John discretely used the number seven. As previously stated, John presented seven “I am” statements, seven discourses, and seven signs or miracles about Jesus.


228. The Seven “I AM’s”: Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35, 41, 48, 51); Light of the World (Jn. 8:12); Door of the Sheep (Jn. 10:7, 9); Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11, 14); Resurrection and the Life (Jn. 11:25); the Way, the Truth, the Life (Jn. 14:6) and the True Vine (Jn. 15:1, 5).

229. The Seven Discourses: new birth (Jn. 3:1-21); Works of God (Jn. 5:19-47); Bread of Life (Jn. 6:26-58); Water of Life (Jn. 7:11-52); Light of the World (Jn. 8:12-59); Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:22-39) and Upper Room Discourse (Jn. 13:1-17:26).
The Hebraic meaning of “seven” was very significant to his first century audience. It represented completeness and wholeness, while the number three represented emphasis. Whenever something was said in the most important manner possible, it was said three times. Since John used the number seven as a figure of speech, it is obvious that there were many more signs, discourses, and “I am” statements. Cana was the first miracle sign.

To underscore His divine authority, Jesus did not choose the fresh fruit of the vine, but common water and changed that into the finest wine. Water has always been an essence of life, especially in the semi-arid and arid climate zones of Israel. It is interesting that the first miracle was not the restoration of life to a dead person or the healing of a crippled, deaf, or mute person, but changing water into wine and creating joy. It had been more than three decades since reports spread throughout the land of His unusual birth; three decades since the shepherds and angels rejoiced. Now this Man of divine birth began to disclose God’s compassion, power, and the message of the Kingdom of God.

05.05.02.Q2 What is the significance of the first miracle (Jn. 2:1-11)?

All too often study of the first miracle is focused on the turning of the water into wine, rather than the fact that Jesus was at a wedding and the wine, symbolic of joy, was at a wedding feast. The new wine portrays the coming of the messianic kingdom – Jesus is the Messiah of Israel who will bring the Messianic Kingdom into reality. His kingdom is often portrayed in terms of a banquet or wedding feast. How appropriate then, that His first miracle is to bring joy to a wedding feast – the focus of His entire ministry. As a whole, Judaism with its many sects and multiple regulations had essentially become a dead religion. It needed life and joy; it needed a “spiritual wine.” Jesus is that wine.

230. The Seven Signs: Water into Wine (Jn. 2:1-2); Healing the Nobleman’s Son (Jn. 4:46-54); Healing the Paralytic (Jn. 5:1-17); Feeding the 5,000 (Jn. 6:1-14); Calming the Storm (Jn. 6:15-21); Healing Man Born Blind (Jn. 9:1-14) and Resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:17-45).

1. The miracle captured people’s attention in a greater manner than did the preaching and teaching He had done until this point. The fact that He had five disciples is indicative that He was a well-respected teacher.

2. The miracle emphasized the fact that He came to bring joy to life – joy that would be revealed within the Kingdom of God.

3. This miracle was the first of many, that coupled with His message, revealed the Father as Jesus preached the good news that the Kingdom of God was about to come to those who placed their faith in Him.

**05.05.02.Q3 Did the wine that Jesus created contain alcohol (Jn. 2:1-11)?**

There is no biblical passage that commands total abstinence from alcohol, but there are abundant passages that declare drunkenness to be a sin.\(^2\)\(^{3}\) This writer has come to the conclusion that today this question is usually asked by those who wish to justify their abuse of alcohol, or desire to argue against this church doctrine. Both issues actually point to other problems. However, to respond to the straightforward question – both the Greek and Hebrew languages have a word that means grape juice and another word that means fermented drink made from grapes. In this passage, the Greek word οἶνος (3631) for wine originated from the Greek ω-νος, which clearly means fermented wine.\(^2\)\(^{3}\) There is no question that the miracle wine had alcohol. The Bible does not condemn drinking wine, but it highly condemns drunkenness and the lifestyle associated with it (see commentary below on “Choice wine … cheaper wine”).\(^2\)\(^{3}\)\(^{4}\) Wine was a common beverage at this time in a manner similar to what a soft drink might be to North America today.

**05.05.02.Q4 What is the difference between wine and strong drink (Jn. 2:1-11)?**

Due to the hot climate, any kind of natural juice spoils quickly. For that reason, grape juice was fermented into wine, so it had a long shelf life and could be used as a medicine, beverage, and for religious rites. As previously stated, both Greek and Hebrew have distinct words for fermented wine and grape juice. A complete study of wine is beyond the scope of this study, but a brief overview is presented.\(^2\)\(^{3}\)\(^{5}\) The word wine is basically used in three ways as follows.

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232. Hab. 2:15; Lk. 21:34; Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18; etc.


1. The word *new wine* is fresh grape juice. It is used 38 times in the Old Testament. But it too can be fermented, as evidenced by Hosea 4:11 that says both “old wine” and “new wine” (Gk. *gleukos* 1098) take away understanding. Obviously virgin grape juice would not do that. Another example is that on the day of Pentecost, the crowds said that the people were filled with “new wine” (Acts 2:13), which obviously implies they were under the Holy Spirit influence. This suggests new wine has some alcohol content.

2. The word *wine* is simply fermented grape juice that has a natural alcoholic content and is found 141 times in the Hebrew Bible.

3. The phrase *strong drink* is used 23 times and refers to an intoxicating beverage with a higher alcohol content than wine. It was made by adding dried fruit (i.e., raisins, dates, figs, barley, pomegranates, dates, or even honey) to fermenting grapes. The dried fruit, with its natural sugar content, spiked the alcohol level of the brew resulting in a “strong drink.” This *wine* is the “ mocker” and “brawler” of Proverbs 20:11, but was to be given to those who are dying (Prov. 31:6). In modern times, this would be associated with liquor.

On a side note, in light of the ancient custom of drinking wine, today’s commercially produced wine has higher alcohol content when consumed than did its ancient counterpart. While it may not be as strong as the “strong drink” of the first century, it isn’t far from it. On occasion, a spice wine with honey and pepper or a palm wine was created. Beer came from Media and Babylon and barley wine was imported from Egypt. However, most Jews observed the rabbinic rules and consumed only their local wines. Jesus made pure wine of the best quality; anything inferior would not have been a divine miracle.

05.05.02.Q5 Could Jesus have quietly have demonstrated His superiority over the Greek god Dionysos?

A question to ponder is whether Jesus silently demonstrated His divinity and power over the Greek god Dionysus. The miracle was obviously significant to the Jews, and their Greek

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236. e.g., Gen. 27:28; Joel 2:24; Mic. 6:5.


240. Dayagi-Mendels, *Drink and be Merry.* 55.
neighbors certainly heard about it. In fact, some Gentile friends and neighbors most certainly attended the event and witnessed the miracle. Jesus demonstrated that He had greater power than Dionysius, the Greek god of joy and wine. In fact, this writer believes that most, if not all of John’s recorded miracles were demonstrations of power over Greek and Roman deities.

The first miracle has two symbolic significances.

1. As stated previously, the first miracle by Moses was to turn water into blood (Ex. 7:20). In that historic case, Moses was the administrator of death and wrath (2 Cor. 3:6-9), but in this case, Jesus was the administrator of joy in life because He is the true vine that brings gladness to the heart (Ps. 104:15). While Moses is shown here in contrast to Jesus, in other places he is shown as a “type” of Christ, as when he sweetened the bitter waters (Ex. 15:25), a feat duplicated by Elijah (2 Kg. 2:19-22). The first miracle had a symbolic message that was quickly recognized by the rabbis. It placed Jesus as One who was more holy than Moses, and that was a dilemma they could not accept.

2. A second symbolic significance is that it also reflects upon the thin and watery elements of the Jewish faith (Heb. 7:18) that was about to be transformed into a richer and joyous higher faith. In essence, the Old Testament Israelite religion was symbolized by water; and only in the “type and shadow” could it point to Jesus who is the true vine (Jn. 15:1). The second symbolic significance was probably not observed until after His resurrection.

According to a Greek legend, on certain annual occasions, namely January 5 and 6, the god of Sephphoris, Dionysius, produced wine in a miraculous manner. The proverbial “wine, women, and song” were considered among life’s greatest pleasures by the Greeks and Romans. No image portrays this better than the god Dionysos. Since Nazareth and Cana were both short distances from Sephphoris, there is no doubt that the news of the miracle soon reached the Gentile city.

241. See Appendix 3.
242. According to some Messianic scholars, shortly after this event, although probably not related to this event, Rabbi Yokamen ben Zikai terminated the practice of bitter waters as a test for determining the guilt of an adulteress. Source: Fischer. The Gospels in Their Jewish Context. (Lecture on CD/MP3). Week 9, Session 2.
In the Greek city of Sepphoris, located only three miles from Nazareth and a few more from Cana, the Greek god Dionysus was worshiped. According to ancient authors like Pliny, Dionysus was the god of wine and happiness. However, the Greeks understood very well that their idol could not change water into wine. This is significant since the gospel of John was written for a Greek audience. The Cana miracle not only had profound theological implications for the Jews, but also led the Gentiles to take notice of the superior deity, just as Moses had done centuries earlier.

On a final note, the Apocryphal gospels, written in the second century and later, record miracles that Jesus supposedly performed in his childhood and early adulthood. These so-called miracles range from modified portions of authentic miracles found in the New Testament to modified portions of authentic miracles found in the New Testament to

244. Pliny, *Natural History* 2.231; 31.16.

245. Idols are not mentioned in the gospels because these statues to pagan deities were not permitted within Jewish communities. They were, however, prominent in Gentile communities within the Jewish regions and are mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. Vine, “Idols.” *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary.* 2:317.

246. Similarly, the Egyptian Coptic Church has many traditions about Jesus performing miracles as a young child when He was in Egypt (cf. Mt. 3:13-15).
outlandish fantasies. All of them are in serious conflict with the Bible, even though the authors claimed apostolic authorship. There are dozens of them, if not more. These writings can be categorized as the false teachers that Jesus warned would come.²⁴⁷

05.05.02.Q6   Where was Joseph, the legal father of Jesus?

It is often presumed that by this time Joseph had died, since there is no mention of him after the temple episode when Jesus was twelve years old. This would naturally lead to the question as to why Jesus did not raise His own father from the grave. The only possible answer may be that Joseph died before the ministry of Jesus began, during which time He performed His miracles. As Jesus said previously, “My hour has not yet come.” Since the Father in heaven ordained the time of Jesus’ ministry, He could not perform any miracles prior to then. The siblings of Jesus naturally felt great sorrow at the passing of their father. But once they witnessed Jesus performing miracles, they probably could not understand why He did not raise their own father back to life.

However, some have argued against this opinion indicating that Joseph may have been alive as noted in John 6:42.

They were saying, “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can He now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

John 6:42

In this conversation, the people refer to the parents of Jesus as if they are still alive and know them personally. But that is a modern interpretation. In biblical times, a son was referred to by his father’s name throughout the son’s lifetime, and many years after the father’s passing. For example, John ben David (John, son of David) would be known by that name until his dying day, even if David died fifty years earlier.

05.05.03 Jn. 2:12 From Cana to Capernaum

AN INTERLUDE AT CAPERNAUM

²⁴⁷. Two examples are: 1) Ron Charles, who has gathered scores of fanciful legends and myths, mostly written between the sixth and sixteenth centuries, in his book titled The Search: A Historian’s Search for Historical Jesus. (Self-Published, 2007). 2) Nicholas Notovich, whose book, The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ. Trans. (Virchand R. Gandhi, Dover Pub.) is a so-called historical account of when Jesus went to Asia to study between the ages 13 and 29.
After this, He went down to Capernaum, together with His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, and they stayed there only a few days.

Jesus began His ministry in the lush country hills and villages of Galilee, also known as Gennesaret, meaning garden of abundance. With His family and five disciples, they walked down to Kefar Nahum, or the “Village of Nahum” that is known in English as “Capernaum.” It was a border town between the districts of Philip and Antipas. The expression “down,” is a reference to elevation and not to the north-south orientation as is commonly used today. For example, ancient writers referred to going “up” to Jerusalem, regardless from which direction they came. The capital city is about 2700 feet above sea level in the central mountain range. From Cana, Jesus and His disciples traveled east to Capernaum, stayed there a few days, and walked southward up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.

As will be revealed, Jesus spent the better part of His ministry time in Capernaum. But why did He relocate from Nazareth? Nazareth was a small hilltop village in the middle of the Jezreel Valley in the District of Galilee. Only one highway of any significance went near it, and that was in Sepphoris – an hour’s walk distant. Capernaum, however, had considerably more traffic – local and international. If Jesus was going to get His word out into the world quickly, the Sea of Galilee area was the place to be. The popular road Via Maris ran through it; from Egypt to Damascus and another road went from Capernaum to Ptolemais – now known as Acre – so international travelers would hear His message and take it with them. When Jesus left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum, it was a fulfillment of one of Isaiah’s prophecies that says,

3 Nevertheless, the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times when He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future He will bring honor to the Way of the Sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations.

Isaiah 9:1


249. Concerning the number of brothers and sisters, see 10.01.02, “and the brother of James, Joses…”

250. At this point in the ministry of Jesus, He had only five disciples. See Lightfoot, A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica. 3:253; Farrar, The Life of Christ. 87.


252. The Greek city name of Ptolemais was changed to Acre in the seventeenth century. See Geikie, The Life and Words of Christ 1:485.
FIRST TEMPLE CLEANSING, MERCHANTS DRIVEN OUT

13 The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple complex He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and He also found the money changers sitting there. 15 After making a whip out of cords, He drove everyone out of the temple complex with their sheep and oxen. He also poured out the money changers’ coins and overturned the tables. 16 He told those who were selling doves, “Get these things out of here! Stop turning My Father’s house into a marketplace!”

17 And His disciples remembered that it is written: Zeal for Your house will consume Me (Ps. 69:9).

18 So the Jews replied to Him, “What sign of authority will You show us for doing these things?”

19 Jesus answered, “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.”

20 Therefore the Jews said, “This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?”

21 But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this. And they believed the Scripture and the statement Jesus had made.

23 While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many trusted in His name when they saw the signs He was doing. 24 Jesus, however, would not entrust Himself to them, since He knew them all 25 and because He did not need anyone to testify about man; for He Himself knew what was in man.

Jesus went to Jerusalem to observe Passover for the first time since He began His ministry. 253 He had been there many times in earlier years, and knew the corrupt business climate that had taken control of the House of Prayer.

“He found people selling . . . money changers sitting there.” When Jesus entered the temple, He found agents for the high priest selling animals and exchanging currency at inflated rates. Currency exchangers functioned at the temple year round, but they were especially active at

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253. Jesus went to at least three Passovers during His ministry years (Jn. 2:13; 6:4; and 11:55) and attended another feast that was not identified but is believed to have been a Passover celebration (5:1). He also attended the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn. 7:2, 10) and the Feast of Dedication (Jn. 10:22).
Passover. This commercial business activity became known as the Bazaars of Annas, located in the Court of the Gentiles. Only Annas was qualified to certify if an animal was pure, spotless, and unblemished and, therefore, perfect for sacrifice. In the event he rejected an animal, he was quick to have an “approved” animal available for purchase at a premium price. Since many local people were involved with agriculture they frequently raised their own animals for sacrifice. But all animals had to be approved by Annas who was known for rejecting perfectly good animals for the sole purpose of reselling them to someone else at inflated prices. Furthermore, many people traveled great distances to the temple and Annas took advantage of their plight by overcharging them ten to twenty times the fair market value. The Talmud records an incident of such price gouging:

Once in Jerusalem a pair of doves cost a golden dinar. Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel said, “By this temple, I will not suffer the night to pass by before they cost but a (silver) dinar.” He went into the court and taught: “If a woman suffered five miscarriages that were not in doubt or five issues that were not in doubt, she need bring but one offering, and she may then eat of the animal offerings; and she is not bound to offer the other offerings. And the same day the price of a pair of doves stood at a quarter-dinar each.”

Mishnah, Kerithoth 1:7

The significance of either a silver or a golden dinar being the price of a pair of doves is that a pair of doves was the offering from the poorest people of Israel. The temple elite clearly had no compassion for anyone but themselves.

From the fifteenth day of the month preceding Passover, bankers set up their tables throughout the city, and from twenty days prior to Passover they were permitted to trade within the temple itself. Passover was also the time when the annual half shekel temple tax had to be paid (Ex. 30:11-16). Foreign coins were generally rejected by Annas, supposedly because these coins generally had images of pagan gods. However, the more likely reason was that these coins did not have a consistent precious metal value, with the exception of coins minted in Tyre. For those who came with foreign currency, Annas charged them a premium between four to eight percent.

254. Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 81.


256. The famous Hillel had a son Simeon who served in the temple when Jesus was dedicated. This Simeon had a son named Gamaliel, who had a son also named Simeon. See Lightfoot, A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica. 2:31.

257. Geikie, The Life and Words of Christ 1:496.
so they could place pure (94%) Tyrian shekels\textsuperscript{258} into the temple coffer\textsuperscript{259}. These shekels and half-shekels were known for having the purest silver content of any mint in the ancient Middle East. That was far more important to Annas than the image of Marduk, a/k/a Melqarth-Herakles that was stamped on the coin. Little wonder that the Pharisees had a passionate hatred for the Hellenized Sadducees.

But the crimes of Annas did not end there. His bazaar was located in the Gentile Court of the temple and the resulting atmosphere was more of a livestock auction than a place of worship. Clearly the retired high priest had great disdain for the Jewish people he was supposed to represent before God, but he had even less respect for Gentiles.

Tradition says that a certain Babh Ben Buta was the first to commercialize it when he brought a flock of 3,000 sheep from Kadar.\textsuperscript{260} This business venture would never have happened if the high priest Annas had not approved it. The Gentile Court, which was to be a House of Prayer for all nations, had been degraded into a foul-smelling livestock market with its currency exchange bankers. Those who were employed by Annas were profit-oriented, while the worshipers were forced to defend themselves against temple swindlers, bankers, and hucksters.\textsuperscript{261} Clearly, the livestock business was a highly lucrative endeavor. The irony is, that those who claimed Jesus profaned the temple were the ones profiting from the profaning that occurred on a weekly basis, but more so at Passover.

Finally, his greed was beyond description. For example, from the altar there was a pipe in which flowed the blood from the sacrificial animals into the Kidron Valley. That blood was collected, dried, and sold to gardeners who used for fertilizer.\textsuperscript{262} There was good reason that the common Jews hated House of Annas as much as the Herodian family.

\textbf{“A whip out of cords.”} No weapons were permitted in the temple area. This included sticks and whips that were normally used to drive animals. Therefore, Jesus quickly made a short rope (Gk. \textit{schoinion} 4979)\textsuperscript{263} out of twisted rushes, or \textit{bul-rush}, thereby creating a \textit{rush-rope}.\textsuperscript{264} With

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{259} Stein, R. \textit{Jesus the Messiah}. 189. Some scholars believe five percent, see Geikie, \textit{The Life and Words of Christ} 1:496; Hendin, \textit{Guide to Biblical Coins}. 131-3.
  \item \textsuperscript{260} Farrar, \textit{The Life of Christ}. 100.
  \item \textsuperscript{261} The issue of commercialization in the commercialization within the Court of the Gentiles is found in the Mishnah \textit{Seqalim} 1.3; 3.1 and \textit{Berakot} 9.5; Josephus \textit{Antiquities} 12.3.4 (145) and 15.11.5 (417).
  \item \textsuperscript{262} Lightfoot, \textit{A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica}. 1:85.
  \item \textsuperscript{263} Vine, “Cord.” \textit{Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary}. 2:129.
\end{itemize}
it He scolded the merchants as He drove them out of the Gentile Court and into the streets. His action was a message everyone understood, and no one, not even the Roman guards who were stationed in the adjacent Antonia Fortress, took action against Him. Judas Maccabee would have been proud of Him. His actions undoubtedly caught the attention of many, including the Zealots.

Jesus never intended to cleanse the temple from its divinely appointed system of sacrifices, but from the incredible corruption and abuses. On several occasions He healed people and told them to make the required sacrifices in the temple.\(^{265}\) It was a holy site for worship but the current activities were an affront to God. The prophet Zechariah said that in the days of the Messiah, no trader (or “Canaanite”)\(^ {266}\) would be in the house of Jehovah and holiness would be restored (Zech. 14:20-21).

\(^{20}\) On that day, the words HOLY TO THE LORD will be on the bells of the horses. The pots in the house of the LORD will be like the sprinkling basins before the altar. \(^ {21}\) Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of Hosts. Everyone who sacrifices will come and take some of the pots to cook in. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of Hosts.

Zechariah 14:20-21

The rabbis must have wondered if Zechariah’s prophecy was fulfilled, and if so, when the rest of the prophecy would be fulfilled. Clearly, cleansing the temple called attention prophetic scriptures and to His identity as the messiah.

“\textit{This sanctuary took 46 years to build, and will You raise it up in three days?}” These words sent shock waves throughout the rabbinic community and temple establishment. They knew that the temple described in Ezekiel (Ch. 40 ff.) was not the temple they so highly cherished. If Ezekiel’s prophecy was to come true, as did so many other of his prophecies, then clearly the present temple would have to be destroyed to permit the construction of the one prophesied. That change would destroy the power and wealth system of the ruling class and no one dared to speak of such a destruction or replacement.

Yet, to add turbulence to their thinking, Jesus said He would raise it in three days. When they realized He could heal the blind, make the lame walk, and raise the dead, their fear of a new temple was most threatening. No wonder they made certain someone would accuse Him of

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265. I.e. the cleansed leper, Mk. 1:40-45; ten lepers, Lk. 17:11-19.
266. Traders and merchants were given degrading names such as “Canaanite.”
destroying the Holy Shrine. In fact, the law required anyone who threatened the destruction of the temple be put to death. While Jesus did not say He would do this, His words came close. He referred to the “reconstruction of the temple” as His body resurrected from the grave. Jesus never said, “I am able to destroy the temple of God,” or “I will destroy this temple....” But those were distortions later said by two false witnesses who accused Him during His trial (Mt. 26:61; Mk. 14:57-58).

In the phrase, “this sanctuary took 46 years to build,” the Greek wording clearly indicates construction was still in progress. In fact, the temple reconstruction began in Herod the Great’s 18th year of reign, reckoned to be 20-19 B.C., and was not completed until A.D. 64, only six years before its destruction. Since the discussion between Jesus and His adversaries took place in the 46th year of reconstruction, the date can be accurately connected to the 15th year of reign for Tiberius Caesar (Lk. 3:1), which in the modern calendar was A.D. 27. Some scholars have argued for a beginning date of A.D. 28 (or 791 AUC the founding of Rome). However, their calculation fails to recognize that the Jews considered part of a year as a full year, in the same manner as they considered part of a day as a full day (i.e. crucifixion day to resurrection day equals three days). It is a strong argument for a crucifixion date of A.D. 30, which presupposes a ministry of three and a half years.

It should be noted that the 46th year was not the year of the temple’s completion, as some have suggested. In fact, the Talmud indicates that the temple was still under reconstruction during the days of Rabbi Gamaliel the Elder, and Josephus said that the all the work was finally

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269. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.* 259.

270. Nonetheless, scholars are not in agreement on this dating as many believe that Herod the Great died in 1 B.C. and the crucifixion occurred in A.D. 33; See Filmer, “The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great.” 283-98; Finnegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology.* 98.

271. Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 115A.
completed in the days of Albinus, which was just prior to the First Revolt and the temple’s ultimate destruction.

“Many trusted in His name when they saw the signs He was doing.” The early teaching ministry of Jesus must have been impressive, because by the time He attended the wedding in Cana, He had gathered five of His twelve disciples without performing any miracles. In fact, they probably didn’t even know Jesus could perform such feats. Therefore, the water-to-wine miracle brought incredible attention, the first of many, which John called signs or semeion (4956).

Multitudes came from many parts of the world for the Passover celebration. While in Jerusalem they most certainly heard all the chatter and latest gossip about the Man who changed water into wine and threw out the money changers. When they returned to home the news spread like a wildfire. While His ministry was essentially in a very small geographical area, His influence reached throughout the empire.

This was the first of two cleansings. While some scholars believe there was only one cleansing which was recorded twice, there clearly is a major difference between the two – after the first cleansing Jesus continued in His ministry. After the second one, He was crucified. However there is an important point to consider, one that has often been missed: the appearance of Jesus was a fulfillment of a prophecy by Malachi, and as such, the cleansing was a bold messianic claim.

“See, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to His temple, the Messenger of the covenant you desire—see, He is coming,” says the Lord of Hosts.

Malachi 3:1

Because of these words by the prophet Malachi, there was a common belief that when the messiah comes, there would be a new era of holiness and purity in temple worship. This is found in several Jewish writings, as well as in the Eighteen Benedictions. The beginning of this verse clearly refers to John the Baptist. But the second sentence refers to Jesus who suddenly


275. Isa. 9-11; Dead Sea Scroll 4QFlor 1.6-17.

276. See number 14 of the “Eighteen Benedictions” in Appendix 18.
came to the temple (see 13.02.02) and, in doing so, made a profound messianic claim without a spoken word.277

The cleansing was not an action against the temple, but against the merchants in the Court of the Gentiles. By these cleansings, Jesus also fulfilled a prophecy in Psalm 69 that reads,

**For your house has consumed me,**

**Psalm 69:9a**

The verse literally means that *the temple will be His destruction.*278 This is precisely what happened. The Sadducees were delighted to see Jesus challenge and humiliate the Pharisees, but when He cleansed the temple, He was threatening their turf – their social, economic, and political security, and they planned to kill Him.

The primary reason for the cleansing was that the Gentile Court of the temple complex had been converted from a Holy Site to a massive commercial enterprise for the benefit of the high priest, Annas.

It should be noted that there was a wall of division between the Gentile Court and the Court of Israel. That wall had a warning engraved on at least two stones (see 13.02.02.A), one of which reads as follows:

**No stranger is to enter within the balustrade (partition barrier) surrounding the temple and whoever is caught will be answerable for his death, which will ensue.**

**Josephus, Antiquities. 12.3.4 (145b)**279

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279. See also Josephus, *Wars* 5.5.2.
There are two significant points to consider which are followed by the discussion of the temple as a sacrificial system and significant people affiliated with the temple who also functioned as a private banking system. The days when the temple was a House of Prayer were essentially gone – as only a few righteous priests and Levites continued to function in their service as per the biblical mandates.

1. The temple was the shrine of the national religion and center of public life. Only the righteous (as defined by the religious elite) could worship there. The structure had become an idol, and to speak against it could mean death. Into this religious environment, Jesus boldly announced the corruption of the established religion. Jesus came and found a decadent temple, rather than what it was supposed to be – a holy temple where all mankind could come to sacrifice and worship God.

2. The Essenes established an independent religious community at Qumran in the second century B.C. because of the corruption of the temple establishment – the most corrupted leadership in the six centuries of the temple’s existence (515 B.C. – A.D. 70). The sins of the Sadducees, who controlled the temple affairs, were prophetically described centuries earlier in Psalm 69:9. Not only did Jesus condemn them, but Josephus likewise mentions them in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*. Centuries after Jesus, the writers of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds also condemned them. The high priesthood reached the pinnacle of greed and defiled the temple in two ways:

   a. The leading Pharisees and Sadducees converted the sacrificial system into a moneymaking machine for their personal wealth.

   b. The temple or various priestly families of the temple continued to function as a private bank for the Jews. Both features are discussed below.

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05.05.04.A. FLOOR PLAN OF HEROD’S TEMPLE. The Court of the Gentiles was a large area that surrounded the more sacred areas of the temple. The Court had been converted into a commercial banking and livestock sales area in Jesus’ day.

The small city of Jerusalem brimmed with hundreds of thousands of visitors during the springtime festival of Passover. It was so congested that many brought their own food and slept outside the city under the starry sky in places like the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact, Jerusalem had become such a popular tourist center, with Jewish pilgrims coming from all parts of the Mediterranean world that scholars believe a synagogue with hotel accommodations was built primarily for them. In 1913 the Theodotus inscription was discovered in the bottom of a well in Jerusalem. However, it is also believed that the facility served as a school between festivals when the “tourist trade” declined.
05.05.04.B. THE THEODOTUS INSCRIPTION. The Theodotus inscription was at one time at the entrance of a Jerusalem synagogue which was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. It is believed to have been built for Jewish pilgrims who desired a bath and place for lodging. Wikipedia Commons.

The inscribed stone reads as follows:

Theodotus son of Vettenus, priest and synagogue leader, son of a synagogue leader, grandson of a synagogue leader, rebuilt this synagogue for the reading of the Law and the teaching of the commandments, and the hostelry, rooms and baths, for the lodging of those who have need from abroad. It was established by his forefathers, the elders and Simonides.

Theodotus Inscription

05.05.04.C. A MODEL OF THE TEMPLE AND COURT OF THE WOMEN (behind the wall). The Court of the Gentiles was the large area to the extreme right and left sides as well as the immediate foreground. Photograph by Wikipedia Commons.

1. The Sacrificial System.
The Jews celebrated their God, in part, with seven festivals that were combined in three events, of which the Passover was the most significant (Ex. 20). Every male Jew, who lived within fifteen Roman miles, was expected to participate. However, it was such a highly esteemed celebration that every Jewish man, particularly those in distant lands, dreamed of visiting the holy city at least once in his lifetime.

This gave the aristocratic Sadducees, namely the house of Caiaphas and Annas, the annual extortion opportunity to overcharge these visitors for sacrificial animals needed for their most sacred worship service. The vast number of sheep, oxen, and doves sold to visiting pilgrims in the temple transformed the place of worship into a marketplace to benefit the well-to-do Sadducees. The noise, filth, and stench were most certainly unbearable.

2. The Banking System.
The Court of the Gentiles had become a house of merchandise, of bartering and bickering, and a banking center. It was supposed to be a House of Prayer where men and women from all

283. See Appendix 5.
nations could pray to the Almighty God of heaven and earth. Instead, it was a system of elaborate commercial enterprises which produced enormous wealth for a few aristocrats.\textsuperscript{285}

In ancient times, the common belief was that gods lived in the temple where the people worshiped. This was true of every ancient culture worldwide, not only in the Middle East. People trusted their gods to protect them and provide for their daily needs. Temples were always considered a safe haven because the gods lived there and would protect people and property. Furthermore, no one dared to steal monies given to the gods or stored in the holy sanctuaries, because it was feared that the gods would retaliate and curse the thief, whether he be a king or a pauper. When Solomon’s temple was burned in 587 B.C., the Israelites believed that the Babylonians had defeated their God. Hence, prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel gave prophetic words to tell their people that their God was very much alive and in control. Centuries earlier when Joshua traveled from Jericho north to Hazor, he burned the entire city, including its temple and royal palaces. Since Hazor was the largest of the Canaanite cities, Joshua’s victory, including the destruction of the Canaanite temple, sent shivers of fear through the hearts of all of the other Canaanite communities. It was obvious to everyone that the God of Joshua was more powerful than the god of the Canaanites.

In every society, as a few individuals became wealthy, they needed a place to store their funds. The only place available was the nearby temple, which became the first bank. The temple-banking system became well developed during the Hellenistic Period in cities such as Delos, Sardis, Claris, Pessinus, Mylasa, Aymus, and Caria.\textsuperscript{286} In Ephesus, for example, the temple of the goddess Diana served as the central bank for the eastern third of the Roman Empire. The wealth that flowed into that city was enormous. Deposits grew and as people needed to borrow money, wealthy individuals within the temple became the first lenders. While the Israelites were in Babylonian captivity, they became familiar with Babylonian lending institutions. Archaeological evidence clearly shows that some Jewish families became very wealthy in the banking industry.\textsuperscript{287} Religions and temples were closely aligned with governments. Now, not only was the money of the wealthy safely secured, but incredible sums of money also were given to the temple by the devotees of the faith. Hence, trustworthy priests could serve as mortgage brokers and earn a commission on money lent out. Thousands of texts written on clay tablets found in Mesopotamia indicate the average interest rate of twenty percent, which was easy for anyone to

\textsuperscript{285} Wilson, \textit{The False Trials}. 26-27.


\textsuperscript{287} Youngblood, \textit{Unlock the Bible: Keys to Exploring the Culture and Times}. 38.
calculate using fingers. It was also the established interest rate for redeeming part of a tithe (Lev. 27:31). In temple complex was the Royal Stoa Building, the financial facility that housed cash reserves, notes of debts, mortgages, expensive fabrics and other objects of extreme value.

Video Insert >

05.05.04.V1 Professor Gary Byers and Dr. Paul Wright discuss what scholars believe was a private banking system affiliated with the religious establishment in the temple. Introduction by Dr. Bill Heinrich. ( ) Click here if Internet connection is available.

In one of His parables, Jesus asked the question, “Why didn’t you put my money in the bank?”(Lk. 19:23). So clearly, there was some type of lending-saving financial institution operating at the time. Some scholars believe that in all probability, it was a private institution connected with the temple. In Jerusalem there were merchants who evidently did considerable business and needed a place to keep their money. The safest place evidently was the Counting House, which was related to the temple – not physically, but probably owned by the temple but located elsewhere in the city. Some scholars have suggested the Counting House was located outside the city, but this is doubtful for security reasons.

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288. The University of Pennsylvania Department of Archaeology and Anthropology has an inventory of approximately 30,000 clay tablets, most of which are financial transactions, such as mortgages and legal contracts. The British Museum holds about 150,000 similar tablets. All of these predate King David (1000 B.C.).

289. Josephus spoke of corrupt priests who stole the tithes from other priests in Antiquities, 20.9.2, found in, “A den of robbers,” 13.02.02. He also mentioned it in Antiquities 20.8.8 as found in “The chief priests” in 15.02.09. See additional rules on tithing in the Mishnah, Ma’aserot 1.1 and Moed Shabbath 4.7. The point is that tithing was a well-established practice.

290. See mini-lecture by Dr. Paul Wright at 05.05.04.V1.

291. For further study of loans, debts, and how first century Jewish courts ruled, see the Mishnah and the chapter titled Baba Bathra.


293. Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus. 34.

At this time there was no modern-style institutionalized banking system, although there is clear evidence that the aristocrats and super rich stored their wealth in the temple.\textsuperscript{295} Josephus, in his eye-witness description of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, said,

\begin{quote}
They also burnt down the treasury chambers, in which was an immense quantity of money, and an immense number of garments, and other precious goods, there deposited; and to speak all in a few words, there it was that the entire riches of the Jews were heaped up together.
\end{quote}

\textit{Josephus, \textit{Wars} 6.5.2 (282)}

Among the wealthy who were private lenders, were tax collectors. Josephus recorded the account of one by the name of Joseph, son of Tobias of the second century (B.C.). His relation as a nephew to the high priest in Jerusalem most certainly was a factor in acquiring this position, which he held for twenty-two years. From his office in Jerusalem, he collected taxes from Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, and Samaria. In addition, he had an office in Alexandria which was operated by his steward. Tax collectors such as Joseph often became private lenders, a tradition that was already well-established in Old Testament times (Isa. 5:8; Micah 2:1-5). Peasants who did not have funds mortgaged their lands and crops, thus becoming poorer while the tax collectors became wealthier. That is why the prophet Isaiah condemned them when he said,

\begin{quote}
Woe to those who add house to house
And join field to field
Until there is no more room
And you alone are left in the field
\end{quote}

\textit{Isaiah 5:8}

The prophet Micah likewise condemned the tax collectors saying that they deprived people of their homes and inheritances to the point of creating a national disaster. The problem for the tax collector was where to store the thousands of coins until shipment was made to the royal treasury? Money was stored in the temple. That is why there was a Roman auxiliary unit stationed in Capernaum where Matthew was the tax collector and why there was a fortress by the temple in Jerusalem.

In addition to being a Roman-protected “safe deposit box” for ancient wealth, the temple was the most important factor in the commerce of Jerusalem. A number of shopping areas, called bazaars, were located nearby where pilgrims could purchase goods made locally as well as

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
So much money was generated from local businesses, that a number of ancient writers said that people were invited to store their wealth in the temple, but it was not just for the rich and famous, widows and orphans also used this facility (2 Macc. 3:10). With so much money in the temple, supervision and security of the deposits was critical. There were no less than three treasurers, or gizbarim, who reported to the captain of the temple. They were responsible for all financial transactions, which included the following:

1. Deposits of monetary funds.
2. Deposits of goods (grain, animals, dough, etc.) equivalent to money
3. Deposits of all other offerings, including second tithes
4. Secured payments of the temple tax as mentioned in Matthew 17:24.

Due to the fact that there was a huge amount of silver and gold in the temple treasury, there was a need for security. The temple police were the responsibility of the Levites who assigned Levitical guards to twenty-one posts while the priests guarded three posts within the sacred area.

Previously, when the Jews were taken to Babylon, they were introduced to a highly developed lending system. A study of the Hebrew Bible and Inter-Testamental books reveal some clues

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297. Josephus, Wars 2.5.2 (282); 2 Maccabees 3:4-6, 10-15; 4 Maccabees 4:1-3.
299. Mishnah, Shekalim 5.2; Tosephta, Shekalim 2.5, 177.
300. Mishnah, Peah 1.6; 2.8; 4.8; Hallah 3.3; 3.4.
301. Mishnah, Shekalim 2.1.
302. Mishnah, Tamid 1.1 and Middot 1.1.
indicating that lending not only existed, but was also abusive, hundreds of years before Christ. Notice the following examples:

1. After a number of poor crop harvests, unfortunate happenings and possible extravagance led to huge debts (Neh. 5:3-4).

2. The wealthy and prosperous were expected to lend to the poor without charging interest.  

3. When David was struggling for his position, among those with him were debtors who joined him in the Cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22:2). They probably joined him due to the harsh punishment they would have received for failure of payment (cf. Ps. 37:21).

These accounts appear to be related to private individuals as there is no mention of commercial lending through the temple. Therefore, the narrative written by Jason of Cyrene in 2 Maccabees 3:10-14 is perplexing, because it is the report of an agent for the Greek Seleucid king who attempted to steal private monies from the temple. It reads as follows:

He reported to him that the treasury in Jerusalem was full of untold sums of money, so that the amount of the funds could not be reckoned, and that they did not belong to the account of the sacrifices, but that it was possible for them to fall under the control of the king.

When Apollonius met with the king, he told him of the money about which he had been informed. The king chose Heliodorus, who was in charge of his affairs, and sent him with commands to effect the removal of the aforesaid money. Heliodorus at once set out on his journey, ostensibly to make a tour of inspection of the cities of Coelesyria and Phoenicia, but in fact to carry out the king’s purpose.

When he arrived in Jerusalem he had been kindly welcomed by the high priest of the city, he told him about the disclosure that had been made and stated why he had come, and he inquired whether this really was the situation. The high priest explained that there were some deposits belonging to widows and orphans, and also some money of Hyrcanus, son of Tobias, a man of very prominent position, and

303. 1 Kg. 7:51; 2 Kg. 18:15, 16:8; 1 Ch. 9:26, 28:11-12; 2 Ch. 36:18; Neh. 13:12-13; Ec. 42:7; and Tobit 1:14, 9:5.

304. Ex. 22:25; Deut. 15:7-11; Ps. 15:5.


306. Monies (alms) given to the temple for the support of widows and orphans.
that totaled in all four hundred talents of silver and two hundred talents of gold.\footnote{Private funds held in the temple for safe keeping.} To such an extent, the impious Simon had misrepresented the facts. And he said that it was utterly impossible that wrong should be done to those people and in the sanctity and inviolability of the temple, which is honored throughout the whole world. But Heliodorus, because of the king’s commands which he had, said that this money must in any case be confiscated for the king’s treasury. So he set a day and went in to direct the inspection of these funds.

There was no little distress throughout the whole city. The priests prostrated themselves before the altar in their priestly garments and called toward heaven upon him who had given the law about deposits, that he should keep them safe for those who had deposited them. To see the appearance of the high priest was to be wounded at heart, for his face and the change in his color disclosed the anguish of his soul. For terror and bodily trembling had come over the man, which plainly showed to those who looked at him the pain lodged in his heart. People also hurried out of their houses in crowds to make a general supplication because the holy place was about to be brought under contempt. Women, girded with sackcloth under their breasts, thronged the streets. Some of the maidens who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of windows. And holding up their hands to heaven, they all made entreaty. There was something pitiable in the prostration of the whole populace and the anxiety of the high priest in his great anguish.

While they were calling upon the Almighty Lord that he would keep what had been entrusted safe and secure for those who had entrusted it, Heliodorus went on with what had been decided. But when he arrived at the treasury with his bodyguard, then and there the Sovereign of spirits and of all authority caused so great a manifestation that all who had been so bold as to accompany him were astounded by the power of God, and became faint with terror. For there appeared to them a magnificently caparisoned horse, with a rider of frightening mien, and it rushed furiously at Heliodorus and struck at him with its front hoofs. Its rider was seen to have armor and weapons of gold.

Two young men also appeared to him, remarkably strong, gloriously beautiful and splendidly dressed who stood on each side of him and scourged him continuously, inflicting many blows on him. When he suddenly fell to the ground and deep darkness came over him, his men took him up and put him on a stretcher and carried him away, this man who had just entered the aforesaid treasury with a great retinue and all his bodyguard but was now unable to help himself; and they
recognized clearly the sovereign power of God. While he lay prostrate, speechless because of the divine intervention and deprived of any hope of recovery, they praised the Lord who had acted marvelously for his own place. And the temple, which a little while before was full of fear and disturbance, was filled with joy and gladness, now that the Almighty Lord had appeared.

2 Maccabees 2:6-30

This historical narrative not only provides evidence of influential lending families within the temple, but also shows that God moved in a profound way to protect. There has been little research made on the relationship of the Jewish temple and private banking system, yet it appears to have been common practice for the two to function together similar to that of other ancient cultures in the Middle East. Concerning the corruption of the aristocratic temple Sadducees, there is no shortage of graphic expressions by the writers of the Mishnah.

The daughters of the Samaritans are deemed unclean as menstruates from their cradle and the Samaritans convey uncleanness to what lies beneath them.... The daughters of the Sadducees, if they follow after the ways of their fathers, are deemed to be like the women of the Samaritans; but if they have separated themselves and follow after the ways of the Israelites, they are deemed to be like the women of the Israelites.

Mishnah, Niddah 4.1-2

Josephus said Pilate stole temple funds to build an aqueduct to serve the temple. This project was begun by Herod before his death. Note the words of Josephus, as these imply the people were upset, not so much that their money was gone, but that Pilate stole sacred monies.

After this he raised another disturbance by expending that sacred treasure which is called “Corban,” upon the aqueducts, thereby he brought water from four hundred furlongs. At this, the multitude was indignant; and when Pilate came to Jerusalem, they came about his tribunal and made a clamor at it.

Josephus, Wars 2.9.4 (175)

308. See photo of Herod’s Aqueduct pipe at 09.03.08.A. According to author of Pseudo-Aristeas 90, the pipe was sealed with lead and lime mortar.

309. A corban (Heb. qorban) was a gift consecrated to God and, therefore, it was considered sacred. Vine, “Corban.” Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary. 2:129.
The maintenance of the infrastructure of Jerusalem – the walls, water-channels, towers, storm sewers, maintenance workers and street sweepers\(^{310}\) – were all paid for by the temple.\(^{311}\) The irony is that when Pilate raided temple funds to complete the construction of the aqueduct, he essentially finished the work that the religious aristocrats were supposed to have done in the first place. When the Romans destroyed the temple during the First Revolt, they burned down the various chambers (rooms) of the temple complex. Josephus, who was an eye witness, recorded the following,

> And now the Romans, judging that it was in vain to spare what was around the holy house (meaning the temple itself), burned all those places, and the remains of the cloisters, and the gates except two; the one on the east side and the one on the south side; both of which, however, burned afterwards. They also burned the treasury chambers, in which was an immense quantity of money, and an immense number of garments, and other precious goods, there deposited; and to say in a few words, there it was that the entire riches of the Jews were heaped up together.

**Josephus, Wars 6.5.2 (281-282)**

The treasury chambers (rooms) that Josephus referred to were probably the same ones that John mentioned when describing the discussion Jesus had by the treasury in John 8:20.\(^{312}\) Since the temples functioned as “safe deposit boxes” in banks, the private bankers, a/k/a money changers (Gk. *kollubistes*, 2855 – derived from *kollubos*, meaning *money clippers*)\(^{313}\) were responsible for all phases of banking, including currency exchange. It was connected with the Greek word *philarguia* (5365), from *phileo*, meaning *to love*, and *arguros*, meaning *silver*.\(^{314}\) The English word *banker* is derived from the ancient money changers. The *changers of money or money changers, (kollubistai)*\(^{315}\) sat at a table, bench, *banque* or *banca* precisely as described in the

\(^{310}\) Since Jerusalem was considered to be a Holy City, the streets were swept every day (Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 26A and *Pesahim* 7A). The Valley of Hinnom had a dump site by the dung gate where all the filth was thrown. With the exception of rose gardens, gardens were not permitted in the city because they required dung (Mishnah, *Maaseroth* 2.5; Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Kamma* 82B). This illustrates to what measures the laws of purity were taken by the time of Jesus.

\(^{311}\) Mishnah, *Shekalim* 4.2.

\(^{312}\) [https://mail.google.com/mail/?shva=1#inbox/1351ab9c4176f14a](https://mail.google.com/mail/?shva=1#inbox/1351ab9c4176f14a) Retrieved February 22, 2012.


\(^{315}\) Barclay, “John.” 1:110.
temple narratives. The money changers in the temple also charged the people high exchange rates for currency and sold sacrificial animals at inflated prices.

05.05.04.D. A ROMAN RELIEF OF A BANKER AT WORK. This relief carving shows a banker with his money bag and book of records at work. The huge volume of money donated to temples, as well as deposits held for security reasons, resulted in temples becoming banking institutions throughout the ancient world. Relief on a Roman era funerary stele from Hungary. Photograph by Wikipedia Commons.

Finally, the fourth gospel tells us Jesus went to Jerusalem for two feasts. These occurred in the spring and would have been the Passover observances. He essentially began and ended His ministry with the cleansing of the temple, symbolic of the ministry and culmination of His life, to cleanse the hearts of the people to be His temple.


317. See 02.03.03 “Economy” for a brief description of the condition of the economy during the ministry years of Jesus.
05.05.04.Q1 What is the evidence against the existence of a temple banking system Jn. 2:14)?

The question of a possible banking system centers on the money changers of the temple as well as the management of temple and business funding in general. Scripture does not address this matter directly, but repeatedly indicates the temple was to be a place of worship and the dwelling place of the Most High God. As previously stated, recent scholarship suggests that wealthy families in Jerusalem established private banking systems that centuries later, became commercial enterprises. The Mishnah and both Talmuds were written by rabbis who desired to see the temple rebuilt, services restored, and God honored. They preserved incredible details and, at times, harsh criticisms of their own priests, but they made no mention of a commercial lending institution. They vehemently opposed the activities of those who were like Annas and Caiaphas who gained incredible wealth by lending and exploiting of fellow Jews.

Nonetheless, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that some wealthy families affiliated with the temple functioned as private lending institutions. It would have been one of those families whom Jesus referred to in His parable of the talents, when He told a servant that instead of burying the talent, he could have placed it in a bank and received a minimal interest.

05.05.05 Jn. 3:1-21 Jerusalem: Jesus met an Inquiring Rabbi

NICODEMUS AND HIS NEW BIRTH

1 There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Him at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

4 “But how can anyone be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked Him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?”

5 Jesus answered, “I assure you: Unless someone is born of water


319. For more information, read 02.01.16 Sadducees concerning the incredible greed of the Sadducean families. Clearly, they had little or no interest in representing the Jewish people before God.
B and the Spirit,
C he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

A’ 6 Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and
B’ whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.
C’ 7 Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again

A 8 The wind blows where it pleases,
B and you hear its sound,
B’ but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going.
A’ So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

9 “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus.

10 “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?” Jesus replied. 11 “I assure you: We speak what We know and We testify to what We have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. 12 If I have told you about things that happen on earth and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about things of heaven? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the One who descended from heaven — the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.

16 “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.

19 “This, then, is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

According to rabbinic writings, Nicodemus, a/k/a Naqidimon ben Gorion, was one of the three wealthiest and most respected men of Jerusalem — also considered to be one of the most

He was the head of a seminary and a member of the Sanhedrin. Since the words and deeds of Jesus had spread far and wide, naturally he wanted to meet the Man of whom he had heard so much about. But the eyes of the community were upon him constantly, so a secret private meeting was necessary. It was then that his theology was politely challenged.

The concept that God, and God alone, as the supreme deity for all people had been rejected by some Jewish leaders. Yet while the Old Testament invites the Gentiles into the Jewish world, many had developed feelings of isolation toward their non-Jewish neighbors for two specific reasons.

1. They remembered the horrific experiences their forefathers encountered under Gentile rule during the Inter-Testamental Period.322

2. The Romans and Greeks had no concept of sin. Their gods had all the character traits and vices of mankind. They made sacrifices to appease their gods, not for the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, to worship an invisible deity who was called “Father” was beyond their comprehension.323 So the idea that Greeks and Romans could come to God was beyond the imagination of many Jews. But Jesus cleared the proverbial playing field by stating that all (whosoever) believed in Him would have eternal life.

Another significant issue was the cleansing of the temple. This bold event was a challenge to the Sanhedrin and it was their responsibility to investigate such matters. It also could have been a reason why Nicodemus came to Jesus. Most certainly, the entire conversation was not recorded. Since he was the head of a rabbinic school, a leading scholar among the Pharisees and, from the mood established in the text, he was seriously interested in learning who this Jesus was.324 It is here that Jesus presented the gospel in the proverbial “nutshell.”

1. There must be honest repentance by everyone including the Jews. This is the beginning of the second point,

2. Repentance (the new birth) is followed by discipleship.


322. For more information, read the Inter-Testamental history from Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 176-164 B.C. (03.04.17) to the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C. (03.06.04).


“Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.” As a Pharisee with a Greek name, Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and some scholars believe he was the third member of the high court. As such, he was extremely faithful to the ritualistic laws of Judaism that included fasting on Mondays and Thursdays. He lived upright in every way, carefully obeying and teaching the oral and written laws. Eventually he became a follower of Jesus – a bold decision for any member of the Sanhedrin to make. After the crucifixion, Nicodemus was the first to come with spices of myrrh and aloes for the body. In doing this he clearly demonstrated his decision concerning his faith. It would be interesting to know how his conversion affected his seminary and students. Did they abandon him? Or did he establish the first Christian Bible college and seminary?

“This man came to Him at night.” Nicodemus is often criticized by today’s theologians for meeting with Jesus at night, as if it was a cowardly act. However, as the leading teacher he was immensely popular and most certainly could not go anywhere without crowds following him. Popular rabbis were cultural icons and continue to be so among ultra-orthodox Jews today, just as are rock stars and professional athletes among American teen-agers today.

Nicodemus probably had some disciples just as other leading rabbis did, but they obviously were not with him. There were times, just as today, when teachers, leaders, and ministers desire to have a private meeting to discuss confidential issues and questions that might not be ready for a public forum. To have such a meeting with Jesus, Nicodemus had no choice but to see Jesus at night. Such was the case here.

“Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher.” Nicodemus opened the conversation in true Middle Eastern style – with a compliment. This culture was one of respect and honor. For Nicodemus, who himself was the teacher of a seminary and a member of the Sanhedrin, to address Jesus as “rabbi” was quite a compliment. At this time in Jewish history, it was not an official title of a clergyman in the synagogue, but it signified a highly esteemed position in the community. The Jews used the title as an equivalent to the modern word “doctor.” The Hebrew word comes from a root word meaning “to increase.” Sometimes Jesus was also addressed as rabban or rabboni which means our master, our great one. These are higher titles than rabbi, which means my master.

326. Lawrence, The Seven Laws of the Harvest. 37.
There can be no question that Nicodemus and his students had carefully scrutinized John the Baptist (Jn. 1:19-24), had observed Jesus as well, and would never address anyone lightly with the title of “rabbi.” They may have even checked the temple records of genealogies and eventually concluded that Jesus was from God.

By recognizing that Jesus was a Man sent by God, Nicodemus confessed that the Pharisees had an understanding that God was in their midst and, as such, a new revelation was about to be presented to them. This understanding was the basis for their accountability and their unbelief/rejection was the basis for their judgment (Isa. 6). The purpose of the miracles that Jesus performed was to vindicate His message and ministry (Jn. 3:2; Acts 2:22).

“Born again.” This could also be translated as, begotten from above. When referred to from the father’s side, the verb is “beget.” When referred to from the mother’s side, the verb is “bear.” In this context, the phrase means to be “begotten of water and the Spirit of God” and it affirms a heavenly origin. As for Nicodemus, he knew that the term was applied to those who converted to Judaism. His problem was that the meaning had been lost in the prevailing externalism of observing the Oral Laws that was the heart and soul of Pharisaic doctrines.

For the Jewish people to learn that they had to be “born again” was totally contrary to their basic beliefs. Since they were God’s chosen people, they believed all of Abraham’s descendants were, therefore, saved. They believed that only pagans and unbelievers needed to be born again.

Clearly the concept behind the phrase was not new, but had to be reapplied to everyone. In the minds of many Jewish people, all Gentiles were damned to hell. Righteous Jews believed that Gentiles who observed the Noahide Commandments would have a place in heaven someday.


Therefore, when a Gentile converted to Judaism, he was “born again” because now his destiny was changed – he became a member of God’s “Chosen People” and was destined to enjoy eternal life. The last thing that Nicodemus ever thought he needed, with all his credentials, was to be born again.

The advantage for the believer of being “born again” or receiving “birth from above” is that he becomes a partaker of the new covenant with God. This includes all of the privileges and responsibilities of being a child of God, including the right to address the God of the universe as “Father.” The responsibility requires that one maintain a biblical relationship with the Father as well as with the brothers and sisters in the church. The intimate and devoted relationship of a husband and wife is representative of the devotion God the Father desires to have with all His children. To become born again is not only a one-time decision, but the beginning of a new relationship with God. Jesus came to earth so man might be saved from his sins. Salvation is found only by complete faith in and dependence on Jesus Christ. It is because of Him that we have complete redemption and forgiveness of sins. Jesus, who lived a sinless life, died for the sins of humanity, and returned to life from the grave on the third day. It is the responsibility of men to accept the gift of salvation and, thereby, receive eternal life. The decision to become a disciple of Jesus was followed by a public confession at the time of baptism. In this ceremonial process the new converts in the first century church were baptized either “in the name of Jesus” (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or “into the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:16; 19:5). Either way, the rite was a confession of faith (Rom. 10:9-10), an offer to accept forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38; 12:16), to accept the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 10:44-48), and a commitment to be obedient to His word. This was a doctrine of the early Christian faith. John 3:16 in the King James version “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” is without question the most quoted verse in the New Testament. It reveals the following:


334. Jesus died on a Friday afternoon and arose on Sunday morning. The Hebrew method of counting time is that the day ends at sundown. Any time prior to sundown was counted as a full day. Any portion after sundown was also considered a full day. Hence, Jesus was considered dead for three full days.

335. For an example of a first century baptismal rite, see 18.02.04.

336. For other references to the salvation of man, see Jn. 3:16-17, 10:9-10; Lk. 19:10; Heb. 12:2; Acts 4:12; Eph. 1:17, 2:8; Rom. 8:16. For the fall and redemption of humanity, see Gen. 1:26, 31; 3:1-7; Ps. 8:4-8; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:17. The fall and redemption of humanity and, his salvation by the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus are two critical doctrines of the Christian church. See also Ralph Martin, Worship in the Early Church. 61, 89, 99.
1. God loves His people

2. To love is to give, great love requires a great gift and God loves humanity so much that He gave what was most precious to Him – His son.

3. Jesus knew that He was the Son of God.

4. Jesus was aware that He would die a sacrificial death for all humanity – past, present, and future.

5. Mankind without faith in Christ Jesus is doomed to destruction; mankind with faith in Christ Jesus will receive eternal life.

6. Faith and trust in Jesus is not an intellectual acknowledgement, but a personal relationship.

05.05.05.Q1 Why does John 3:16 say that God loves the world and John 9:39 says that Jesus came to this world to judge it?

John 3:16 is the famous verse that says that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son Jesus that anyone who believes in Him will never perish but have everlasting life. Yet John 9:39 says that Jesus came into this world to judge it. Obviously the second verse doesn’t sound very loving.

Jesus did indeed come to bring salvation to the world. He does, in fact, love everyone and, as St. Augustine once said, “Jesus died for every one of us as if there was only one of us.” However, not everyone accepts the free gift of salvation. For those who reject His calling the Day of Judgment will be most unpleasant. So both John 3:16 and 9:39 are true; 3:16 is offered first and, if rejected, 9:39 goes into effect. As someone else once said, “decisions determine destiny.”

“Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” There can be little question that Jesus referred to Ezekiel’s prophecy (36:25-27; Dead Sea Scroll 1QS 4:20-22). Rabbi Shim’on Ben-Lakish once said that a “Proselyte is like a newborn infant” to which Rabbi Yosi agreed. Yet those trapped by preconceived ideas of a political-

337. The Essenes seem to have had a basic concept that atonement could be gained by the Holy Spirit. For further study, investigate comments on Dead Sea Scroll 1QS 3:6b-8, 1QS 4:20-22, and related fragments.


339. Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 48b.
messiah did not recognize it. The two key terms “born of water” and born of spirit are explained below.

1. The term “born of water” on line “A” as found in rabbinic writings and in this context, means natural birth, as a child in the womb is in its water sac. This meaning is further clarified on line “A’” with the term is “born of the flesh is flesh.” The connection is obvious – what is born of water is born of flesh, and this is clarified when read in its poetic format.

Christians have associated the phrase, “born of water,” with baptism practiced by a new convert to the Christian faith. Just as the Israelites escaped the bondage of Egypt, they walked through the Red Sea, and went forth to enjoy the new life in the Promised Land. Likewise, baptism symbolizes death to the bondage of sin. Being immersed in baptism is symbolic of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea and rising out of water is symbolic of the promised new life in Christ. Jesus introduced a new use for it.

Baptism was well established among the Essenes. According to Dead Sea Scroll 4Q414, one of the requirements to become a member of the Qumran sect was to be baptized. While the scroll fragment was found tattered with some pieces missing, sufficient script was found to recreate the original document.

05.05.05.A. DEAD SEA SCROLL 4Q414 WITH BAPTISMAL LITURGY. Dead Sea Scroll 4Q414 preserved the baptismal liturgy for the Essene sect who lived in various communities, most notable in


341. Some ancient manuscripts refer to the Red Sea as the Reed Sea. Scholars believe it was because of the reeds that grew along the shoreline.
Qumran. Baptism was part of the acceptance ritual for new membership into the group. Photograph by Wikipedia Commons.

Notice that the first section requires a response; this differs from a mikvah immersion for purity which one did by oneself. An Essene baptism always required a minimum of two people. The scroll fragments from cave 4 read as follows:

(...And he shall) say (in response) “Blessed (are You,) the unclean for the festivals of (...) Your (...) and to make atonement for us (...)to be) pure before you (...) in every matter (...) to purify oneself prior to (...) You made us (...).”

F.2 Col.1

And you shall cleanse him for Your holy statutes (.) for the first, the third and the sixth (...) in the truth of Your covenant (...) to cleanse oneself from uncleanness (...) and then he shall enter the water (...) And he shall say in response "Blessed are You (...) for from what comes out of Your mouth (...) men of impurity (...) ."

F.2 + 3. Col.2

Soul (...) he is (...) to Yourself as a pure people 342 (...) And I also (...) the day which (...) in the times of purity (...) the Yahad. In Israel's pure food (...) and they shall dwell (...). And it will happen on that day (...) a female and she will give thanks (...) 

F.10

For You made me (...) Your will is that we cleanse ourselves before (...) and he established for himself a statute of atonement (...) and to be in righteous purity and he shall bathe in water and sprinkle upon (...) (...) And then they return from the water (...) cleansing His people in the waters of bathing (...) second time upon his station. And he shall say in response: "Blessed are You (...) (...) Your purification in Your glory (...) (...) eternally. And today (...)."

F.12

342. Purity was a major issue among orthodox Jews because of the continuous encroachment of Hellenism in Jewish families. Purity (Gk. katharos) was defined within the realm of physical, religious, and ethical purity; a term that has both figurative and literal requirements of behavior. See Link and Schattenmann. “Pure, Clean.” 3:102-03.
Dead Sea Scroll Fragment, 4Q414 with Baptismal Liturgy

According to Jesus, the baptism ritual symbolized a new phase of life and commitment to God to carry out that calling. Water for drinking is symbolic of the Holy Spirit whereas water for washing is symbolic of the Word of God for cleansing. Jesus spoke of the Spirit in the form of “living water,” as in His discussion with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4). When the water was poured over the brazen altar at the morning sacrifice, it was to remember the water that flowed from the rock that Moses struck (Ex. 17; 1 Cor. 10:4). Baptism was not only a physical immersion in water, but that same water was symbolic of being immersed in the Holy Spirit.

The dispensation of the Spirit could not begin until the work of Jesus as redeemer was finished. There could be no Pentecost until there was first a Calvary. Only after Jesus was exalted in heaven did the Spirit celebrate the coronation. Only after the Rock (Jesus) was smitten, could the rivers of water (Holy Spirit) flow. The extent of that flow is dependent, in part, to how we thirst, drink, and believe in the glorified Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “If any man thirst” (Jn. 7:37) and Jesus continued to speak of the Holy Spirit. Nothing could stop Calvary and nothing could stop Pentecost; the “living water” of Jesus.

The process of being born again or born from above includes a ritual called baptism. The term is from the Greek word baptismos or baptisma. Its root word bapto means to dip and as such was used by the Greek poet Homer to describe the dipping of steel in water to temper it. The Hebrew counterpart is tabhal, and is often translated simply as to dip, as when Naaman dipped himself in the Jordan River (2 Kgs. 5:14). It was not a new phrase and people were familiar with the word.

2. “Born of the Spirit.” The regeneration of life in the new believer is the key. This is of a spiritual nature and, with it there is the immediate divine promise of eternal life, as well as divine strength to pass through the difficulties of this life. While this is of a spiritual nature, the physical challenges, such as addictions, often remain to be healed in a slower process. However, by the power and grace of Jesus Christ, the new believer can break free of these bondages.


344. Homer. Odyssey. 9.392; See 05.02.03.

The Jews practiced baptism for the conversion of Gentiles. Hence, it was not a new institution for them. It had been a ceremônial ritual, but did not have the same concept of repentance as taught by John the Baptist and Jesus. The Essenes, on the other hand, were probably more on target in understanding this concept than most believers today realize. They had a daily ritual immersion bath for purification that included a confession of sins. It is interesting that they said such a ritual immersion was worthless without a repentant heart. This doctrine developed in the previous two centuries and the entire Jewish nation was aware of it. Therefore, when Jesus preached it, His message was not entirely new. The Essenes appear to have had clear understanding of the times in which they lived that would usher in the messiah – and interesting reflection upon the “fullness of time” in Galatians 4:4, which had not yet been written by the Apostle Paul.

Finally, the initial difference between the lost and the saved is not who is guilty and who is innocent, but rather how each person responds to the gospel message. Nicodemus knew that righteousness was required to enter the kingdom of the Messiah (Ps. 24:3-4) and he knew the details of the Law. He was about to learn that the Law was a reflection of what the condition of the heart ought to be.

Whereas the Written Law directs the behavior of man toward God from an external source, a change of heart, the Kingdom of God directs the behavior of man toward God from an internal source. The concept of the Messiah as the Savior of humanity and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer were not in first century Jewish expectations.

Jesus said to him. “Are you a teacher of Israel?” In the Greek, a definite article indicates Nicodemus was one of the most respected educators of his time and it would read, “Are you the teacher?” meaning, “senior theologian,” or, “professor,” in Israel ….”

Jesus was not indicating any lack of knowledge of the Law, but He was critical of Nicodemus’ inability to understand what He was teaching. Nicodemus had been so strongly instructed in every facet of the Law that he failed to understand its purpose. For this reason, Jesus gave the illustration of Moses in Numbers 21:8-9.

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“Our testimony.” When the New Testament writers used terms such as “testimony,” “bore witness” or “I have seen and testify,” these are statements of legal terminology. These statements were common in Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures whereby the author placed himself under an oath concerning the truthfulness of the statement made.  

05.05.05.Q2 How could an evil symbol of a snake of Numbers 21:4-9, be associated with Jesus crucified upon a Cross?

The passage in John 3:14 reads “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness (desert)” and with it Jesus reflected upon an Old Testament story in Numbers 21:4-9. In that account the people of Israel journeyed through the desert and complained bitterly and regretted that they had ever left Egypt. God punished them for complaining and murmuring, and, after receiving some nasty snake bites, they repented and cried for mercy. God told Moses to make a brass snake, place it on top of a pole, and when the people looked upon it they would be healed. Years later, the brazen serpent became an idol during the days of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 18:4). The irony was that they were not to make a graven image of any living thing, yet when they looked upon a brass snake, they were healed.

The wilderness event is sometimes problematic for modern students, because the snake is associated with the demonic serpent of Genesis. How could such an evil symbol be associated with Jesus who would be lifted upon a cross? This association was made by the church fathers centuries after Jesus. However, in the days of Moses through to the first century many believed that, because a snake sheds its skin every year, it was a symbol of renewed life. Jesus is renewed life. It was certainly not the snake that healed, nor was it Moses, but God. Centuries later it was Jesus who healed. But, as will be shown later, among the Greeks and Romans the symbolic snake appeared on ancient gods and goddesses of healing as well as in accounts of virgin births.

There are two issues taking place in this passage that challenge the modern reader.

1. The symbolic issue of the snake, and


348. Negev, *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*. 248. Notice that even some emperors like Alexander the Great, believed they were born of a virgin who became pregnant by the actions of a snake. See 04.03.08.Q7 “How does one explain other so-called virgin births in history?”
2. The phrase “just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness,” which must not be disconnected from the statement, “the Son of Man must be lifted up.” John 3:14 places Jesus as One who was more holy than Moses, and verse 15 states that all those who believe in Him (Jesus) have eternal life. By this Jesus clearly declared His equality with God, and that was a dilemma they could not accept.

“The Son of Man must be lifted up.” The early church recognized these interpretations to this comment:

1. The literal “lifted up” event when Jesus was hung on the cross.

2. The literal “lifted up” when He arose from death and walked out of the grave.

3. The literal “lifted up” of the ascension

4. The early church understood this phrase as a literal fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy:

   See, My Servant will act wisely;  
   He will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted.  

   Isaiah 52:13

5. The early church recognized the divinity of Christ Jesus. He had thrown a new light on the Scriptures; He revealed God in a new aspect – as no mere national deity, but as the Father of all mankind. He also taught the most enlightening concepts of freedom of the individual conscience.

“World.” John places a unique emphasis on this word by repeating it three times – a Jewish custom of giving something the maximum level of importance. Furthermore, he used the Greek word kosmos, meaning a sinful place where Satan rules. The word is repeated twice in verse 17 and again in verse 19. His message is that Jesus came into this world to save sinners.

Jesus then closed the meeting by saying that men love the cover of darkness to cover their sins. This was not intended to be an insult or degrading, but simply to underscore the need for regeneration of life (being born again).

349. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus, 209-10.
05.05.05.B. EARLY ISRAELITE INCENSE BURNER ADORNED WITH SNAKES. Incense burner adorned with snakes of the earlier Israelite Period. Snakes represented renewed life throughout the biblical period. Photograph courtesy of the Israel Museum.
05.05.05.C. THE GREEK GOD ASCLEPIUS WITH STAFF AND SNAKE.
The statue of the god Asclepius is always shown with a staff entwined with a
snake, and as such was known as the “rod of healing.” The snake was not
symbolic of any demonic spirit, but of new life because it sheds its skin yearly.

Photo by Wikipedia Commons

05.05.05.Q3 Should Nicodemus have known or suspected anything about a “new birth”
(Jn. 3:1-21)?

Absolutely, yes! He was aware of the baptismal rites within Judaism and, therefore, should have
made a connection with what Jesus was telling him. He also should have been aware of King

David’s two horrific sins for which there was no atonement: murder and adultery. As a result he cried out unto the Lord and said,

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

Psalm 51:10-12 (NIV 1984)

What David requested from our Lord was a regeneration or new birth, for he realized that cleansing himself was a vain exercise (Ps. 73:13). The Essenes, even though they lived under the Old Covenant, realized that the Holy Spirit purifies the heart. They even spoke freely of God’s Spirit of holiness as a cleansing and purifying power as revealed in a number of Dead Sea Scrolls. Notice the similarities between Dead Sea Scroll 1QS 4.21, written about a century before Jesus was born, and Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 as illustrated below.

He shall cleanse him of all wicked deeds with the spirit of holiness; like purifying waters He will shed upon him the spirit of truth (to cleanse him) of all abomination and injustice.

Dead Sea Scroll 1QS 4.21

11 “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matthew 3:11

352. See Dead Sea Scroll: 1QS 3.7-9; 4.21; 1QH 16.12 cf 7.6; 17.26, Fragment 2.9, 13.

353. Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit. 9-10.

354. This scroll is known as The Community Rule or The Manual of Discipline. It is one of the earliest scrolls written by the Essenes; Vermes, The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English. 97.

355. Translated and parenthesis by Geza Vermes; Vermes, The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English. 103.
16 John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but One is coming who is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Luke 3:16

Nicodemus, as the head of a seminary, should have known that the Messiah would be Israel’s refiner and purifier as stated in passages such as Malachi 3:1-3. That purifying had already begun with the temple cleansing, but he did not recognize it. Yet the Spirit moved his heart to discuss this with Jesus.

The rabbis, of which Nicodemus was one, had long connected the ritual of baptism (complete immersion in water), with washing as instructed in Exodus 19:10. It was deemed to be the first step in holy living and preparation to be in communion with God. This opinion was summarized by Josephus concerning the ministry of John the Baptist. The background to this narrative is that Herod Antipas had executed John, and then entered into battle with the Nabateans who soundly defeated him. The Jewish community believed the defeat was divine judgment for a horrible sin against a righteous man. Note the comment on Jewish baptism:

Now, some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist for Herod slew him who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as righteousness towards one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism. For that washing [with water] would be acceptable to him, if they made use of it not in order to the putting away [or the remission] of some sins [only], but for the purification of the body.

Josephus, *Antiquities 18.5.2* (116-117b)

As previously stated, baptism did not originate with Christianity, but with Judaism. When a Gentile converted to Judaism, he was baptized. When a disciple became a rabbi, he was baptized as part of his ordination service. Some sources indicate that when one became a member of the Sanhedrin, there was a baptism. Such rites were associated with the new responsibility and direction in life. The rite, along with “born again” terminology was common in Pharisaic writings. Therefore, Nicodemus should have known or at least made an educated guess at what


357. Bracketed inserts for clarification by Whiston, ed.

Jesus was talking about. There were several times when a man could be “born again” according to Jewish theology and tradition.359

1. When a Gentile man converted to Judaism, he had to perform three things:360

   a. Be circumcised361

   b. Make an offering at the temple

   c. Be immersed in a mikvah; after this a man was considered a “new born child” and accepted in Jewish society.362 That immersion was not a ritualistic immersion in a mikvah to cleanse defilement, but a baptism concerning the forgiveness of sins as John the Baptist did. Records show that some rabbis permitted baptism immediately after circumcision, while the School of Hillel said baptism should be seven days after the circumcision.363

2. When a Gentile slave, either man or woman, became the property of a Jew, he/she had to be baptized.364

3. When a Jewish man was crowned king

4. At the time of his bar mitzvah (age 13 years and 1 day). From that day on he qualified to be one of ten men and women to begin a new synagogue.365

359. These baptisms would have been similar to those of John the Baptist who stressed true repentance. For more information on Jewish baptisms, see William S. LaSor, “Discovering What Jewish Mikvah Can Tell Us About Christian Baptism.” 52-59. Fruchtenbaum, The Jewish Foundation of the Life of Messiah: Instructor’s Manual. Class 6, pages 7-9; See also Zondervan’s New International Version Archaeological Study Bible. 2005. 1562.

360. Also see comments below “After Jesus was baptized” in 05.02.03.Q1.

361. Those men who decided to forgo the circumcision ritual, but observed the Noahide Commandments, were known as “God-fearing” men. They were not “Jewish converts,” but still respected among the Jewish people. For more information on the Noahide Commandments, see Appendix 17.


365. The rabbinic rule that a minimum of ten men could establish a new synagogue was not established until centuries after Christ, around the time the Babylonian Talmud was written. For further study on the various opinions concerning the status and influence of women in the Second Temple Period, see the excellent work by Tal Ilan, Integrating Women into Second Temple History, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.
5. When he married a wife (usually between ages 16 and 20).

6. When a man was ordained as a rabbi (age 30)

7. When a rabbi joined the Sanhedrin (age 50)\textsuperscript{366}

However, some scholars believe that the “baptisms” of points 3 through 7 above were not baptisms, but purification rituals in a mikvah.\textsuperscript{367} But regardless, Nicodemus should certainly have known what Jesus meant when He used the terms such as “born of water,” “born of the water,” or “baptize.”\textsuperscript{368} No wonder that Jesus said, “Are you \textit{the} teacher…”\textsuperscript{369} Therefore, “\textit{the} teacher,” who in all probability was the head of a seminary, had a small following of disciples, and as a member of the Sanhedrin he should have understood what Jesus meant.\textsuperscript{370} Furthermore, the Apostle Paul made an interesting comment on baptism in his first letter to the Corinthian church when he said “All under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (10:1b-2). Clearly, not only did the apostle know what baptism meant, but those in his audience understood that their forefathers understood the term as well.

Finally, the concept of \textit{rebirth} or \textit{born again} was well known to both Jews and Gentiles. For the Jewish people, the concept is discussed above. For the Gentiles, the Romans and Greeks were familiar with the phrase because it was in nearly all of the ancient mystery religions.

\textsuperscript{366} Fruchtenbaum, \textit{Life of the Messiah}. Tape 4, Side A.

\textsuperscript{367} See “Baptism” and “Mikvah” in Appendix 26.

\textsuperscript{368} According to Scott, Jr. \textit{Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament}. 146, one of the earliest scholars to research Jewish baptisms was a French scholar, Joseph Thomas, who authored \textit{Le Mouvement baptist en Palestine et Syrie} (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1935).

\textsuperscript{369} Emphasis by the author, but it is also in the Greek text.

\textsuperscript{370} Fruchtenbaum, \textit{The New Birth}. 20-23.
In light of Romans 10:9, was it possible for Nicodemus to become born again?

Yes, if the answer were limited to this passage in Romans, which states that eternal life is obtained if first, one confesses that Jesus is Lord, and second, one believes that God raised Him from the grave. The problem is obviously that Jesus was very much alive when He spoke to Nicodemus.

The New Testament was written years after the ministry of Jesus. While being “born again” is generally and accurately defined by Romans 10:9, a passage that is more applicable pertains to the new creation Jesus spoke of and is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17. It states that “if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.” That was precisely the point Jesus made. Nicodemus needed to become a new creation in Christ, which today is known as becoming “born again.”

05.05.05.D. FIRST CENTURY MIKVAH. A mikvah like this one, located at the southern steps of the temple, became the pattern for baptismal fonts used by the church. Photograph by the author.

05.05.05.E. FIFTH CENTURY CROSS-SHAPED BAPTISTRY. The concept of a step-down baptistery was patterned after the Jewish ritual mikvah. The Jewish rite was adapted by the early church when a river or body of water was not available. This cross-shaped baptistery is located along the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee. Photograph by the author.

05.05.06 Jn. 3:22-36 Jesus and John in Judea

JESUS AND JOHN BAPTIZE

22 After this, Jesus and His disciples went to the Judean countryside, where He spent time with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there. People were coming and being baptized, 24 since John had not yet been thrown into prison.

25 Then a dispute arose between John’s disciples and a Jew about purification. 26 So they came to John and told him, “Rabbi, the One you testified about, and who was with you across the Jordan, is baptizing — and everyone is flocking to Him.”

27 John responded, “No one can receive a single thing unless it’s given to him from heaven. 28 You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah, but I’ve been sent ahead of Him.’ 29 He who has the bride is the groom. But the groom’s friend,
who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the groom’s voice. So this joy of mine is complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”

31 The One who comes from above is above all. The one who is from the earth is earthly and speaks in earthly terms. The One who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what He has seen and heard, yet no one accepts His testimony. 33 The one who has accepted His testimony has affirmed that God is true. 34 For God sent Him, and He speaks God’s words, since He gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands. 36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who refuses to believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.

“Judean countryside.” While a number of ancient extra-biblical writers refer to the Holy Land as Judaea, amazingly, John 3:22 is the only place in the New Testament where the name “Judean” appears, meaning “Judaea.”

“Aenon near Salim.” The location of these two villages was unknown until the late 19th century when, during an excavation in St. George’s Greek Orthodox Church in Madaba, Jordan, a 6th century mosaic map of sacred sites was found. Known as the Madaba Map, its focal point is Jerusalem, but it also depicts Aenon as being near to Salim, just south of the Decapolis city of Scythopolis (a/k/a Beth Shean) and west of the Jordan River. Note that John was baptizing in this area, while Jesus was baptizing two or three days further south along the same river in Judea, where He Himself was baptized by John.

“Because there was plenty of water.” John the Baptist did most of his ministry in the area along the Jordan River, especially the southern region. Generally, the river had sufficient water for an immersion baptism. However, at the end of a long hot and dry summer, it is reduced to a trickle and any crocodiles can be easily spotted. So John went further north, where there was a greater quantity of water for immersion. Apparently, sprinkling was not an option. But sprinkling was introduced by the Jewish church near the end of the first century, as recorded in the Didache.

**Regarding baptism. Baptize as follows:** After first explaining all these points, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running
water. But if you have no running water, baptize in other water; and if you cannot in cold, then in warm. But if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Before the baptism, let the baptizer and the candidate for baptism fast, as well as any others that are able. Require the candidate to fast one or two days previously.

*Didache 7:1-4*[^374]

“Rabbi, the One you testified about ... everyone is flocking to Him.” The disciples of John the Baptist became so jealous of the ministry of Jesus, that they did not mention the name of Jesus. Rather, they referred to Jesus as “that man,” or in this case, as “the One.” The avoidance of a name was a deliberate insult. However, John did not respond with a rebuke but simply affirmed that “the One” was the bridegroom (v. 29) who had come from heaven (v. 31).

*05.05.06.Q1 What happened to the disciples of John the Baptist who did not follow Jesus (Jn. 3:26)?*

The phrase “everyone is flocking to Him” is a figure of speech indicating that many, possibly the majority, of people began to follow Jesus. It is not an exclusive statement meaning every single person, just as the term “all” is not an exclusive statement[^375] in terms of human relationships.

Eventually many disciples and followers of John the Baptist followed Jesus, especially after John was executed. However, not all made that change. Those who didn’t may have recognized that God brought forth a mighty prophet, but for one reason or another, they chose not to follow Jesus and formed their own religious sect. That group and their descendants became known as the Mendeans, or Christians of St. John, although they were never true Christians. Centuries later the Muslims called them the Sabaeans. They moved east and settled in the cities of Wasit, Basra, and Chuzistan on the eastern side of the Tigris River in a nation known today as Iraq.[^376]

“**But the groom’s friend.**” There were some cultural differences in wedding rituals between communities. In Galilee, there was a groomsmen (Heb. *shoshebhin*) for the groom and brideswoman for the bride, whereas in Judea only the bridegroom had a groomsmen. The bridegroom in ancient times was the most important individual at the wedding, the reverse from

[^374]: The *Didache* is a book on church order that was written within a century of the life of Jesus. For more information, see 02.02.08.

[^375]: For an explanation, see 15.04.08.Q1 “Does the word “all” mean the entire Jewish community; every Jew in the land?”

today’s Western custom. The bridegroom in this passage is Jesus and His friend, the groomsman is John the Baptist.

“The One who comes from above.” John again presented his commentary reflecting the divine message in no uncertain terms. He stated that Jesus:

1. Came from heaven

2. Spoke with divine authority

3. Spoke from observation into the hearts of men, not from theology or theory

4. Spoke the words of God, and

5. Had complete authority from God the Father to proclaim and demonstrate his message (confirmed later by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15:47).

“The one who believes in the Son has eternal life.” John brings forth his theme that whoever places his faith in Jesus for salvation has eternal life. That life is not only a future possession, but also a present possession. “Whoever believes” is not an opinion or feeling, but rather, is both a deep-seated faith and commitment to follow biblical instructions that pertain to all areas of life.

After a brief ministry in Judea and around Jerusalem, Jesus traveled north into the Galilee area. There were two primary reasons for this.

1. Both Jesus and John were engaged in the same ministry. They were challenged by the increasing tension of the leading Pharisees who desired to see both men end their ministries. The corrupt police power of the Sanhedrin was intense, but limited to Jerusalem and Judea. Therefore, Jesus traveled north to Galilee.

2. John’s imprisonment by Herod Antipas signaled that the message of the Baptist was rejected, as would be the message of Jesus.

Jesus was gaining immense popularity, which could have developed into political overtones. The image of the coming messiah held by the people was powerfully explosive but completely different from the life and ministry of Jesus. To avoid any problems and to be outside the legal sphere of the Sanhedrin, He ministered in the plain of Galilee, as well as the villages that surround the Sea of Galilee. Herod the Great had previously limited the arresting authority of the high court to Jerusalem and Judea.
At the same time the popularity of John also increased. Since his messages were far more inflammatory than those of Jesus, Herod Antipas feared John might start a revolt. Yet strange as it seems, the leading Pharisees and Sadducees appear not to be as concerned about John, but worried that Jesus would overthrow their religious system in the temple.

05.05.06.Q2 Did Jesus baptize anyone (Jn. 3:22)?

According to John 3:22 and 26, Jesus and His disciples baptized people. However, John 4:2 is a clarification statement that says only the disciples were performing the baptisms. There is no conflict between these three passages, but rather, the disciples were baptizing under the authority of Jesus. Therefore, it would be the same as if Jesus personally performed the baptisms.

05.05.07 Lk. 3:19-20 Machaerus Fortress, East of the Dead Sea

JOHN THE BAPTIST IMPRISONED

19 But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him about Herodias, his brother’s wife, and about all the evil things Herod had done, 20 added this to everything else — he locked John up in prison.

The Herodian family lived on the wild side. Their wild and sensual parties and banquets were the envy of Rome. The trend began with Herod the Great and was faithfully continued by his three sons, especially Herod Antipas. For this the Baptist had rebuked him for his notorious debauchery as well as his adultery. Naturally, the corrective rebuke was not welcomed by the king. In fact, according to Josephus, he feared that John’s teaching might lead to civil unrest. Consequently, he had John imprisoned in the Machaerus Fortress, located east of the Dead Sea.

05.05.07.A. RUINS OF THE MACHAERUS PALACE-FORTRESS. The ruins of this palace-fortress, east of the Dead Sea, are hardly a shadow of its glorious past. According to tradition, John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded at this site. Some scholars believe the pit (right of the fence) was the prison dungeon. The fortress was constructed by Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.), destroyed by the Romans in 57 B.C., and reconstructed by Herod the Great, who enjoyed the nearby hot springs of Callirrhoe in the Wadi Zerka Ma’in. Photograph by the author.

Unit 06
The Ministry Of Jesus Accelerates

Chapter 01
The Ministry Of Jesus Begins In Galilee

06.01.00.A. JESUS HEALS THE SICK. This image, also known as “The Healing of the Paralytic,” is dated to about 230 and the oldest known image of Jesus. It was discovered in the ancient city of Dura Europos, in modern Syria.
06.01.01 Introduction
Since His miracle in Cana, the whole province of Galilee was talking about Him. Unlike today where cultural and technological changes are expected, in the ancient world, change happened so slowly it was hardly noticeable. The only exception was related to warfare, and that was never good. Therefore, when a certain Man from Nazareth began performing miracles, He was the subject of every conversation – on the boats, in the synagogues, in the marketplace, wherever people met. The news spread throughout all of the Jewish provinces, to Sidon far to the north, Idumea far to the south, throughout the cities of the Decapolis, and beyond. But the bulk of His ministry was in Galilee for these three reasons:

1. Galilee had a higher concentration of Jews then did Judea and Jerusalem. Since Jesus came to present Himself to the Jewish nation, He obviously came to where most Jewish people lived, and in doing so He fulfilled Isaiah 9:1.

2. The Galilean Jews were not as theologically rigid or prideful as their Jerusalem counterpart. Consequently, they were more open to receive His message of the Kingdom of God.

3. The Sanhedrin had no arresting authority in Galilee.

It appears that the significance of the Via Maris has all too often been overlooked. This important road was the great international coastal highway that connected Egypt with Galilee, Phoenicia, Syria and eventually went on to Mesopotamia. From there the Spice Route went to China. Its importance is underscored by the thirty-seven local connecting roads within Israel.\(^\text{379}\) An amazing feature of Isaiah 1:9 that is often missed is that the prophet called the road by a name – the Way of the Sea. But that name did not exist in the days of Isaiah (about 700 B.C.), rather, it was known as the Way of the Philistines, or technically, the way of the land of the Philistines (Ex. 13:17; Num. 20:17).\(^\text{380}\) However, in 63 B.C., the Roman General Pompey took control of Israel and renamed the highway the Via Maris, which is Latin meaning, the Way of the Sea, precisely what Isaiah called it.\(^\text{381}\)

379. Dorsey, Roads and Highways. 57; Cosby, Interpreting Biblical Literature. 45.

380. It was also known as The Great Trunk Route (as in “tree trunk”) because it connected to so many secondary roads.

06.01.02 Jn. 4:1-3 Judea to Galilee

JESUS LEAVES JUDEA FOR GALILEE BY WAY OF SAMARIA

1 When Jesus knew that the Pharisees heard He was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (though Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), 3 He left Judea and went again to Galilee.

06.01.02.A. THE ROAD INTO SABASTE, SAMARIA. The ancient road is still lined with the pillars that formed the Cardo Maximus (Main Street) of Sabaste. Between these columns merchants had their shops. Since modern roads are often paved over ancient ones, there is little doubt that Jesus and Peter walked down this road many times during their ministry. Photograph by the author.

Jesus left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee by taking a short-cut through Samaria, and of course, opposition was expected. The Samaritans considered the temple at Jerusalem to be part of an apostate religion. 382 So whenever the Jews traveled through Samaria to go to Jerusalem, the Samaritans assumed they were going to worship at the Jerusalem Temple and would attack, beat, rob, and sometimes kill them. To avoid the dangers, some Jews bypassed Samaria by taking the

382. See 02.01.17 “Samaritans” and 03.05.07 “135-104 B.C. Rule of John Hyrcanus, Samaritan Temple Destroyed.”
longer route south along the eastern side of the Jordan River through the province of Perea. Eventually they crossed the Jordan at Jericho and hiked the long uphill climb westward on the Jericho to Jerusalem Road. Yet in spite of the great animosity, it was safe for them to go through Samaria when leaving Jerusalem, because symbolically, that was seen as “leaving” the Jewish temple and its apostate religion. That may not make sense in the modern world, but it was common thinking in the first century.

By this time the leading Pharisees were discussing the possible execution of both John and Jesus. In fact, John 4:1-3 suggests they may have had an influence on the imprisonment of John the Baptist. However, the Pharisees, in their vain attempt to remain pure, avoided Samaria, so Jesus forged ahead and had a divine encounter with the Samaritan woman in Sychar. Today, the village is known as Nablus, and is located a few miles southeast of the city of Samaria.

Even though Jesus had previously performed His first miracle in Cana, it was the first of several miracles that caught everyone’s attention and let them know He was One to watch. Galilee was out of reach of the long arm of the Sanhedrin authority, so Jesus could minister freely without the threat of the temple police. However, He still had two challenges:

1. The Pharisees and the Herodians were constantly spying on Him.

2. More importantly, He had to change preconceived ideas of the Jewish people, because their expectations of the messiah were different than His purpose and identity.

Crowds began to gather around Him and soon there was an audience to teach and declare the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, the Romans, Sadducees, Herodians and the Pharisee elitists were less than delighted. They kept a careful eye on Jesus to see if He would initiate a revolt or threaten the temple.
Map Depicting The Ancient Tribal Areas Of Zebulun And Naphtali. Throughout history, these two tribal areas suffered horribly by the invading armies that traveled along the Via Maris. By the first century, Zebulun and the lower half of Naphtali became known as Galilee where Jesus preached peace and performed healing miracles, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy (9:1). Courtesy of International Mapping and Dan Przywara.
THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL

4 He had to travel through Samaria, so He came to a town of Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, worn out from His journey, sat down at the well. It was about six in the evening.

7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water. “Give Me a drink,” Jesus said to her, for His disciples had gone into town to buy food.

9 “How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” she asked Him. For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would ask Him, and He would give you living water.”

11 “Sir,” said the woman, “You don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do You get this ‘living water’? You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are You? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and livestock.”

13 Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again — ever! In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up within him for eternal life.”

15 “Sir,” the woman said to Him, “give me this water so I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.”

16 “Go call your husband,” He told her, “and come back here.”

17 “I don’t have a husband,” she answered.

“You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’” Jesus said. “For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

19 “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, yet you Jews say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”
Jesus told her, “Believe Me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”

“I am He,” Jesus told her, “the One speaking to you.”

Jesus went through Samaria about 4 months prior to the Samaritan Passover, a/k/a the Festival of Zimmuth Pesah (or Pesach) which would have been in January A.D. 27 or 28. There He stopped for a rest around 12:00 noon at a well in the small village of Sychar that has historic significance. It was in ancient Shechem where Jacob, the ancestor common to both Samaritans and Jews, purchased a plot of land (Gen. 33:19). On the day Jesus came by, a Samaritan woman of “poor reputation” came to draw water from the traditional well of Jacob and met Jesus. Even though there was legendary hatred between the two ethnic groups, in this encounter Jesus demonstrated that divine love and forgiveness could destroy four major taboos that were present at the time.

1. Religious discrimination (Jew vs. Samaritan),

2. Racial-ethnic discrimination (also Jew vs. Samaritan),

3. Social discrimination (man to woman in public), The rabbinic rules of the Oral Law strictly forbade a man from having a private conversation with a Jewess, so having a conversation with a Samaritan woman must have been even more shocking to the disciples. Note the following:

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384. A term associated with sexual impurity.

385. See 02.01.17 “Samaritans” for a list of significant changes the Samaritans made to their Torah and an abbreviated listing of the hateful actions between the two groups.

386. Freedman, The New Manners and Customs of the Bible. 514.
Any man whose business is with women may not remain alone with women; and a man should not teach his son a craft that is practiced among women.  

Mishnah, *Kiddushin* 4.14

4. Moral discrimination (her moral history). While the terms “poor reputation,” “sinful woman,” and “sexual impurity” are commonly associated with prostitution, these were also applied to women of multiple marriages who were not prostitutes. However, no Samaritan man would have married a prostitute, so the probability that she was one is rather nil.

In the conversation, she displayed a modest and gentle spirit, two characteristics Jesus always loves. There was hatred between the two ethnic groups because each considered itself to be the true Israelite nation. In the middle of this hostility, the love of Jesus destroyed all forms of discrimination. As she listened, her knowledge and faith about Him grew. She concluded that He was the long expected *Tahbe* /messiah without the performance of any signs or wonders. The Jews, however, required a sign.

“A town of Samaria called Sychar.” Amazingly, the name Sychar means *drunken town* or *lying town.* Why anyone would want to identify their community with a name like that is unknown. No wonder the Jews avoided them.

“A woman of Samaria came to draw water.” The role of a woman was primarily one of a domestic servant in the home. While some women rose to positions of power and influence (i.e., Esther), but for the most part, those few were the exceptions. In the average home, the man was the dominant influence and the woman did as he directed. This was not only true within the biblical community but in neighboring cultures as well. It continues to this day in many Muslim countries.

Her duties included preparing food for meals and storage, weaving raw materials into fabrics, and maintaining the home. If the home did not have a cistern, she had to draw water from the village well and carry it home. These were distinctive chores and men were not to undertake them. However, Jesus was not troubled by prevailing cultural taboos. When He approached her

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387. For this reason, men who were weavers were highly despised. It was clearly defined as “women’s work.”


at the well, He broke nearly every gender-based cultural norm that had established itself over the previous centuries, including the cultural taboo that “Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” This is why His disciples were surprised when they returned and found Him talking with her.

Jesus initiated a conversation by asking her for water. This was a radical request because it also required that He drink from her vessel – which in Jewish thinking, was a very unholy and defiled vessel. They avoided contact with the “mixed race,” and to drink from her vessel was even more unthinkable. In response, she acknowledged two cultural barricades: gender and ethnic differences. But Jesus shifted the cultural difference to a spiritual one. The “gift of God” (v 10) and of “living water” (v 10, 14), which means water of life, was also symbolic of eternal life. There was a time when oriental courtesy would never refuse a request for water. However, in the two previous centuries the relations between the Jews and Samaritans had become strained to the breaking point, so even giving water to someone of the other ethnic group was strictly forbidden. Two other examples,

1. The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) and,

2. A common saying was that one who eats the bread of a Samaritan is as one who eats the flesh of swine. This saying underscores the phrase, “Jews do not associate with Samaritans,” (Jn. 4:9). This does not mean that Jews and Samaritans never spoke with each other, but it meant that there were no friendships and social events shared by the two groups, which is precisely what Jesus did. Jews who traveled through Samaria had the freedom to purchase necessary items if they wished, but other than that, the two groups discriminated against each other.

This attitude is preserved in the writings of a second century B.C. Jew named Jesus, the son of Sirach, who wrote the following:

Two nations my soul detests,  
And the third is not even a people;  
Those who live in Seir and the Philistines,

392. Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 283.

393. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 283.

394. Other references are Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Job 22:7; Prov. 25:21.

395. Geikie, The Life and Words. 1:557; Fruchtenbaum, Life of the Messiah. Tape 4, Side B.

396. See 02.01.17 and 03.02.04 for more information.

397. The phrase “not even a people” clearly has some powerful negative cultural implications as 1 Peter 2:10a reads “Once you were not a people,” and Hosea 1:9-10 twice reads, “you are not my people.”
And the foolish people that live in Shechem.\textsuperscript{398}

\textit{Ben Sirach 50:25-26}\textsuperscript{399}

Evidently, she did not grasp the full concept of what Jesus was saying and the conversation was about to become more remarkable. When He asked her to get her husband (v 16), she indicated that she had none. Until now, the dialog was one that she could have had with any man who was not too discreet. But Jesus captured her undivided attention when He said she had five husbands. To this she acknowledged Him by saying \textit{“I see that You are a prophet.”} She chose not to continue to discuss her former husbands, but she obviously recognized Jesus as One who had unusual divine insight of both current events, the future, and was a proclaimer of God’s word (Gk. \textit{prophetes}).\textsuperscript{400} Her statement was not merely a compliment, but was one of the highest honors among the Jews.\textsuperscript{401} In modern society today, there is no similar position. However, the discussion continued on \textit{the} major issue between Jews and Samaritans: where is God to be worshiped. But the response by Jesus was one referring to a different issue, the coming of the Kingdom of God (cf. Rev 21:22).

She had been in a marriage covenant with five men, was now living with a sixth man with whom she did not have a marriage covenant. And now, number seven – Jesus, told her of a new spiritual covenant. However, while she did not fully understand it, she obviously had a basic concept of what Jesus was trying to communicate. She reflected the opinion of many Middle Eastern people in saying that, \textit{“When He comes, He will explain everything to us.”} That statement may have been one of the deepest mysteries of the gospels, because, just as the Jews had unanswered questions, so did the Samaritans. Both groups had questions they pondered for centuries.

There have been countless sermons that condemned her because preachers have assumed that she was a prostitute who had been divorced five times and now lived with a man outside of marriage. Most likely, her former husbands divorced her because she could not bear children for them. The ancients believed infertility was a curse that came directly from God. In a society where divorce was condemned, to have been divorced five times simply meant that she was the

\textsuperscript{398} The second and fourth stanzas of this Hebrew poem refer to the Samaritans.

\textsuperscript{399} \textit{Ben Sirach} and \textit{Tobit} belong to a classification of extra-biblical books known as the Apocrypha. These two literary works reflect the opinions of many Jewish people. See 02.02.03 \textit{“Apocrypha”} for more information. The reader is reminded that quotations from non-biblical sources are not to be understood as being of equal authority with the biblical narratives. See 01.02.04.

\textsuperscript{400} Brown, \textit{“Prophet.”} 3:74-92.

\textsuperscript{401} Macartney, \textit{Great Interviews of Jesus}. 24.
constant subject of gossip and ridicule. Not only was she childless, but she had no friends and was indeed, was a very lonely woman. At that time women seldom divorced their husbands because living as a widow or divorced woman almost always insured a life of poverty.

She probably did not choose to live an unmarried lifestyle, but she had to in order to survive. She, most certainly, gave up on life thinking God condemned her and she lived with someone only as a means of survival. No one would have helped a woman who was repeatedly divorced. Therefore, her conversation with Jesus became her only hope for life.

Then Jesus said the He would give her “living water.” There are two interpretations of the term “living water.”

1. In a physical sense, it was flowing water as found in a river or stream.

2. In a spiritual sense, it reflected upon common phrases pertaining to teaching and explaining the Law. The term was similar to the phrase “To give water to drink.”

Jesus referred to the imagery of both interpretations. He spoke of “living water,” as a reference to water flowing from a stream that is always fresh and vibrant. It is in sharp contrast to well water, or worse yet, cistern water, which is collected rain water that after several months becomes stagnant. People in this area have always been dependent upon cisterns since there is no rainfall for six to eight months of the year. Living water is water that was never stored in a vessel and was considered clean and refreshing. His words were not like those spoken by the Pharisees, but were filled with kindness and compassion and she responded in like manner. Earlier Jesus had turned water into wine, now He opened the gates of living water of eternal life for an impoverished soul.

As with hundreds of other rules and regulations, the leading Pharisees developed clever ways to circumvent them and that included a way to turn stagnant water into “living water.” They simply


403. Myers, “Yes, They are.” 48.
let it flow a short distance through a small channel or pipe to where it was needed. What was stale and stagnant one moment “suddenly” became ritually pure and desirable. But Jesus was referring to living water that flows fresh from a mountain spring, not that which was manipulated by the religious leaders.

According to Jewish tradition, there were six grades of water that were acceptable for mikvaot (or mikvah singular) immersions, each “one more excellent than another.” A mikvah was a small reservoir of fresh water into which one would immerse himself/herself to be ritually pure. At the temple, the priests immersed themselves three times daily. The Midrash stated that the best quality was from a continuous flowing source and was known as “living water.” It was ideal to be immersed in living water, which was considered the best grade and, therefore, approved for “the sprinkling of lepers” and for “mixing with the ashes of the sin-offering.” Here Jesus said that He would make this living water flow out of the believer. Jesus offered her living water.

On the other hand, the Essenes seemed to understand the phrase living water to mean a life in covenant with each other. In a fragment of the Damascus Document is a reference that whenever members left the Essene community, they left the well of living water from where life and refreshment flowed. Consequently, they were no longer counted as part of the Essene community. In detail, the document reads as follows:

And like this judgment will be that of all who reject God’s precepts . . . and forsake them and move aside in the stubbornness of their heart. And thus, all the men who entered the new covenant in the land of Damascus and turned and betrayed and departed from the well of living waters, shall not be counted in the assembly of the people and shall not be inscribed in their lists, from the day of session of him who teaches.


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404. Mishnah, Mikwaot 1.1.
408. 19:32-35 = Column 19, lines 32-35; Martinez, The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. 46.
The Essene covenant of membership was considered to be equal to a well of living waters. Therefore, the words of Jesus concerning living water could have been understood by some as attaining knowledge of God and as a reference to a new covenant.

Video Insert

06.01.03.V The Samaritan Woman at the Well. Gordon Franz discusses the preparation days of the Samaritan Passover known as the Festival of Zimmuth Pesah when Jesus met the Samaritan woman. (3:06) Click here if Internet connection is available.

When Jesus was speaking the Samaritan woman, He was also speaking to an adulterous people. Her people were represented in her life and she was a “type and shadow” of all Samaritans. Jesus knew that she had five husbands — so did the Samaritans in a spiritual sense. The Samaritans originated from five pagan groups who intermarried with Israelites, and these pagan groups each had their own god(s). In the 8th century B.C., the king of Assyria brought in foreign people, who spiritually polluted the land when they married their Jewish neighbors who had remained in Samaria. According to Josephus, each of these five people groups brought their own gods with them into Samaria. The historian and the author of 2 Kings preserved the details.

In essence, the Samaritan woman was symbolic of the Samaritan people. Since the marriage covenant is a “type and shadow” of the covenant believers have with God or gods, her life with five husbands (covenants) was reflective of the Samaritan people whose background was with pagan gods (covenants). When Jesus spoke with her, she lived outside of a marriage covenant, and the Samaritan people lived in spiritual confusion.

409. See “type and shadow” in Appendix 26; See also Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible. 768.

410. As stated previously, the woman had a covenant with five previous husbands. Likewise, the ancestors of the Samaritan people had covenants with five gods. See also Josephus, Antiquities 9.14.3 (288) below.

411. 02.01.17 “Samaritans.”

412. See 03.02.04 and .05.

413. See 2 Kings 17:24-25, 29, 32 and Josephus, Antiquities 9.14.3 (288) in 02.01.17 “Samaritans.”
It was the desire of Jesus to see them return to the worship of the One True God. In fact, His mission was and still is to see all humanity come to the saving knowledge of the One True God. Just as John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus to come to the Jews, this woman prepared the way for Peter, Philip, and John who came later (Acts 8:5-25) and had a successful ministry among them. From Peter’s converts, there arose a certain man named Justin, who was born in the ancient city of Shechem. He became a significant second century church father and writer, who willingly died for his faith. The English word martyr is from the Greek word martyς, which carries a sense of witness. Justin was killed because he was a witness for Jesus, and is known today as Justin Martyr.

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain.” People in all ancient cultures believed their god or gods had to be worshiped in the same temples as where their deities lived. At the time of this encounter, the Samaritan temple had been destroyed for nearly a century and a half, and the Samaritans waited its reconstruction (see 03.05.07). They were jealous that the Jews had a beautiful temple but theirs was destroyed by a Jew. So they had strong expectations that the Taheb would come and rebuild it.

Jesus, however, introduced a new concept of worship “in spirit and truth” without a temple. His “temple” would be those believers in whom the Holy Spirit would live and, therefore, there would be no need for a temple of stone. Clearly, the opinions expressed by the woman were not light-hearted comments, but serious expectations shared by the Samaritan community at large.

“Salvation is from the Jews.” Salvation is from the Jewish people in the sense that God made His covenant with them, beginning with Abraham. Since Jesus is the central focus of that covenant, salvation is through Him alone, and He is of human Jewish origin.

“Worship the Father in spirit and truth.” The term “in spirit” indicates that the worshiper has changed character and is focused on Christ. He has the new life, which he received at his new birth (Jn. 3:5-8; Heb. 9:23-24). The phrase “[in] truth” refers to the complete honesty and


openness that the worshiper has when he comes to God in prayer, for God knows all things. To worship God in Spirit and truth is a high privilege and the Father seeks those who desire to worship him.\(^{416}\)

Following her statement “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ), Jesus identified himself as that Messiah. It was His most direct statement in His early ministry. She returned to her village and proclaimed her encounter with Jesus. A lowly woman of the despised Samaritans became one of the first profound evangelists of the New Testament era. It must be remembered that no one anticipated a messiah who would be fully human and fully God. Therefore, the term messiah is spelled with a lower case “m.” The Samaritan woman most certainly did not expect the Samaritan messiah to be God as well as man.

The progression of her understanding is even more profound when considering her theological background. While the Samaritans believed in a coming messiah, they had a unique perception of him because they only had the five books of Moses that comprised their Bible. Furthermore, some passages of their Bible were modified from the Hebrew Bible. One of those is the messianic prophecy of Deuteronomy 34:10 that reads in their Bible,

\[
\text{There will not arise a prophet in Israel like Moses.}
\]

**Samaritan Bible: Deuteronomy 34:10\(^{417}\)**

In essence, the Samaritan woman must have been wondering of Jesus was in fact, Moses. Yet that apparently did not influence her as did the conversation with Him. Theologically, she was prepared to meet Jesus and when she did, her heart followed. He never condemned her for what she did or believed because “in Christ all things are new” (Rev. 21:5).

Throughout this dialogue, Jesus was very patient and allowed her understanding to develop. As the Master Teacher, He guided her from the known to the unknown.\(^{418}\) She concluded her opinions believing Jesus to be the Messiah and the Savior of the world. This was an extreme departure from her preconceived ideas and her own faith. They believed the Taheb would come, live 110 years, die, and then would come again for the final judgment of the world.\(^{419}\) This was

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\(^{416}\) Jn. 4:23; Rom. 8:15; 1 Jn. 3:1; See also Hejkop, *Unto Christ*, 22-23.


\(^{418}\) The concept that intellectual teaching is based upon what is previously known to the person taught has generally been credited to Aristotle, in *Posteriora Analytica* 1.1. However, the concept, although not described in this manner, is elementary and was practiced by the Jewish rabbis and prophets for centuries.

based, in part, on Deuteronomy 18:18 of the Samaritan Bible. Therefore, the ministry of Jesus was beyond their wildest expectations. In this discourse there are several points to be noticed.

1. Jesus never confused doubt with unbelief, or ignorance with stupidity and carnal foolishness. He was the very model of patience and kindness and did not condemn her for her past actions or her beliefs. She evidently lived in shame (the reason for going to the well at midday was to avoid other women) and Jesus gave her hope. She, as a Samaritan, believed only in the first books of the Old Testament and some other theological issues, but Jesus never condemned her (Rom. 8:34) or argued with her. In Christ, all things are made new.

2. He told her that He was the “living water” of eternal life. This is always the real issue. He pointed to himself, as as the way of salvation (Jn. 4:26), and

3. She became an evangelist in her community. As a result of her testimony, many came to Jesus (Jn. 4:27-30).

4. Both temples, the Samaritan and Jewish, were pronounced obsolete.

5. The message of the Kingdom of God was available to the Samaritans, and later would be offered to the Gentiles as well.

6. The irony is that it was Jesus who was thirsty and came to the well for a drink, and offered the thirsty woman who gave him a drink, living water. The words and works of Jesus are filled with ironies.

“I know that Messiah is coming.” Not only the Samaritans, but nearly all people groups in the ancient Middle East were expecting a Messiah to come. For example, in 63 B.C. the Romans attempted to pass a decree requiring the killing of infant boys because of a prophecy of a newborn king (see 03.05.15), and of course the magi came to Bethlehem because they too were expecting a Messiah. Then in 42-38 B.C. the Roman poet Virgil predicted the coming of a messiah (see 03.05.24). Yet this woman and her fellow Samaritans had something the others didn’t have – a Samaritan Torah. The first five books of Moses are similar in most details to the Jewish version – close enough to have the correct prophecies of the messiah\textsuperscript{420} whom they called the 

\textit{Tehab}. Little wonder then, that she was expecting Him. In the course of discussion with Jesus, there is an interesting progression of her observations.

\textsuperscript{420} Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Num. 24:17; Deut. 18:15.
1. She addressed Jesus as a “Jew” (v. 9),

2. Then she addressed Him as “sir” which has a meaning similar to “lord” (v. 15),

3. Then she addressed Him as a “prophet” (v. 19),

4. Then she addressed Him as the “Messiah” (v. 25), and

5. Finally, she recognized Him as “the Savior of the world” (v. 42).

6. Without question, she must have considered Jesus to be the expected Taheb. The Samaritans, like so many others, believed that God would soon send someone to restore their land and people. That “someone” was called the Taheb or Restorer – a great prophet of the end-time whom Moses referred to in Deuteronomy 18:15.

A similar progression of observation was noted by the blind man who was healed by Jesus by the Pool of Siloam.

“I am He … the One speaking to you.” This is a direct statement by Jesus stating in no uncertain terms that He is God Himself, a declaration of deity. In the Hebrew Bible the phrase I Am is used to reveal the essence of God. Furthermore, in the Septuagint translation, the phrase I Am is the exact phrase used by God to identify Himself in the burning bush when Moses asked who was speaking to him. John used seven I Am statements in his gospel.

Evidently, Jesus did not care about the Jewish or Roman reactions to such an announcement. In other situations He told various individuals not to reveal His identity or what miracle He performed. The Jews were far more nervous about the coming of their messiah than any other people group.

421. Barclay, Jesus. 231.


423. See 11.02.21, 11.02.24, 11.02.11.A, and 11.02.11.B.


425. Bailey, Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes. 211.

426. The Seven “I AM’s”: Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35, 41, 48, 51); Light of the World (Jn. 8:12); Door of the sheep (Jn. 10:7, 9); Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11, 14); Resurrection and the Life (Jn. 11:25); the Way, the Truth, the Life (Jn. 14:6) and the True Vine (Jn. 15:1, 5).
SPIRITUAL FOOD

27 Just then His disciples arrived, and they were amazed that He was talking with a woman. Yet no one said, “What do You want?” or “Why are You talking with her?”

28 Then the woman left her water jar, went into town, and told the men, 29 “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Messiah?” 30 They left the town and made their way to Him.

31 In the meantime the disciples kept urging Him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

32 But He said, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.”

33 The disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought Him something to eat?”

34 “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work,” Jesus told them. 35 “Don’t you say, ‘There are still four more months, then comes the harvest’? Listen to what I’m telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, for they are ready for harvest. 36 The reaper is already receiving pay and gathering fruit for eternal life, so the sower and reaper can rejoice together. 37 For in this case the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ 38 I sent you to reap what you didn’t labor for; others have labored, and you have benefited from their labor.”

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.” Jesus made frequent mention of His dependence upon the Father.

“Look at the fields, for they are ready for harvest.” Jesus clearly connected agricultural imagery to “harvesting for the Kingdom of God.” In January and early February the crops were obviously not ready for harvesting – in fact, the barley seeds were not even planted yet. And the fields certainly were not literally white (see 02.03.02). But that was when Jesus came to the Samaritan Festival of Zimmuth Pesah when they wore white festal garments. In those days, the ethnicity of people was identified by their clothes, language, or accent. Those were markers that distinguished “them from us.”


The Jews had maxims of conduct that pertained to all areas of life. There was always a labor shortage when crops were harvested and placed in storage. A rabbi said the following:

**Rabbi Tarfon said: “The day is short and the task is great and the laborers are idle and the wages are abundant and the master of the house is urgent.”**

*Mishnah, Aboth 2.15*

Jesus had simply taken a well-known statement concerning the labor conditions of his agricultural community and applied it to the work of God.

**06.01.04.A. SAMARITAN MANNEQUINS IN WHITE COSTUMES.** These traditional white costumes were worn by the Samaritans when they celebrated the
Festival of Zimmuth Pesah — the Samaritan Passover which is about two months earlier than the Jewish one. When Jesus said that the fields are ripe for harvest, just as crops lighten in color at harvest time, His words were a pun with an obvious double meaning. Photographed at the Samaritan Center in Shechem, Samaria, by the author.

06.01.05 Jn. 4:39-42 Samaria

THE FIRST WOMAN EVANGELIST

39 Now many Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of what the woman said when she testified, “He told me everything I ever did.” 40 Therefore, when the Samaritans came to Him, they asked Him to stay with them, and He stayed there two days. 41 Many more believed because of what He said. 42 And they told the woman, “We no longer believe because of what you said, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this really is the Savior of the world.”

There can be little question that this woman’s reputation was the lowest in the community. Yet her statements were so profound that the village elders, who normally would never have listened to her, decided to investigate her report. She said that Jesus had supernatural knowledge concerning herself that He could have received only from God. She recognized him as Savior and the Messiah; the Taheb or Restorer — a great prophet of the end-time.429 The greatest evidence of divine truth has always been a transformed life. There was a growing circle of believers who recognized the identity of Jesus.

At this time women were not considered viable witnesses and their ideas were generally considered meaningless. But with this encounter and others like it, Jesus underscored the importance of women and thereby, their status was elevated. The manner in which Jesus nullified prejudice was later more fully illustrated in the letters written by the Apostle Paul.430 Only heaven knows her name although the Eastern Orthodox tradition says her was Photina.431

“The Savior of the world.” It wasn’t the woman, but the village leaders who announced that Jesus is the Messiah of all humanity. Ironically, the Jews could not accept this teaching because, in their preconceived ideas, the messiah would be theirs alone and would overthrow the Roman

430. Rom. 3:27-4:18; 8:9-17; etc.
Empire. They refused to consider the possibility that He would also be the messiah for the Samaritans, Greeks, and the hated Romans.

06.01.06 Jn. 4:43-45 Galilee

**JESUS RETURNS TO THE PROVINCIAL DISTRICT GALILEE.**

43 After two days He left there for Galilee. 44 Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. 45 When they entered Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him because they had seen everything He did in Jerusalem during the festival. For they also had gone to the festival.

The reputation of Jesus went before him. In a society where changes occurred very slowly, a man performing miracles was a major event. Everyone wanted to see the “Miracle Man,” who some thought might be the Man of God. Therefore, when Jesus arrived in the Galilean communities, He had a waiting audience.

06.01.07 Jn. 4:46-54 Cana

**THE SECOND SIGN: BOY IN CAPERNAUM HEALED.**

46 Then He went again to Cana of Galilee, where He had turned the water into wine. There was a certain royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum. 47 When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and pleaded with Him to come down and heal his son, for he was about to die.

48 Jesus told him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe.”

49 “Sir,” the official said to Him, “come down before my boy dies!”

50 “Go,” Jesus told him, “your son will live.” The man believed what Jesus said to him and departed.

51 While he was still going down, his slaves met him saying that his boy was alive. 52 He asked them at what time he got better. “Yesterday at seven in the morning the fever left him,” they answered. 53 The father realized this was the very hour at which Jesus had told him, “Your son will live.” Then he himself believed, along with his whole household.
This, therefore, was the second sign Jesus performed after He came from Judea to Galilee.

This account has given critics fuel for argument because the parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels have a number of differences compared with the book of John. Most scholars believe all four gospel writers refer to the same event, but that may not be the case. For the purpose of this study and eBook, the narrative as recorded by John is presented. However, as stated, Matthew, Mark and Luke may have recorded a similar but separate account. Note the following differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synoptics</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The soldier is a Gentile centurion</td>
<td>The soldier is a royal official of Herod’s army (centurion)</td>
<td>Herod had a Gentile army because he did not trust the Jews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The centurion tells Jesus not to bother to come to his home</td>
<td>Jesus is asked to come to the centurion’s home</td>
<td>Since there were many who were concerned about the boy’s life, someone asked Jesus to come, a request made by a soldier or messenger for the benefit of the centurion, but the centurion said “No,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus heals a slave</td>
<td>Jesus heals a son</td>
<td>The term “son” is not limited to a blood relative, but can be an endearing term for any young male child, even if he is a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus heals in Capernaum</td>
<td>Jesus heals in Cana</td>
<td>Capernaum was better known than Cana, which was a “daughter village” of Capernaum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the second of seven miracles recorded by John although Jesus obviously performed hundreds of others.432 It was not only stunning for Jesus to heal people, but in doing so, He identified Himself with God without saying a word. Not only was Jesus of gentle authority, but when He healed, the audience reflected upon one of the names of God – Jehovah Rapha – our Lord who is our Healer.433 Furthermore, John’s selection of seven miracles represent wholeness and completeness and, in this case, the perfect Person who performed them.

432. The Seven Signs: Water into Wine (Jn. 2:1-2); Healing the Nobleman’s Son (Jn. 4:46-54); Healing the Paralytic (Jn. 5:1-17); Feeding the 5,000 (Jn. 6:1-14); Calming the Storm (Jn. 6:15-21); Healing Man Born Blind (Jn. 9:1-14) and Resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:17-45).

433. See “Jesus, the Fulfiller of Selected Names of God” in Appendix 32 for additional attributes.
“A certain royal official.” Some scholars believe that the official was Manaen (or Menahem), the foster brother of Herod Antipas, who eventually became a prophet and teacher (Acts 13:1). Others believe the official was Chuza, the personal steward or epitropos, of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. It was the responsibility of the epitropos to care for the king’s personal property and investments. It is uncertain if the official was Jewish, given the Roman practice. In addition to Manaen, Joanna (or Johanna), the wife of Chuza was one of the women who also supported Jesus and His disciples (Lk. 8:3; cf. verse 53). Both were affiliated with Antipas.

By this time, the provincial capital of Galilee had been moved from Sepphoris to Tiberius, which was located along the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and a few miles south of Capernaum. Since the ministry of Jesus centered in Capernaum, travelers along the Via Maris and the government officials in nearby Tiberias, heard of Jesus’ reputation. The royal official went from the Tiberius-Capernaum area to Cana to meet Jesus. He evidently had incredible faith in the ability for Jesus to heal, as the distance is not only about eighteen miles, but it is also a long uphill walk. The ancients walked quickly at a pace like a military march of today; not the modern slow walk of two or three miles per hour, but a faster pace of four to five miles per hour. The Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below sea level and Cana is about 1600 feet above sea level. No one would have undertaken such a physical challenge if there was not a passionate motivation.

Finally, there were many who pondered if Jesus was the expected messiah who would bring them freedom. Simon the Zealot may have considered this as well. However, when Jesus healed the son of the royal official, the hopes and dreams of many Zealots were crushed. That was reinforced when Jesus said that one should carry a burden “a second mile,” an obvious implication of occasional Roman military commands. They did not realize, until later, the dynamics of Jesus and the freedom that He would bring.

**06.01.07.Q1 What was the purpose of the miracles performed by Jesus?**

People believed that illnesses were the consequences of sin. How appropriate that Jesus was the Great Healer, since He came to save men from their sins. While the healing of the human body did not save anyone from sin, the act of healing provided striking evidence to the observers, that Jesus saves lost souls from the consequences of sin. Miracles were not the intended end, but gave overwhelming evidence concerning the identity of Jesus.


Considering the social and political tensions of the time, for a Jew to heal a Roman or his servant was unthinkable. This had a profound effect because most Jews believed God was interested only in them. In fact, many dismissed any thought of Gentile conversions and questioned how God could select one of their own to heal the son of a Roman official of the horrible Herodian dynasty. Yet even within the halls of government, the Spirit of God was convicting the lost. Manaen, a foster-brother and official to Herod, became a believer. His and other conversions were beyond Jewish comprehension.437

The short dialog between the centurion and Jesus is most interesting. The Greek language of the centurion’s request indicates he repeatedly asked Jesus to heal his servant, because he was desperate and the young man was near death. This underscores the faith he had in Jesus although the request was probably humiliating (Jews were despised by most Romans). The boy’s father had assumed that Jesus needed to be beside his son physically in order to perform the miracle (cf. Jn. 11:1-37). Jesus, however, demonstrated His power over distance by simply speaking His Word of healing. Once Jesus pronounced his son healed, it would seem natural for the centurion to hurry home to confirm the miracle. But he didn’t. In fact, he stayed in the area and did not begin his return trip until the following day. In this case, there was a double miracle – an absent child was healed of his sickness and the father was healed of his unbelief.

The passage reads that on the following day, as the centurion was walking home, he met his servants who came to tell him of the boy’s healing. The time of the healing was confirmed to have occurred at the 7th hour (1:00 p.m.), but the centurion was not surprised at the news. Note the interesting progression in the narrative:

1. He believed in the words of the promise spoken by Jesus and

2. He believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

Again, news of the miracles that Jesus performed traveled quickly. Many believed in Him as the result of Him cleansing of the temple (Jn. 2:23; 3:2), and they had returned to their homes in the Galilee area. Now Jesus was requested to perform another miracle in the same area where He once turned water into wine. Two statements were made by these miracles – without a single word spoken.

1. The first miracle in Cana was associated with creation of a new family and the joy of the wedding, at which Jesus added gladness to the feast.

2. In the second miracle, there was sorrow with the fear of death in the family but Jesus brought health and gladness to many hearts.

After this event, some of the chronological experiences of Jesus’ life are difficult to ascertain. John focused his gospel on the events in Judea, yet he did not mention the miracles in Galilee.

On a side note, critics have long said Capernaum was a poor and isolated village with little or no significance to either the Jewish or the Gentile world. But the fact that a Roman garrison was there speaks volumes of its significance. Archaeologists discovered a Roman bathhouse, which verifies their presence. The town was a caravan stop that had a commercial center with major fishing and basalt stone products industries. There is also evidence to suggest there was at least a small facility to sell glass vessels or manufacture them.

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438. This is implied 7:3-4.


440. See 06.03.02.A through 06.03.02.E.

441. Loffreda, Recovering Capernaum. 20. Some scholars have suggested these glass vessels were imported for the purpose of selling them to caravans.
Sea of Galilee by the fishermen who were called by Jesus to become His disciples. Photograph by the author at Capernaum.

06.01.07.B. THE SO-CALLED “JESUS BOAT.” During a severe drought in 1986, an ancient fishing boat was discovered in the mud along the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The hull matches well with the first century mosaic tile picture and has been nicknamed the “Jesus boat.” An image of the mosaic is projected on the wall so visitors see the similarities. Photograph courtesy of Allon Museum, Kibbutz Ginnosar.

It is difficult to imagine what daily life was like in those days. In Capernaum, homes consisted of several rooms clustered around an open courtyard, which was the center of family activities. Rooms were essentially for the storage of personal items and sleeping during the cold and rainy months. Bathrooms within homes did not exist except in the palaces of the aristocrats and kings. Noticeably missing from the village was a well, since a lake of fresh water was nearby. Dried food and crop seeds were stored in clay jars. The Galilee area was extremely fertile and productive with wheat, fruits, and vegetables, all of which contributed to the economic growth of a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles.

442. Loffreda, Recovering Capernaum. 21, 24.
06.01.07.C. A ROMAN MILESTONE AT CAPERNAUM. An early second century milestone, discovered at Capernaum, was most likely made by soldiers. When not at war or military practice, they functioned as road builders, highway engineers, pursued highway bandits, and pursued caravans who attempted to evade the tax collector. Photograph by the author at Capernaum. The translation reads as follows:

**IMP (erator)**

**C [A] E [S] AR DIVI**

**[TRAIA]NI PAR (thici)**

**F (ilius) [DIVI NERVAE] [N] EP (OS) TRAI**

**[ANUS] [HA] DRIANUS AUG (ustus)**

06.01.07.D. ROMAN MILESTONE INSCRIPTION. The inscription was written in Latin, the official language of the Roman Empire. Damaged and illegible letters appear in lower case. Translation of the Latin inscription reads,

“The Emperor Caesar, son of the divine Trajan who conquered the Parthians, grandson of the divine Nerva, Trajan Hadrian Augustus.” Notice the reference to divinity.

06.01.08 Mt. 4:12-17; Lk. 4:14-15 (See also Mk. 1:14-15) Capernaum

THE PROPHETIC SETTING

Mt. 12 When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew into Galilee. 13 He left Nazareth behind and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

15 Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the sea road, beyond the Jordan,

Galilee of the Gentiles!

16 The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the shadow land of death, light has dawned. (Isa. 9:1-2)

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

Lk. 14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread throughout the entire vicinity. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, being acclaimed by everyone.

The literary focus in the Hebraic poetry is that the Gentiles living in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali have seen a great light. That light is Jesus.

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,” These two ancient tribal areas in the upper and western regions of Galilee had an international highway known as the Via Maris meaning, the

Way of the Sea, that connected Egypt with Damascus and other points east. For centuries, invading armies marched along this popular road to their destination. In the process soldiers pillaged the communities for freshly harvested food and supplies. Hence, those living in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali were repeatedly plundered, raped, and murdered. Even if they were not the targets of a military conquest, they suffered greatly.

They were especially devastated in 730 B.C. and again in 722-21, when the Assyrians marched through, captured, and relocated the ten northern Israelite tribes hundreds of miles to the east. At the same time, the Assyrians relocated five eastern Gentile tribes into what became known as Samaria, hence, the name “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Jesus ministered in these two areas – now known as Galilee and Samaria – for two reasons:

1. To fulfill the promise spoken of by Isaiah. Because the Jews of Zebulun and Naphtali suffered so much in the past, Jesus was now bringing the message of peace and hope to their descendants.

2. He was outside of the arresting powers of the Sanhedrin. While the high court sent observers to listen and eventually confront Jesus, there was nothing they could do until He came into Jerusalem.

“Galilee of the Gentiles.” When the Assyrians relocated the Israelites in 722/721 B.C., they removed so many of them that the vast majority of the remaining people were Gentiles. For this reason Isaiah referred to the region as the Galilee of the Gentiles (Isa. 9:1) as did the author of 1 Maccabees (5:15). By the first century Galilee had a significant population of Phoenicians, Syrians, and Greeks. Archaeological data indicate an almost complete abandonment of the region as the result of the Assyrian campaigns from 733 to 701 B.C. The province remained unchanged for centuries and it was not until the era of Nehemiah and Ezra, and again after the Maccabean Revolt, that Jews began to repopulate Galilee. But that was only minimal repopulation, as a major influx of Jewish people from Babylon and elsewhere occurred in the

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445. See 07.03.05.Z “Map of Major Routes through First Century Israel.”

446. For more details, see 03.02.04-05, “733 B.C. Israel Falls To The Assyrians; Israelites Deported To The East; 723 B.C. Israel Ends.”


449. It is interesting that the synoptic gospels hardly mention Jesus in Jerusalem until the Passion week, yet John’s gospel concentrates on His ministry in the Holy City. For further study, see Burton Throchmorton, Gospel Parallels.

450. Dunn, “Did Jesus Attend the Synagogue?” 208-09.
wake of the Hasmonean conquest. Some scholars believe the forefathers of Mary and Joseph came from Babylon to the province of Galilee after the Revolt. Scholars believe that for this reason Galileans had a noticeable accent in their speech.

To confirm the absence of Gentiles living in this area, it is significant that archaeologists have uncovered numerous villages that had no evidence of pig bones – a sure sign of Gentile occupation. On the other hand, there are three positive indicators of Jewish occupation that have been discovered in nearly every community. They are:

1. Ceremonial stone vessels made of limestone that reflect concern for ritual purity

2. Stepped plastered ritual baths known as mikva'oth.

3. Tombs that reflect burial practices that were unique to the Jewish people. They placed the body of the deceased inside so-called kokhim or loculi, a horizontally shafted underground family tomb. This was a distinctive practice in the end of the Second Temple Period.

Furthermore, Josephus said that a “countless multitude” came from Galilee and other areas to Jerusalem at Pentecost, and that they did so by going through Samaria. The Jewish population had increased significantly after the Maccabean Revolt when Jews migrated from Babylon. It is not surprising then, that because of the Gentile reputation of centuries past and the fact that the Galileans had an accent and some customs that were somewhat different than the Jerusalemites, the religious leaders of Jerusalem generally snubbed them. It should be noted that a growing number of scholars believe that in spite of the political, military, social, and economic crises in “Eretz Israel” (the land of Israel), the Jewish people maintained a majority over Gentile and Samaritan populations in the first centuries B.C. and A.D.

“Repent.” The word repent in Greek is metanoias, which literally means to change one’s mind. However, in the first century culture, to change one’s mind also meant to change one’s lifestyle to match his new way of thinking. This is the central message of Jesus because it is critical to

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454. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.10.2 and *Wars* 2.3.1.


establishing the Kingdom of God within one’s life. The nearness of the kingdom has reference to the presence of Jesus among men. His words and works are the good news of the gospel of God that demands a human response. It is a measure of time determined by God for the fulfillment of the kingdom as promised from the foundation of the world and promised in various covenants throughout history. The plan of God was about to be fulfilled as stated on the cross when Jesus said, “It is finished.” This clearly set guidelines to protect the church from false teachers, who would come and state that the work of Jesus was not complete and that another message of God would need to be heard.

06.01.08.Q1 What is the “Kingdom of Heaven”?

The kingdoms of this world consist of matter and flesh, of power and deceit, of depraved human nature. The Kingdom of Heaven/God is the opposite. It is the kingdom of the Spirit and the soul, the kingdom of renunciation and of purity; the kingdom of all things valued by men who know the worthlessness of everything else in comparison. The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” is an expression not found in the Hebrew Bible; the term was developed by sages to refer to God as king or to God reigning in the lives of His people forever (Ex. 15:18). Mark used this phrase in conjunction with “the time (Gk. kairos) is near,” meaning “the Day of the Lord” that the prophets foresaw is “approaching quickly.”

But Jesus did not wish to be the restorer of earthly kingdoms or be the conqueror of people. God offered kingship to Jesus via the cross, which is in stark contrast to Satan who offers so-called “eternal life” without the cross. The kingship of Jesus is the Kingdom of Heaven within His believers. The day when a soul has repented, has turned to righteousness, and has placed Jesus in the center of his or her life, the eternal Kingdom of Heaven has been enlarged because it has acquired a new citizen.

The ideal Kingdom of God is to be realized in the absolute rule of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, by whom all things are made and consist (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16-20). His earthly life was one of perfect obedience to God and whose sacrificial offering of love upon the cross reveal to men their true relation to God, and whose spirit works to bring them into this relationship. The Kingdom of Heaven is the Spirit of God functioning within a person, and that person, in turn, functions accordingly to his or her best abilities to serve God.

457. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 232.
Finally, it should be noted that from the Book of Daniel, the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven,” was a familiar phrase in the first century. The term was found in the *Psalms of Solomon* 17:4 and other Jewish books that were in wide circulation of the time.

**06.01.08.Q2 Is there a difference within the phrases “Kingdom of God/Heaven?”**

No. Matthew, speaking to a Jewish audience would not have used the name of God, but rather, would have used a substitute word such as “Heaven, Power, Glory, the Highest,” or “the Name.” The reason is that most Jewish people had so much respect for God that they did not even mention His name, but addressed Him with a different title. But other gospel writers who addressed their works to a Gentile audience would have used the word “God” because they would not have been offended by the name.

Phrases such as “the Kingdom of Heaven is near” and “let the fear of heaven be upon you,” avoid the name of God but have the same meaning. Jewish people have such a high respect for God, that even today many orthodox Jewish people spell the name of God as “G-d.” Matthew, at times, used the plural form “heavens,” which is characteristically Hebraic and does not occur in any other language. The phrase “Kingdom of God” simply means that God has complete rulership of one’s life.

The Kingdom of God is also in the future in that there will come a time when Jesus will rule and reign upon the earth for a thousand years with Jerusalem as His capital. The Kingdom that is in the present is the one in which every believer permits Jesus to rule and reign His or her life. However, in the future there will be a completely different Kingdom – one where Jesus will rule and reign over the nations of the world as a political entity – King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

“*Their synagogues.*” Matthew used this phrase several times, as if to suggest a future separation between Jesus and traditional Judaism (although a break was never the intent). He also spoke of “their” scribes (Mt. 7:29) and “their” cities (Mt. 11:1). Even though followers of Jesus functioned within Judaism throughout most of the first century, by the end of the Second Revolt in A.D. 135, there was a clear separation.

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Unit 06
The Ministry Of Jesus Accelerates

Chapter 02
Rejection In Nazareth

06.02.00.A. THE ROAD FROM NAZARETH TO JERUSALEM by James Tissot. 1880. Jesus teaches to various followers as He travels across the rocky Galilee Mountains.

06.02.01 Introduction. It would be only a matter of time until Jesus went to the remote village that for so many years was His boyhood home. As He came before the congregation in the
synagogue, everyone saw Him as the neighborhood kid who grew up among them. The other children He once played with were now adults and had their own children. There were people whose homes He built or repaired, for whom He constructed furniture or agricultural implements. They knew that He was a good and obedient boy, one of whom any parent would be proud.

Some admired Him while others could not forget His illegitimate birth. They believed that since He was born out of wedlock, He was ineligible for the least of any religious duties. In fact, it is a wonder that He was even permitted to read from the sacred scrolls. Maybe it was because He was such a fine young man in His youth in spite of His birth. Or maybe it was because of the miracles and the exploding popularity He attained. Regardless, now the people of Nazareth would see this young man they thought they knew so well; and they passionately listened to every word – much to their surprise.

06.02.02 Lk. 4:16-30 Nazareth

JESUS REJECTED IN HIS HOMETOWN
(The poetic section is divided in three sections)

16 He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,

1 A As usual, He entered the synagogue
   B And stood up to read.
   C 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him,
      D and unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it is written:

2 A 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me
   B to preach good news to the poor.
   C He has sent Me to proclaim freedom to the captives
      D and recovery of sight to the blind,
   C’ to set free the oppressed,
   B’ 19 to proclaim
   A’ the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isa. 61:1-2a).

3 D’ 20 He then rolled up the scroll,
   C’ gave it back to the attendant
   B’ and sat down.

A’ The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 He began by saying to them, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.”
They were all speaking well of Him and were amazed by the gracious words that came from His mouth, yet they said, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

Then He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me: ‘Doctor, heal yourself. So all we’ve heard that took place in Capernaum, do here in Your hometown also.’”

He also said, “I assure you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah’s days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them—but to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. And in the prophet Elisha’s time, there were many in Israel who had serious skin diseases, yet not one of them was healed — only Naaman the Syrian.”

When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They got up, drove Him out of town, and brought Him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl Him over the cliff. But He passed right through the crowd and went on His way.

**Literary style.** Verses 16 – 21 are written in a poetic style of three stanzas. The first and third are of opposite patterns. In line 1A, Jesus entered the synagogue while 3A is another reference to the synagogue. In line 1B, Jesus stood up while in 3B He sat down. In line 1C, He received the scroll of Isaiah while in 3C He gave it back to the attendant. In 1D, He unrolled it but in 3D He closed it. Stanza 2 has the same structural form as 1 and 3. Note the similarities between A and A’, B and B’, etc. In fact, this stanza could be moved to the right and unified with the other two.

It should be noted that poetic forms of parables may change or even be lost in translation when sentence structures change. Not all parables are shown in poetic form, but these are presented so the reader can understand the dynamics of Hebraic speech that help people memorize the stories.

“As usual.” Jesus lived in this community for most of His life and had attended the local synagogue every Sabbath. It may have had a “House of the Book” attached – a classroom for young children or the sanctuary itself may have served in this capacity six days of the week. This was like a homecoming for Him, but one that would be a disappointment and most certainly cause embarrassment for His family who would not come to faith until after His resurrection.

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“He entered the synagogue.” Going to the house of worship on the seventh day was what everyone did – no one even questioned it. During the week teachers taught children or their disciples in synagogues, but on the Sabbath, the entire community came to the synagogue to be taught and to worship God. Likewise Jesus taught in the synagogues and His gospel message was later commissioned to the apostles (Acts 1:8). When Paul began his ministry to the Diaspora (Jews in foreign lands), he also taught in the synagogues as Jesus had done. Apollos also began his ministry in the synagogue (Acts 18:26). And since Jesus preached in the synagogue, those who accepted Him as their Messiah began to worship God at home and in a synagogue service that was patterned after the traditional Jewish service. Early Christian and Jewish services always began with praises, followed by prayer as stated in the Talmud:

Rabbi Simlai expounded: “A man should always first recount the praise of the Holy One, blessed be He and then pray.”

Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 32a-32b

“[Jesus] stood up to read.” Luke takes notice of Jewish practices, as when Jesus stood to read the Scriptures and the audience always stood to listen. This tradition is still practiced today. Following the reading from the Torah was a reading from the Prophets, which, in this case, was from the Book of Isaiah. It was the cultural norm that, after He finished reading, He sat down to preach a sermon. What has been preserved by Luke most certainly is only a small segment of a much larger sermon presented by Jesus.

Ancient texts were usually intended for public reading, as silent reading was an unknown skill until the second or third century A.D. That is why Jesus said “Let those who have ears, listen.” He never said, “Let those who have eyes, read.” For the most part, letters and other documents were an extension of oral communication. St. Augustine, in his fourth-century Confessions, wrote that St. Ambrose was the most incredible man he had ever met because he could read without moving his lips or making a sound.


465. For a study on the synagogue worship service, see Alfred Edersheim. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993). This reprint of the 1883 edition remains a classic resource.

To make the matter of reading more challenging, papyrus and ink were expensive and scribes were among the highest paid professionals. Furthermore, Greek and Hebrew documents frequently had no separation of words, sentences, paragraphs, or punctuation. To read ancient texts required excellent reading skills, even by today’s standards. 467

“**To set free the oppressed.**” The literal translation of *oppressed* is *to be taken*, or *conquered*, as begin a captured prisoner of war. 468 The allusion has two points to it:

1. A reflection upon the exiles of Israel. Most Jewish people were living outside of their homeland because,
   a. They moved due to persecution
   b. They lived abroad because their forefathers were captured and relocated to foreign lands, and the families eventually settled there.
   c. Some Jewish families moved abroad because economic opportunities were better in places such as Rome and Antioch. 469

2. An allusion to those held captive in spiritual bondage by Satan.

“**The year of the Lord’s favor.**” This phrase is clearly reflective of the year of Jubilee, the year when all debts were to be forgiven, slaves were to be emancipated (Lev. 25:8-17), and the oppressed captives were to be given their freedom. 470 This year was to occur once every fifty years, but it was seldom honored. Jesus proclaimed that this year was symbolic of Him because He is the one who forgives debts and gives freedom to humanity. That was absolutely stunning! It is noteworthy that the English words *sins* and *debts* are both translated from the Aramaic word *hoba*. Therefore, when Jesus speaks of sinners He is also speaks of debtors; when He speaks of the forgiveness of sins He also speaks of speaks of the forgiveness of moral and spiritual debts. 471

469. See 02.01.03.Z “Map Of The Two Jewish Diasporas.”
470. For further study of loans, debts, and how first century Jewish courts ruled, see the Mishnah and the chapter titled *Baba Batra*.
But what Jesus did not read from the scroll of Isaiah (61:2b) is equally important; He did not mention the short passage with reference to the “day of vengeance.” That passage is a clear reference to when Christ returns as king to judge the godly and ungodly. When John the Baptist thundered that One would come who would bring judgment and fire, he was right; however, that portion of his prophetic words was not to be fulfilled in the first century; it is yet to come.

“He began by saying to them.” As previously stated, the teacher (or rabbi) would always stand to read the Scriptures and always sit down to teach the class or congregation.472 When the reader sat down in the seat of Moses, he was in a slightly elevated position and, essentially, was seen as a type of Moses as he instructed the congregation.

THE SEAT OF MOSES AND THE BEMA STONE. The seat of Moses (background) and the Bema stone (foreground) in the synagogue ruins at Chorizim is typical of a first century synagogue. At Nazareth, Jesus would have stood upon the Bema stone when He read the Scroll and was seated in the Seat of Moses when he explained the Scriptures to the congregation. Photograph by the author.

The Greek word Bema refers to the raised platform upon which a speaker stood to address a congregation, read proclamations, and upon which citizens stood when tried before officials.473

“Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” This passage from Isaiah 61 was recognized as one of the great messianic prophecies. Therefore, when Jesus said this Scripture was fulfilled in their hearing, He was announcing that He was that expected Anointed One – the

Messiah! They could not imagine that a child born out of wedlock, even if He was the best kid in town, could possibly be their messiah. Consequently, there was instant anger.

**Mystery Unveiled**

By saying that Isaiah 61:1-2a has been fulfilled, Jesus said that He was that expected Anointed One. His message, miracles, and life would be the fulfillment of Luke 4:16-21.

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**06.02.02.B. THE SEAT OF MOSES IN CHORIZIM.** A close-up view of the seat where the teacher of the synagogue sat to instruct the congregation. This stone seat was discovered by archaeologists in 1926, and is the type mentioned in Matthew 23:1-3. Photograph by the author.
06.02.02.C. THE RECONSTRUCTED NAZARETH SYNAGOGUE. This synagogue is believed by Jewish scholars to be identical to the one that was graced by the presence of Jesus, although its location cannot be affirmed. Since the architectural style of synagogues had little or no variation from village to village, archaeologists and researchers examined the synagogue ruins at Gamla to create an authentic reproduction. A man wearing first century costume walks past the reconstructed village synagogue in the Nazareth Village which received rabbinic compliments for authenticity. Photograph by the author.

06.02.02.Q1 What was the unseen miracle in Nazareth (Lk. 4:16-17)?

The tradition was that men of the congregation would take turns reading Scripture in the worship service, unless there was a visiting guest, then he was given the honor to lead the service. The readings from the scrolls were continued from week to week and, in any three year cycle the entire Hebrew Bible was read. That, in itself, was a difficult task to accomplish since there were no chapter and verse divisions. Furthermore, there were no vowels and all the letters were run together. It is normally assumed that Jesus simply selected a text from Isaiah, read it, and applied it to Himself. Clearly, this was not the case. At the point where the reader of the previous Sabbath ended, that was the beginning point for the reader the following week. The miracle lies


475. A system of “vowel points” was established in the 9th or 10th century (A.D.) to aid reading.
in the fact that Jesus did not select the text, but His reading was the continuation from the reading of the previous Sabbath. This was hardly a coincidence, but a miracle by a divine appointment. One would hardly notice a miracle had occurred unless the order of synagogue worship was known. The custom of the day was as follows:  

1. The congregation would recite the Shema (Deut. 6:4), which was a short prayer. At the end, there was a moment of thoughtful silence which was when the worshipers “folded up the Shema.”

2. A prayer followed.

3. There was a reading from the Law (Parashah),

4. There was a reading from the Prophets (Haphtarah).

5. The reader would then give an explanation and life application to each reading.

Jesus was probably seated in the front of the congregation during the first two steps, then read a section from the Torah (step 3). It is unknown if He read that section or if He entered the synagogue in time to read from the Prophets (step 4). Regardless, He then stood upon a large flat stone in the front of the synagogue called the “bema” (Heb. bima) stone. This was the honorable position of a maphtir or reader (who at this moment was Jesus) of the sacred megillah, meaning the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus then read the haphtarah, or the reading of the day, which was Isaiah 61:1-2a. As He read, the entire congregation stood to honor the Word of God. The length of the haphtarah was normally between three and twenty-one verses. However, Jesus only read one and a half verses, rolled up the megillah, and gave it to the chazzan or the attendant, who carefully placed the sacred writing in a painted ark.

After the unusually short reading, Jesus stepped off the bema stone, walked to the Seat of Moses, and seated Himself. There He presented His sermon based on that Scripture (Isa. 61:1-2a). His lifelong friends and neighbors could hardly believe that the little boy Jesus, who grew up in


479. Farrar, Life of Christ. 102; Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 276, 308-09; Moseley, Yeshua: A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church 9.

480. The custom of being seated while teaching is also found in Mt. 5:1, 23:2, 26:55; Jn. 8:2; Acts 22:3.
their community, was applying the words of Isaiah to Himself. They knew of the miracles He had already performed, but when He reminded them that Elijah and Elisha performed miracles for their non-Jewish neighbors who believed God, that brought instant anger and fury. The unspoken message was that the pagans could become believers while they, the Jews of Nazareth, might not.

The first century Jewish philosopher, Philo, preserved a description of a synagogue service that was typical of the time of Jesus. He recorded the following:

**Now these laws they are taught at other times, indeed, but most especially on the seventh day, for the seventh day is accounted sacred on which they abstain from all other employments, and frequent the sacred places which are called synagogues, and there they sit according to their age in classes. The younger sitting under the elder and listening with eager attention in becoming order.**

Then one, indeed, takes up the holy volume and reads it, and another of the men of the greatest experience comes forward and explains what is not very intelligible, for a great many precepts are delivered in enigmatical modes of expression, and allegorically, as the old fashion was; and thus the people were taught piety, and holiness, and justice, and economy, and the science of regulating the state, and the knowledge of such things as are naturally good, or bad, or indifferent, and to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong, using a threefold variety of definitions, and rules, and criteria, namely, the love of God, and the love of virtue, and the love of mankind.

**Philo, Every Good Man is Free 12.81-83**

The attendant was in charge of the service. It was his responsibility to insure the appointed people read Scripture at the appropriate times, to see that the furniture and building were kept in good order, and to make sure the entire service was conducted properly and in order. This form of a Jewish worship service became the pattern of worship in the early church, since the first converts were Jews. Jews wrote the first church hymns, some of which eventually were entered into Scripture (i.e. Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16).

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482. Freeman, *The New Manners and Customs of the Bible*. 503.

“A widow at Zarephath … many in Israel who had serious skin diseases (leprosy).” At this point, the Master Teacher reflects upon the prophet Elijah and the miracle God performed through him to benefit the widow of Zarephath of Sidon. There is also a poetic reflection concerning the healing of Naaman, the Syrian leper. Note the comparisons.\(^{484}\)

1 Kings 17:1-16

There were many widows in the land of Israel
In the days of Elijah the prophet
But none of them were healed
Except in Zarephath, the widow of Sidon


There were many lepers in the land of Israel
In the days of Elisha the prophet
But none of them were healed
Except in Syria, Naaman the leper

The audience could not help but notice the powerful connection of what they had heard and seen with the miraculous stories in their Hebrew Bible. Everyone had heard of the honored prophets Elijah and Elisha, and now they were asked to connect Jesus with the greatness of these prophets.

Leprosy was the name given to a wide range of skin diseases, but the malignant skin disease of horrors was known by the Greek name of \textit{lepra} and the Hebrew name of \textit{sara'at}. This is the condition described in Matthew 8:3; Mark 1:42, Luke 5:12 and translated in the Revised Standard Version as “full of Leprosy.” The New English Bible translates the term as “covered with leprosy.” Its conditions include scaly skin with swelling, discharge, ulcers, loss of hair, odor, and loss of pigmentation.\(^{485}\) This condition leads to an agonizing death. The significance of this discussion was that Jesus hinted that what the Jews will reject, the Gentiles will accept.

Finally, throughout the biblical period there was a prevailing idea that gods were territorial; that there were gods who controlled various cities and regions. Therefore, it is amazing that the widow of Zarephath believed that Elijah could perform a miracle in the land of Baal. In light of that, it is even more amazing is that she gave him – a prophet of a foreign god – her last loaf of bread.

\(^{484}\) For further study, see Bailey, \textit{Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes}. 160-68.

Likewise, Naaman, who had leprosy but was not confined to a leper’s colony, believed that a foreign god would help him. His healing only occurred after the encouragement of his servant, but he finally had faith to step into the Jordan River for his healing. The faith expressed by the widow and Syrian general surpassed that of the citizens of Nazareth. Both were Gentiles, both are heroes of the Jewish faith, and to tell this to the Jews of Nazareth greatly angered them.

“Everyone in the synagogue was enraged.” The many friends and neighbors were extremely hostile to one of their own equating Himself with God. However, how did His family feel? For years they tried to live in this small village in peace and harmony, but the gossip about Jesus having been conceived out of wedlock continued. It was in His hometown where the Jews first considered killing Him. The primary reasons for their hatred were:

1. He identified himself as the Messiah spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, and

2. He referred to the faith of two Gentiles to whom God showed mercy and blessing, but the Jews considered them condemned. Yet they should have recognized that their own Scriptures prophesied the Messiah would bring salvation to the Gentiles.

3. Jesus said that His old friends, neighbors, and distant relatives of the small village were unworthy of Him, just as all of Israel was unworthy of Elijah and Elisha. That “unworthiness” was the result of the sin of unbelief committed by the people.

The rejection of Jesus most certainly had an effect on His half-brothers and half-sisters. It can safely be assumed that by this time they would have married and established homes in Nazareth or nearby villages such as Cana. In those days young married families remained close to the clan or extended families. Since the neighbors so severely rejected Jesus, they most certainly rejected and ridiculed His family as well. That was the norm of the day. Jesus was confronted by several people groups, namely:

1. Some of His friends and neighbors in Nazareth

2. The religious leaders from Jerusalem who no longer had religious authority in the Galilee (removed by Herod the Great), but spied on Him.

486. Others references are Jn. 5:16; 7:30; 8:40, 59; Lk. 11:53-54.

487. Isa. 9:1-2; 42:1-3, 6-7; 60:1-3; also note Mt. 4:13-16; Acts 13:47.
3. His family members questioned Him as they too, could not believe He was the Messiah.

However, at a time when the Romans were quick to execute anyone whom they suspected to be the political-religious Messiah, they never confronted Jesus. They had their spies such as the Herodians, observing Jesus, but they never felt threatened.

Finally, this may be a good place to comment about women in the Galilean synagogue. The stringent rules of Jerusalem were considerably more relaxed in Galilee. While in Jerusalem women were required to remain silent during synagogue services; in Galilee synagogue leaders were more lenient:

1. Galilean women were permitted to make up a quorum to establish a new synagogue.

2. They were permitted to read the Torah, but were not permitted to sit in the seat of Moses or comment on the Torah reading.

3. Women were permitted to engage in a question and answer session that frequently followed the teaching segment of the service. Some even became involved in rabbinic debates and their words are still on record. The modern belief that women had to be silent and sit separately from men in the synagogue arose several centuries later. (Incidentally, the Apostle Paul’s comments on women being silent in the church (1 Cor. 14:34) probably is a reference to this segment of the service.)

4. There is no archaeological or literary proof that women were separated from men until the 500s in the Common Era. The Babylonian Talmud speaks of women reading from the Torah in the synagogue near the end of the second temple period.

The fact that men and women had equal opportunity to read during the Sabbath service is indicative that boys and girls both went to school to learn how to read. This was quite unusual,

488. For further study on the various opinions concerning the status and influence of women in the Second Temple Period, see the excellent work by Tal Ilan, Integrating Women into Second Temple History, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.


not only in the Greco-Roman world, but for many other Jewish communities as well. Second to Jerusalem, Galilee had become the primary academic center of Israel and, after the destruction of the temple, the seat of rabbinic authority relocated to nearby Tiberias. In fact, all the major sages in Jerusalem were from the Galilee area. With education held in such high esteem, women were welcomed in the academic community.

**06.02.02.Q2 The Sabbath Day’s walk – How far did they take Jesus (Lk. 4:29)?**

The synagogue leaders were so angry at Jesus, that they wanted to take Him “to the edge of the hill” and throw Him over it to His death. In recent years tourists have been shown a huge cliff south of Nazareth and are told this was where the Jews wanted to throw Jesus. But the southern cliff account is a myth.

In reality, the first century event would have been a retaining wall that wasn’t much higher than possibly two to four meters – or just over a man’s height. Being thrown over such a small cliff would not have been a fatal fall, but He would then have been stoned to death. That is the cultural context according to research conducted by the reconstructed Nazareth Village, and this miniature cliff or retaining wall was either in Nazareth or right along the edge of it. While its location has been lost in history, these men were observant Jews and would not have broken any Sabbath laws (including those that pertained to a Sabbath walk) to drag Jesus to the huge cliff on the southern side of Nazareth.

The Sabbath Day’s walk traveling restrictions were established centuries earlier. Joshua 3 contains the account of the Israelites crossing the Jordan as they were about to enter the land God had promised them. At that time the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant, which represented the presence of God in their midst. The people were told by the famous leader, Joshua, *not* to get closer than two thousand cubits (about one thousand yards) from the ark (Josh 3:4a). Therefore, on the Sabbath Day one could not travel more than a thousand yards from the center of worship.

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492. Information was acquired by personal interviews with Nazareth Village staff on June 9, 2013. Nazareth Village is a recreated first century living museum in Nazareth, Israel.
so as not to become distant from God. Especially since the term Sabbath means rest.\textsuperscript{493} Since the “center” was considered to be the home, synagogue, or other place in the village, the rabbis would place markers indicating the end of two thousand cubits along the roads leading in and out of every village. On the Sabbath Day, the villagers could walk to the marker that indicated the limit of the distance they could travel.\textsuperscript{494}

However, apparently there was some variation concerning the length of a Sabbath’s Day’s journey. Acts 1:12 indicates the distance from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem as a Sabbath Day’s walk. Josephus cited this distance as five furlongs or 3,031 feet\textsuperscript{495} and again as six furlongs (a/k/a six stadia/stadium) or 3,637 feet.\textsuperscript{496} But it is doubtful that when Luke wrote Acts 1:12, he was interested in a precise measurement.

In addition, a great disparity of distance lies in the fact that by Hellenistic measure 2000 cubits is 3000 feet. The variation may be due to the fact that while a cubit was generally 17.49 inches,\textsuperscript{497} in some cases it was 21.5 inches. But the most common unit of measure was the shorter unit. For general purposes, two cubits equal 36 inches or one yard as referred to in Joshua 3:4b. For Romans, a journey of 2,000 cubits (Num. 35:5), was reckoned to be equal to six Roman stadia (606.5 feet). Jerome in his Epistle to Algasian (Book 10) recorded the Sabbath Day journey to be a distance of 2000 feet.\textsuperscript{498} Obviously, there were different opinions as to a precise distance, but there was a consensus of the approximate distance.

Today tourists in Israel see a quarry on the south side of the mountain upon which Nazareth rests and are told this is the cliff where Jesus was threatened. However, when examining the distance between Nazareth and the “traditional cliff” as determined by the Crusaders, there is no question this was far beyond any Sabbath’s Day journey, even by the most liberal interpretation. Hence, the so-called traditional cliff location needs to be removed from any consideration as a historical-religious site.

\textsuperscript{493} Josephus, \textit{Antiquities} 1.1.1.

\textsuperscript{494} For additional Sabbath regulations, see \textit{Jubilees} 50:6-13 at 02.04.06. In fact, during the Maccabean Revolt, since the Jews refused to fight on the Sabbath, the Greeks slaughtered more than a thousand men, women, and children. Thereafter they decided to defend themselves so as not to be removed from the face of the earth (\textit{1 Macc}. 2:31-38).

\textsuperscript{495} Josephus, \textit{Antiquities} 20.8.6.

\textsuperscript{496} Josephus, \textit{The Jewish Wars} 5.2.3. Some other sources indicate 3,639 feet instead of 3,637 feet.

\textsuperscript{497} See Appendix 20; Some sources indicate the Old Cubit, a/k/a Short Cubit, was 17.49, 17.6, or 17.71 inches, or 45 cm.; See also Vine, “Cubit.” \textit{Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary}. 1:53.

\textsuperscript{498} Kepler, “Sabbath’s Day’s Journey” 4:141; Geikie, \textit{The Life and Words}. 2:622.
The “Traditional Cliff” of Nazareth. The cliff south of Nazareth, according to Crusader traditions, is identified as being where the congregation of Nazareth challenged Jesus. However, this cliff is far beyond the traditional “Sabbath’s day walk” from the ancient synagogue and, therefore, cannot be considered as the site. It is a classic example of the many traditional myths of the Holy Land. Today it is an active quarry. Photograph by the author.

The people He grew up with; the neighbors He loved and cared for; the kids He once played with who now had children of their own; for the most part, rejected Him. He saw friendly faces and critical eyes. Jesus left His hometown with a heavy heart and moved to Capernaum. The humble home that was His for so many years would be no more. Yet of all the human emotions that filled His heart, He knew that eventually the Jewish leadership would do likewise – turn against Him. The passage in Isaiah expressed His own purpose and program – precisely what He was going to do with His life – the Kingdom of God as follows:

1. To preach the good news to the poor (v. 11)

2. To announce that captives to sin would be released (v. 18)

3. To bring sight to the blind – both to those who are physically blind and those who were spiritually blind to the truth (v. 18).

4. To give liberty to those who are injured and oppressed (v. 18)
5. To announce that the Kingdom of God has arrived – the hour of salvation has come.

It is noteworthy that little is recorded in the Bible concerning the relationship Jesus had with His biological family. It appears, however, that His brothers and sisters still had some serious misgivings about Him at this point. In fact, His brother James was as much, if not more, of a doubter as was the famous doubting Thomas until after the resurrection. His mother and father, assuming Joseph was still alive, were the only family members who had any confidence in Him. Thus, the poetic words of David were fulfilled.

I have become a stranger to my brothers and a foreigner to my mother’s sons.

Psalm 69:8

There are times when one must move on to the next phase of life. So did Jesus, as now He proceeded to the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee where He spent considerable time teaching and performing miracles. So much so, that the region between the villages of Tabgha, Bethsaida, and Chorizim became known as the “evangelical triangle.” Capernaum was centered within this evangelical area.
06.02.02.Z MAP OF THE EVANGELICAL TRIANGLE. The area of three villages where Jesus ministered most frequently formed what has been called the “Evangelical Triangle.” These villages were Tabgha, Bethsaida, and Chorizim, located in the area along the northern edge of the Sea of Galilee with Capernaum in the center. Courtesy of International Mapping and Dan Przywara.

Finally, two of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments have amazing reflections upon Luke 4:16-30, although that passage is based upon selections from Isaiah 61. The fragments indicate that the Essenes apparently believed that Isaiah’s words were messianic in nature, and when they wrote them, they did so in a similar manner to what Luke did.
### Fragments 4Q278 & 4Q521

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragment</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4Q278</td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit rests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q521</td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>The Messiah is exalted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>To preach the good news to the poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q521</td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Release for the captives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q521</td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Opening the eyes of the blind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q521</td>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Raising up the downtrodden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q521</td>
<td>4:38-40</td>
<td>His mighty works: heal the sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Q521</td>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>His works: Raising the dead</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Luke 4:16-30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>The Spirit of the Lord is on Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>For He has anointed Me [i.e., made me into Messiah]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>To preach the good news to the poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Release for the captives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Opening the eyes of the blind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:18</td>
<td>Set free the oppressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:38-40</td>
<td>What we have you did at Capernaum do also here [i.e., heal the sick]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:22</td>
<td>Affirms the raising of the dead as a messianic act of Jesus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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499. The comparison of Luke 4:16-30 with DSS 4Q278 and 4Q521 was adapted from Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 150.

500. For more information on the messianic acts / messianic miracles, see 06.03.08.Q1, 06.03.08.Q2, 06.01.03, John 4:25 as well as the related video link 06.03.08.V; Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Miracles*. 4.
Unit 06
The Ministry Of Jesus Accelerates

Chapter 03
The Ministry Of Jesus Accelerates In Galilee

06.03.00.A. JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES IN A FISHING BOAT. Artwork by William Hole of the Royal Scottish Academy of Art, 1876. After toiling all night without catching a single fish, Jesus, who was not a fisherman, told them where to cast the net (Lk. 5:1-7). The result was phenomenal.
Lk. 1 As the crowd was pressing in on Jesus to hear God’s word, He was standing by Lake Gennesaret. 2 He saw two boats at the edge of the lake; the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, which belonged to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the land. Then He sat down and was teaching the crowds from the boat.

4 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

5 “Master,” Simon replied, “we’ve worked hard all night long and caught nothing! But at Your word, I’ll let down the nets.”

6 When they did this, they caught a great number of fish, and their nets began to tear. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them; they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, because I’m a sinful man, Lord!” 9 For he and all those with him were amazed at the catch of fish they took, 10 and so were James and John, Zebedee’s sons, who were Simon’s partners.

“Don’t be afraid,” Jesus told Simon. “From now on you will be catching people!” 11 Then they brought the boats to land, left everything, and followed Him.

Mt. 18 As He was walking along the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen.

19 “Follow Me.” He told them, “and I will make you fish for people!”

20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and He called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.
Before discussing the biblical passage, some background information is needed relative to fishing in the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were their business partners. The fish they caught were usually dried, salted and sold to traveling caravans while fresh fish were taken quickly to nearby markets such as Tiberias, Nazareth, and Sepphoris. Their business did not make them wealthy, but did provide for all their needs. Yet soon they would find sufficient reason to leave the business to Zebedee and follow Jesus.

Then Jesus, who was not a fisherman, came by and gave some instruction to professional fishermen that produced outstanding results. A huge catch of fish in daylight was caught when fish are normally caught only at night. Since the Sea of Galilee has always been abundant with fish, failure to catch any at night was unheard of and, therefore, a miracle. At night the fish swim close to the surface to feed, but during the daylight hours they descend to the depths of the lake. It was common knowledge that daylight fishing was an exercise in futility. For a carpenter to tell professional fishermen how to fish was totally out of character, especially during daylight hours – a most unusual event.

Therefore, when Jesus called Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to follow him, they knew they were going with Someone special. Yet they would not know to what extent “special” was until after His death and resurrection. John 1:35 indicates that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, and possibly Peter as well. Little wonder then, that when Jesus spoke to Simon Peter, Peter addressed Him as “Master.”

It has been said that a great man can transform ordinary people into great people. The lives of the disciples would be transformed dramatically – beyond their wildest dreams. In the course of time, their human frailties would be exposed, but the power of God would transform them into healers of the sick and soldiers of the cross.

As to the profession of fishing, the trammel net was the ideal net for use at night. It is a series of three nets close together, which are “hung” in the water like a vertical curtain. Along one edge is a series of floats and along the opposite edge is a series of weights. The net is suspended in a semi-circular fashion near the shore and slowly the two ends are drawn together causing many fish to be caught. At night the fish swim between the nets and become tangled. This type of net, while very effective for catching fish, also catches seaweed and “unclean” fish. Therefore, the net needs to be cleaned and unacceptable fish removed.

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06.03.01.A. AN ILLUSTRATION OF NIGHT FISHING WITH A TRAMMEL NET. This illustration shows the trammel net being hung in the water in a circular manner. Then another net was thrown over the enclosed area to keep the fish from jumping out.

In summary, there are three important aspects to this miracle.

1. The trammel net is used only at night because it is ineffective during the day when a different type of net is used.

2. Most net fishing is done at night because during the daylight the fish can see the nets.

3. The fish were caught in a deep portion of the lake, which was distant from their normal habitat near the shoreline.

Jesus clearly demonstrated his authority over nature and creation; they recognized Him as having some unusual divine powers which caused Peter to immediately confess himself as a sinful man (v. 8). The irony is that Peter, while catching dozens of fish into his net, was himself caught in the net of Jesus. Peter’s view of Jesus was more than that of a teacher, as he called Him “Master,” In contrast to John, who called Him “Rabbi.” At a future time Peter received a second calling when a “ Stranger” along the shore told him to recast his net and that resulted in a catch of 153 fish.
06.03.01.B. AN ILLUSTRATION OF HOW FISH ARE CAUGHT IN A TRAMMEL NET. A trammel net is a three-layered net in which the fish become tangled and caught. Fishing was done close to the shore at night when the fish could not see the linen net. Today nylon nets are used for day fishing because the fish cannot see them.

“’Master,’ Simon replied.” Luke used the Greek word epistates, which means teacher, boss, or master. Simon Peter clearly recognized that he was speaking with someone who had unusual authority and power. In verse 5 Simon Peter called Him kyrios, meaning Lord.502

There is a second type of net that is occasionally used in the Sea of Galilee. When Matthew said, “They were casting a net into the sea,” he was referring to a cast-net that in Greek is amphiblestron.503 A cast-net is any net that is thrown around or over something to restrict its motion and was used for fishing as well as for wild game and even people in games or war.504 In Matthew it was the casting net (Gk. amphiblestron 293)505 that was laid over the shoulder of the fisherman, who then cast it carefully into the water from the shore or a boat.506 It was ideally

502. Bailey, Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes. 142.
used at night when the fish did not see the net coming all around them and they were trapped inside. The net was then pulled ashore and the fish were separated – the bad from the good. This parable teaches there will be a time when God will separate the bad from the good – it is the tenor of the Bible, along with the encouraging call to follow the ways of our Lord.

06.03.01.C. CASTING A STANDARD CASTING NET. Fishermen today still cast their nets as they did in the time of Jesus. Photograph by Jeane Conte.

If Jesus would have been a typical rabbi, He would have asked the disciples to learn the Torah, become competent of the Oral Law, master the hermeneutics of biblical interpretation, and memorize the traditions and quotations of previous important rabbis. But rather, Jesus simply said, “Follow Me.” They did and “immediately they left.” This phrase illustrates the commitment the disciples had because the fishing nets were expensive. But they would simply not leave anything of such value lying on the shore. In all probability, their father Zebedee took the nets and continued the fishing business. The miracle was to be seen later as the backdrop or metaphor of the time when they would become fishers of men.

Finally, it should be noted that Satan is also a fisherman (2 Tim. 2:26) and desires to catch men. He is the impersonator of Christ, luring as many as he can with his counterfeit deeds and message.

06.03.01.D. CLEANING FISHING NETS. Arab fishermen in the 1920s are shown cleaning their nets in the Sea of Galilee in a similar manner as was done in the first century. Cleaning involves the removal of unwanted fish and vegetation. Note the barren hillside in the background. Photograph by H.V. Horton.
06.03.01.E. AN OLD ILLUSTRATION OF FISHERMEN FISHING WITH A CAST-NET. This illustration taken from a Roman mosaic in north Africa depicts a fisherman with a cast-net wearing only a loin cloth, but in doing so, he was considered to be “nude.”

06.03.02 Mk. 1:21-22 (See also Lk. 4:31-32) Capernaum

**JESUS TEACHES AT CAPERNAUM, AN ECONOMIC CENTER**

21 Then they went into Capernaum, and right away He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began to teach. 22 They were astonished at His teaching because, unlike the scribes, He was teaching them as one having authority.

Capernaum was an economic center for trade and international commerce and a popular stopping point for caravans that traveled between Europe, Asia, and northern Africa. It was here where Jesus located the center of His ministry. When He spoke in the synagogue, “they were astonished at His teaching.” Not only would the community people have been there, but also the traveling Jewish merchants would have attended and heard Him speak. Evidently Jesus left quite an impression, because previously He had acquired five disciples before He performed any miracles.

As a child, Jesus attended the local synagogue school in Nazareth and had no further education. Since He was not a seminary graduate and not ordained as a rabbi, He was not permitted to introduce a new interpretation, but He gave new insights and explained the ideals of the Kingdom of God with compassion and love. Furthermore, He taught with authority. Rabbis frequently quoted famous rabbis in their sermons. Jesus, however, said, “I say…..” In essence, He said He was His own authority. Later this became more pronounced when He forgave sins, an act only God could do.
06.03.02.A. SYNAGOGUE AT CAPERNAUM. This late 3rd or early 4th century A.D. synagogue was made of white-colored limestone and constructed directly on top of the original synagogue in which Jesus preached. The massive columns and size of the sanctuary dwarf visitors. Photograph by the author.

At Capernaum traveling caravans loaded with goods, travelers, and religious pilgrims frequently stopped there for fresh supplies and salted fish. Local craftsmen carved millstones and grinding stones from local volcanic basalt rock and sold them to traveling merchants. The Roman command post was located there, near today’s Greek Orthodox Church as evidenced by the ruins of a Roman bathhouse. That is probably where a centurion and his soldiers insured that travelers paid their taxes to a tax collector named Matthew.

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06.03.02.B. RUINS OF THE ROMAN BATHHOUSE AT CAPERNAUM.

Grass and weeds bury the first century Roman bathhouse at Greek Orthodox Church in Capernaum. It is evidence of the presence of a Roman station that insured that travelers paid taxes to the agent of Rome – Matthew. Photograph by the author.

While Capernaum was known as a fishing village and a rest area for traveling caravans, there were probably several other industries located there as well. The surrounding farmland from Chorizim to Gadara was known for its excellent wheat that was used in the temple and was also sold to caravans for export. Archaeologists have unearthed glass vessels that suggest a glass making industry or glass merchant, as well as dozens of grinding stones and stone implements made of the locally-found basalt rock. These discoveries led them to conclude that the village had at least two thriving manufacturing industries.

509. Sources disagree on whether wheat from this area was used in the temple. While the quality was considered excellent, the Talmud (Men. 85a) states that distance made it prohibitive to ship it to Jerusalem. However, that may not have been the real reason because other sources state that no sacrifice could be taken across a defiled area such as Samaria in route to Jerusalem and, therefore, wheat from this area could not be used for the Omer sacrifice.

06.03.02.C. BASALT GRINDING STONES. Many volcanic basalt grinding stones have been uncovered in Capernaum, leading archaeologists to suspect there may have been a thriving stone industry in Capernaum at the time of Jesus. Photograph by the author.

06.03.02.V An unassigned scholar discusses the first century industries around the Sea of Galilee, the importance of the Via Maria, the local hot springs, and how these factors helped spread the gospel. Discussion may include Israel as a land bridge between the “two seas” that connect the three continents. ( ) Click here if Internet connection is available.

Code xyx
06.03.02.D. A CACHE OF GLASS VESSELS. Large quantities of glass vessels uncovered in Capernaum, like this one, have led some archaeologists to consider the possibility of a glass industry or glass merchant in the small village. Photograph by Stanislao Loffreda.

One of the fantastic treasures of Capernaum is the ruins of the house of Peter. The ruins of the village were first explored and identified by Edward Robinson. In the following years the Roman Catholic Franciscans protected the site from vandalism and began archaeological excavations. They uncovered a cache of glass vessels, basalt grinding stones of various sizes, and the home of St. Peter. Possibly most the interesting discovery is the collection of plaster pieces with various graffiti writings on them that identified the site as the former church that was built upon the ruins of St. Peter’s home.

The identity of where Peter and his family once lived has been preserved by an interesting event. Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, came to the Holy Land in the early fourth century. She honored the home of St. Peter by building a basilica over it that had three concentric octagons. Her purpose was to preserve the location of the holy site.

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512. Shepherd, “Rediscovering the Kathisma: Where Mary Rested.” 47.
DECORATED PLASTER PIECES FROM PETER’S HOME.

Decorated plaster of floral design (3rd – 5th century) and graffiti was found in the home / Church (or Basilica) of St. Peter. The graffiti, written in nine languages, suggest that pilgrims from many countries visited this location.

A Spanish nun, Egeria in the years 381-384 toured the Holy Land and visited the home of Peter. She noted that the Apostle’s home had been converted into a small church and made these comments:

The house of the prince of the apostles (St. Peter) in Capernaum was changed into a church; the walls, however, (of the house) are still standing as they were (in the past).

Pilgrim Egeria

513. It was not until excavations in 1968 that archaeologist discovered an apse and a baptistery, making it possible to identify this structure as a basilica. See http://theosophical.wordpress.com/2011/09/16/biblical-archaeology-38-peter%E2%80%99s-house-in-capernaum/

514. Loffreda, A Visit to Capharnaum. 32-33.

The foundations of Queen Helena’s basilica were also identified by an Italian pilgrim who came from the village of Piacenza in about the year 570. He stated that:

**We came to Capernaum in St. Peter’s house, which at present is a basilica.**

*Pilgrim of Piacenza, Itinerarium*^{517}

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**06.03.02.F. OCTAGONAL BYZANTINE FOUNDATIONS OVER PETER’S HOME.** The ruins of Capernaum as seen from the air looking toward the Sea of Galilee. The three concentric octagonal walls on the left are the remains of a Byzantine church that was built around Saint Peter’s house. Today a Catholic shrine is suspended over the site. To the right are the partially reconstructed walls of the late 3rd century (A.D.) synagogue that was built over the synagogue in which Jesus taught. Photograph by Wikipedia Commons.

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Jesus performed His first exorcism

MAN DELIVERED FROM A DEMON

23 Just then a man with an unclean spirit was in their synagogue. He cried out,
24 “What do You have to do with us, Jesus — Nazarene? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are — the Holy One of God!”

25 But Jesus rebuked him and said, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” 26 And the unclean spirit convulsed him, shouted with a loud voice, and came out of him.

27 Then they were all amazed, so they began to argue with one another, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” 28 News about Him then spread throughout the entire vicinity of Galilee.

The methods of casting out demons used by Jewish exorcists and healers were strongly opposed by Jesus. They used a wide variety of tactics that supposedly achieved success, including the use of animal organs, smoke, magical incantations, tricks, and the name of Solomon. This was in sharp contrast to Jesus who usually spoke the word and on rare occasion used mud and spit for a healing. Notice that the healing practices of the first century Jewish world were nearly identical to those practices that were commonly used by pagan healers. This reveals the magnitude to which Hellenism had penetrated into the core of Judaism. While it is believed by scholars that these practices were common knowledge, not all Jewish people accepted them; many preferring to call only upon the name of the Lord.

Then the young man questioned the angel and said to him, Brother Azariah, what medicinal value is there in the fish’s heart and liver, and in the gall?” He replied, “As for the fish’s heart and liver, you must burn them to make smoke in the presence of a man or woman afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, and every affliction will flee away and never remain with that person any longer.

Tobit 6:7-8

518. Ben Sirach and Tobit belong to a classification of extra-biblical books known as the Apocrypha. These two literary works reflect the opinions of many Jewish people. See 02.02.03 “Apocrypha” for more information. The reader is reminded that quotations from non-biblical sources are not to be understood as being of equal authority with the biblical narratives. See 01.02.04.
“Be quiet.” Literally to be muzzled or gagged. The demon could not speak even if he wanted to; Jesus politely but firmly commanded absolute and complete control. While Jewish exorcisms involved magical formulas, Jesus cast out demons simply with His word.

Ironically, the Jewish elite decided not to recognize Jesus for who He was, but the terrorized demons immediately recognized Him – the One who would deliver people from their strongholds and influence (Rev. 20:1-3). Unfortunately, English translations miss the sense of terror the demons expressed in this passage.

Here, for the first time, Jesus exercised His divine power over demonic spirits. Demons influence and sometimes control the thinking, speaking, feeling, and actions of their victims and, therefore, the demon’s desires are revealed. The approach Jesus used was uniquely different from others who practiced exorcisms. He always spoke to the demons but never touched the possessed persons. This is in sharp contrast to the many times he touched the sick, infirm, and even the dead.

In the process of casting out demons, Jewish and pagan exorcists followed prescribed formulas and repeatedly called upon the name of their god to cast out demons. Some rabbis believed that,

520. Tobit 5:7-8; Josephus, Antiquities 8.2.5 (45-49).
by their secret spells, they could command the services of spirits for good or evil.\textsuperscript{522} An example is the magical spell, repeated for emphasis, in the book of \textit{Tobit}. It reads,

\begin{quote}
As he went … he took the live ashes of incense and put the heart and liver of the fish upon them and made a smoke. And when the demon smelled the odor, he fled to the remotest parts of Egypt, and the angel bound him.
\end{quote}

\textit{Tobit 8:2-3}

It should be noted that in Greek thinking, demons were supernatural beings that could be either good or bad spirits,\textsuperscript{523} but biblical writers identified the spirits only as evil.

\textbf{06.03.04 Mk. 1:29-31; Lk. 4:39} (See also Mt. 8:14-15; Lk. 4:38-39) \textit{Capernaum}

\textbf{PETER’S MOTHER-IN-LAW HEALED}

Mt. \textsuperscript{29} As soon as they left the synagogue, they went into Simon and Andrew’s house with James and John. \textsuperscript{30} Simon’s mother-in-law was lying in bed with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. \textsuperscript{31} So He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up.

Lk. \textsuperscript{39} So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up immediately and began to serve them.

After the synagogue service, it was the custom for people to enjoy a meal with friends, so Jesus went to the home of Peter. It is said that Peter’s mother-in-law was ill, but it is unknown if she was sick in bed or if she became ill after the synagogue service. Either way, by the time Jesus arrived at Peter’s house she had “a fever.”

\textit{“Simon’s mother-in-law.”} Simon had no shortage of names, and is also known as “Peter,” “Simon ben Johan/bar Jonah,” “Simon Peter,” “Cephas,” and “Kepha.” As with all the disciples, little is known of their families. But concerning Peter, he was obviously marked and may have had a son (1 Pet. 5:13) and his wife eventually joined him on some missionary journeys (1 Cor. 9:5).

\textsuperscript{522} Geikie, \textit{The Life and Words of Christ} 1:367.

\textsuperscript{523} New International Version Study Bible footnote on Luke 4:33.
06.03.04.Q1 Why is the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law to be considered more than a healing miracle?

The significance lies in the term “a fever.” There were three kinds of fevers in the Galilee and surrounding areas, because Galilee was different than Perea and Judah. Those two areas were too dry to have mosquito-infested marshy areas. In Luke 4:38, the physician said the fever was great, suggesting its seriousness. Ancient physicians marked the difference between a light and great fever.

1. The Malta fever in which a person was weak, anemic, and wasted away.

2. Typhoid fever

3. Malaria, a disease

A short distance north of the Sea of Galilee is the Hula Lake, which was surrounded by a large marshy area. It was always a mosquito-infested swamp and travelers always risked getting Malta fever, malaria, or typhoid. All three of these diseases generally resulted in death. According to Alfred Edersheim, the Talmud identifies this disease as the eshatha tsemirta, meaning, “a burning fever,” which suggests that she had one of these terminal diseases.

Jewish writings reveal the extent to which pagan superstitions had infiltrated Judaism. It appears that some rabbis imitated Greek healing practices because basic elements were similar. For

524. Concerning medical procedures available in the first century Israel, a number of good resources have been published by the University of Haifa, Hebrew University, and the Israel Museum. For further study, see the articles published in Michmanim, (English and Hebrew), Haifa, Israel: University of Haifa (Vol. 13) May, 1999.


526. This disease is known by several names, including the Mediterranean fever. It is caused by a bacteria from infected milk or undercooked meat.

527. Also known as the plain of El Huleh, or the Sea of Merom,


529. Alfred Edersheim (18125-1889) was a Jewish scholar who converted to Christianity, and whose writings are considered by scholars as classic; Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. 336-37. He is clearly a rich source for the understanding of first century Jewish traditions. However, he has his bias in that he is anti-Pharisaic and anti-Rabbinic. Therefore, he has a tendency to be less than historically accurate on some issues.

530. The Greeks likewise had their own superstitious methods of exorcisms that included wild and frenzied dancing with singing and chanting. These components were not in Jewish exorcisms. For more information, see Ustinova, “Treating Madness with Madness: The Greek Corybantes.” 26.
example, the prescribed healing method for a fever recorded in the Talmud involved tying an iron knife to a thorn bush with the hair of the sick person attached. This was repeated several consecutive days, after which the bush was cut down while a magical formula was announced.\(^{531}\) Objects of iron, such as nails and knives, were in much demand and were said to hold magical powers to ward off evil.\(^{532}\)

Luke said that Jesus rebuked the fever. The healing was more than a miracle because Jesus not only healed Peter’s mother-in-law, but demonstrated power over the superstitions and ridiculous methods of the rabbis. The narrative reflects the same manner in which He rebuked demons, which implies the source of the fever.\(^{533}\) As mentioned previously, Jesus never touched anyone with demonic spirits, but He commanded them to leave as He did with the burning fever. This story is far more dynamic than the healing, which was a phenomenon in its own right.

The Jewish people had a number of incredible legends and superstitions they believed would either heal a person or cast out demons. One of them was recorded by Josephus.

\begin{displayquote}
In the Valley of Baaras there is a certain root called by the same name. Its color is like to that of flame, and towards evening it sends out a certain ray like lightning. It is not easily taken by such as would do so, but recedes from their hands, nor will it yield itself to be taken quietly until either the urine of a woman, or her menstrual blood, be poured upon it; no, even then it is certain death to those who touch it, unless anyone take and hang the root itself down from his hand, and so carry it away.

It may also be taken another way without danger, which is this: they dig a trench all around it, until the hidden part of the root be very small; they then tie a dog to it, and when the dog tries hard to follow him that tied him, the root is easily plucked up, but the dog dies immediately instead of the man who would take the plant away;
\end{displayquote}

\(^{531}\) Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. 336.


\(^{533}\) Read the discussion on healing and exorcisms written in Dead Sea Scroll fragment 4Q521 at the end of 08.05.04.
nor after this need anyone be afraid of taking it into their hands. Yet after all these pains in getting it, it is only valuable on account of one virtue which it possesses, that if it be brought to sick persons, it drives away those called demons.

Josephus, *Wars* 7.6.3 (180-185)

This interesting point of superstitious folklore is that they reveal that the Jewish people had more faith for healing in a variety of places, but not in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus was about to change their perception of Who does the healing.

“When began to serve them.” She functioned as the Greek *diaconate* or, as would be known after Pentecost, a *deaconess of the church*. 534

06.03.05 Mk. 1:32-34 (See also Mt. 8:16-17; Lk. 4:40-41) Capernaum

**MANY WERE HEALED**

32 When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all those who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. 33 The whole town was assembled at the door, and He healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons. But He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

“When evening came, after the sun had set.” The people who desired to be obedient to God’s commands naturally obeyed the teachings of their rabbis and did not want to break the Sabbath day regulations by requesting a healing. Therefore, they waited until the Sabbath was over; after the sun had set and at least three medium-sized stars were in the sky. 535 This was the “second


535. See discussion on “evening” in Appendix 16.
evening” of the day when they brought their sick and demon-possessed to Jesus to be healed and delivered. Why three stars? Because two or three witnesses were needed to render a judgment and three stars in the sky determined when a day began or ended (Deut. 17:6).

“**The whole town was assembled at the door.**” The popularity of Jesus continued to grow exponentially. The Jordan Valley had a healing reputation as foreigners came to sit in the natural hot springs as found in Tiberias. Now Jesus, who functioned with the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was healing men, women, and children including those who failed to get healed in the natural hot springs. But with popularity came a serious set of problems:

1. Jesus was always surrounded by people. He had no opportunity to be alone by Himself, alone with His disciples, or alone to pray. Whenever He woke up in the middle of the night and went to a mountain to pray, His disciples hunted for Him as soon as they woke up. Popularity was taxing His physical, spiritual, and emotional strength as well as time. On a side note, it is amazing that often Jesus went alone to pray for extended periods of time (i.e., all night), yet all the prayers recorded in the gospels are relatively short.

2. People were more anxious to be healed or to get a free meal than to hear His message. They failed to understand that His miracles underscored His Person and message.

3. There was a growing belief that He was the messiah – one who would overthrow the Roman oppressors. In fact, later some even wanted to make Him their king (Jn. 6:15). Their idea of a kingdom was a resurrection of the once mighty Davidic Empire of a thousand years earlier. He was constantly challenged with replacing their preconceived ideas of a political-messiah with His idea of the Kingdom of God. But their idea of a messiah would change dramatically after His resurrection.

“**Various diseases…demons.**” Demons are synonymous with unclean spirits, who are connected with Satan, and in total opposition to the work of God, and as such, promote all forms of idolatry. They oppose the faith of believers and attempt to influence and disturb

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536. See Appendix 16 for clarification on the two daily evenings.


538. Mk. 5:12, 15; 3:22, 30; Lk. 4:33.


540. 1 Cor. 10:20-21.

the physical, mental and emotional well-being of people. However, while certain ailments may be connected with demonic powers, the laws of Moses that pertain to sanitation clearly indicate that good health is also a matter of cleanliness – meaning that many diseases are not related to demonic influences but can be prevented.

06.03.06 Mk. 1:35-38 (See also Lk. 4:42-43)

JESUS GOES OUT TO PRAY

35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place. And He was praying there. 36 Simon and his companions went searching for Him. 37 They found Him and said, “Everyone’s looking for You!”

38 And He said to them, “Let’s go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come.”

“To a deserted place.” Some translations use the word “desert,” rather than a solitary and quiet or deserted area. However, there was no desert near the Sea of Galilee (cf. Mk. 1:35; Lk. 4:42), but rather, it is a lush, green, productive farmland with quite peaceful areas on the hill and mountain tops where few, if anyone, lived – deserted places. The gospel writer is saying that Jesus had to retreat to a quiet area and spend hours in prayer. His humanity is revealed in that ministry exhausted Him physically and emotionally.

“He was praying there.” Jesus was often in prayer. It was His source of strength, especially when He knew difficulties lay immediately ahead. In his busiest period, when He was so often exhausted from the labors of the day, He retreated to a secluded place away from the crowds and disciples to pray with His Father. He never took any important step without such a night. It is amazing that Jesus spent many long hours in prayer, yet only His short prayers have been recorded.

06.03.07 Mt. 4:23-25 (See also Mk. 1:39; Lk. 4:44) Regions of Galilee

JESUS TRAVELS ABOUT

542. 1 Tim. 4:1.

543. Lk. 13:11, 16; Mk. 5:2-5; 7:25; Mt. 12:45.

544. For example, the King James Version.
Jesus was going all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Then the news about Him spread throughout Syria. So they brought to Him all those who were afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pains, the demon-possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. And He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, Jerusalem, Perea, and even into Gentile areas preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God and healing people of every sickness and disease. When He healed, He revealed Himself to be one of the names of God they had used – Jehovah Rapha – our Lord who is our Healer. Now they witnessed Jesus perform miracles they believed only God could do.

“Epileptics.” The Greek word for epileptic is seleniazó (4583), and refers to someone who was moon-struck. It was believed that this disease was caused by or influenced by the moon.

“Decapolis” The term means “ten cities.” This was a loose confederation of ten Greek cities on the eastern side of the Jordan River with the exception of Scythopolis (also known as Beth Shean) which was west of the river. More specifically, it was a term applied to ten administrative districts as the number of cities varied from time to time.

06.03.08 Mk. 1:40-45 (See also Mt. 8:1-4; Lk. 5:12-16) Galilee area.

THE LEPER IS HEALED – A MESSIANIC MIRACLE

40 Then a man with a serious skin disease came to Him and, on his knees, begged Him: “If You are willing, You can make me clean.”

41 Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. “I am willing,” He told him. “Be made clean.” Immediately the disease left him, and he was healed. Then He sternly warned him and sent him away at once, telling him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and

545. See “Jesus, the Fulfiller of Selected Names of God” in Appendix 32 for additional attributes.


offer what Moses prescribed for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” Yet he went out and began to proclaim it widely and to spread the news, with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But He was out in deserted places, and they would come to Him from everywhere.

To understand the depth of meaning of this passage, some cultural background must be discussed first. That perspective then highlights both the miracle and monumental announcement. The severity of leprosy, known as tsaraath in Hebrew, in the biblical period seems to have a range of opinions among scholars. Some have said that it was merely a skin disease while others have given it horrific descriptions. The fact is that both are correct and need to be discussed.

The leprosy described in Leviticus 13:4 and 13, appears to be a form of psoriasis that covers the skin with white scales. In verse 30 the symptom of skin itch is associated with it. Those who have said that leprosy was merely one of several minor skin diseases (according to modern medical standards) generally refer to this condition. However, later in Leviticus a different and deadly form of leprosy is described, in fact, there are three kinds of leprosy which are only briefly described below in modern medical terms.

1. *Nodular* or *tubercular leprosy* begins as joint pains which are followed by discolored patches on the back. On those skin areas small pink nodules form which then turn brown or black. The patches spread and eventually the face becomes disfigured. The nodules enlarge and emit a foul odor and the body becomes increasingly crippled. After about nine years of decline, life ends with mental decay, a coma and death.

2. *Anaesthetic leprosy* is similar to the *nodular leprosy* in its early stages but all sensation is lost in the infected area. The sufferer may not realize that he has contracted the disease until an injury occurs of which he has no pain. In the course of the disease, muscles waste away and fingers and toes become grossly distorted and eventually a foot or hand may literally fall off. The disease may take up to three decades until death comes.

3. The third kind is a combination of *nodular* and *anaesthetic leprosy*. This may have been the most common form of the dreaded disease. In its worst form, the leper had to live outside the community (Lev. 13:45) in both Israel and Gentile regions. But in Jewish communities some lepers could attend the synagogue although they had to be seated in a secluded area. But they were not permitted to enter homes or a walled city. The Romans, on the other hand, had their famous leper colonies where the “living dead” eventually died with no care for their spiritual life. 549

549. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 64-67.
However, the ancients described the three kinds of leprosy in simpler forms:\footnote{550} 

1. Black
2. Clear white
3. Dull white

The physician said in Luke 5:38 that the man was \textit{full of disease}; the word \textit{full} being used in other phrases such as veins being \textit{full of blood} or the ears \textit{full of noise}. Those with this condition were known as the “living dead.”\footnote{551} What Luke identified as \textit{full of (leprosy) disease} is today commonly referred to as Hansen’s Disease.

The mystery of leprosy is why Moses dedicated two entire chapters – Leviticus 13 and 14 to the subject as well as the declaration of cleansing, when no Jewish person was ever healed of the disease. As will be shown below, people would ask their rabbi this question and his response would be that he did not know, but when the messiah comes, he will know and will heal lepers.\footnote{552} In the meantime, there were only two healings of lepers recorded in the Old Testament.

1. Miriam received her healing before Moses wrote the Torah\footnote{553} and
2. The Syrian military commander, Naaman, was not even a Jew but was healed by the Jewish prophet Elijah (2 Kg. 5:1).

Since Miriam received her leprosy as a result of a sin, it was believed that anyone with the disease received it for the same reason. Since no one was ever healed of leprosy, by the first century it was believed that the disease was a visible sign of inner corruption that resulted from a judgment of God. It was also believed that only the Messiah would be able to heal anyone afflicted with the deadly disease – a Messianic Miracle\footnote{554} or Messianic Sign.\footnote{555} Therefore, when


\footnote{551}{https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#inbox/136f8c38200c05dd Retrieved April 28, 2012.}

\footnote{552}{This is an argument from silence and, therefore, weak. However, the fact remains that there is not a single healing of leprosy recorded among the Jewish people prior to the advent of Jesus.}

\footnote{553}{Some scholars argue that Miriam was the only one healed of leprosy, since the Israelites left Sinai in Numbers 10:12 and Miriam was healed at Hazeroth in Numbers 12.}

\footnote{554}{Research on the “Messianic Miracles” is credited to Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Messianic scholar and director of Ariel Ministries of San Antonio, Texas. For more information on his excellent scholarship, see http://ariel.org/. Retrieved September 26, 2013. See the related video 06.03.08.V below. See also Fruchtenbaum, \textit{Messianic Miracles}. 4.}
Jesus healed the man and told him to be examined by the priests, it caused an immediate sensation throughout all religious circles. To the leaders of all religious sects, the healing of a leper revealed that the Messiah had come.

However, there are two cases where persons with leprosy are reported to have performed normal daily tasks, in spite of the disease. Notice the following:

1. Naaman commanded the Syrian army (2 Kg. 5:1). While he was healed by the prophet Elijah, the fact remains that he functioned as a commander and was not isolated from other people.

2. Gehazi, with his leprosy that never should be cleansed (2 Kg. 5:27) talked with the king of apostate Israel (2 Kg. 8:4-5). A leper who has been healed is often not called “healed,” but “cleansed” because the disease has always been symbolic of sin.

Both lepers appear to have been healed while the disease was in the early stages. The most common opinion is that lepers were not permitted to enter towns or be in the company of other people; that theirs was a life of misery and loneliness. Just as the Jews had severe restrictions on the social functions and movements of anyone with the dreaded disease, so did the people of other cultures.

However, depending on the severity of the disease, some lepers were permitted to live in communities and attend the synagogue services. When in public, they had to hide their faces and cry out “unclean, unclean” whenever approaching anyone (Lev. 13:45). Severe cases were so fatal, that many people counted them as dead. For those lepers who were somewhat more fortunate, Jewish leaders even constructed a small chamber, called a Mechitsah, within the synagogue about six or eight feet wide, so they could be part of the service yet remain separated from the crowd.


556. There were four kinds of people that were considered as good as dead, and it was believed that in all four situations their situation was a divine judgment. They were the blind, the leper, the poor, and the childless.

In other cases, the leper was considered to be as one who had died, and as such was shut out of the community. This law was so strictly enforced that even Miriam, the sister of Moses, was not exempted from it (Num. 12:12-14) nor was King Uzziah. It was believed that lepers, along with others who were seriously ill, had their disease because of sin in their lives or in that of their parents. This opinion is found in the writings of a Persian historian about 484 B.C.

The citizen who has leprosy or the “white sickness” may not come into a town or consort with other Persians. They say that he was so afflicted because he has sinned in some way against the sun (god).

Herodotus, The Histories 1.138

06.03.08.Q1 What is the difference between a leper being cleansed and being healed.

Leprosy was and still is a strange disease. It is the name of a broad range of abnormalities from skin afflictions to the rotting of the body while the victim is still alive. According to one Hebraic scholar, when a leper was purified, he was not healed of his disease, but the poison of the disease was removed and he was no longer contagious to other people. The leper was then restored to the congregation. An example is such a cleansed person was Gehazi, the servant of Elisha who was a life-long leper but still a servant to the king (2 Kgs. 8:5).

558. Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2-4; 2 Kg. 7:3.
559. 2 Ch. 26:21; 2 Kg. 15:5.
560. The Persians, like the Egyptians, worshiped the sun god.
06.03.08.A. EGERTON PAPYRUS 2 FRAGMENTS. Fragments of the Egerton Papyrus 2, dated to no later than A.D. 150, are probably from a non-canonical gospel and contain portions of Matthew 8:2-3, Mark 1:40-42 and Luke 5:12-13. It is evidence of the early recorded events of the life of Jesus. It is considered to be neither heretical nor Gnostic, and is probably the oldest non-canonical text yet discovered. Photograph courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

06.03.08.Q2 Why did Jesus heal the man, but not declare forgiveness of his sins?

This is a classic example where understanding rabbinic writings and the Jewish culture resolves misunderstandings. Long-term diseases such as leprosy, as well as childlessness, were considered to be divine punishment; and victims and childless couples lived their entire lives with hopelessness, believing God had condemned them. Consequently, they usually received little or no pity or comfort from the religious establishment. When a person with severe leprosy brought his offering to the synagogue or temple, he was not permitted to enter it, but someone had to present his gift for him, which, according to the Oral Law, was a sin offering. Therefore, when Jesus healed the man of his leprosy, everyone realized that his sins must have been forgiven. Jesus did not have to declare, “Your sins are forgiven.” It was understood. This understanding was part of the cultural context in which Jesus ministered. An example has been preserved in the Talmud.

562. Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 5b.

563. Mishnah, Tohoroth 14:11.

564. Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. 341.
Rabbi Alexandri said in the name of Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba: “A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him, as it is written, ‘Who forgives all your iniquities; who heals all your diseases’” (Ps. 103:3).

Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 41a

The relationship between illness and the forgiveness of sins was evidently a firm belief among pagan people as well. In the second century B.C., King Nabunai of Babylon found himself with an ulcer and he asked a Jew named Nabonidus to pray for his healing. These words of the king after the prayer of healing were found on an ancient papyrus, and are, in part, as follows:

I was afflicted with an evil ulcer for seven years...and an exorcist pardoned my sins. He was a Jew from among the [children of the exile of Judah, and he said], “Recount this in writing to [glorify and exalt] the name of the Most High God.”

Dead Sea Scroll, *The Prayer of Nabonidus* 4QPrNab

Healing was associated with the forgiveness of sins. The actions of Jesus were clearly understood by all observers, and by those who heard of these miraculous accounts. To those lepers known as the “living dead,” and to the witnesses who saw these lepers being healed, Jesus demonstrated that He had power over sickness and death. So when Jesus “touched him,” that was a phenomenal event because touching a leper was a violation of the Law. It made a person who touched the leper unclean and required him to undergo ceremonial cleansing. Jesus knew the Law, yet He touched and healed him and obviously ignored the ceremonial cleansing. This is more significant in the Greek language of Luke, who said the man was full of leprosy, meaning that he was near the end of his life. There was no question of his illness and, there was no question that if there ever was a time not to touch a leper, this was it! Hence, this act was also a profound illustration that the spirit of the law was better than sacrifice. In touching the untouchable, Jesus taught His disciples a lesson of boldness, faith, and humility; and that they were to despise no one, but show compassion and bring healing to everyone.

Jesus performed one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history, and when the disciples and everyone else was ready to advertise it to the world, He said, “Say nothing to anyone.” He did not want the sensation; His primary challenge was to convince the Jews that He was their Messiah, and that He was radically different from their pre-conceived ideas of a messiah (small “m”). Possible reasons for instructing the healed person to keep silent are as follows.

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1. To make a public announcement would probably have resulted in a rejection by the Jews, and had political overtones that He avoided. He was not about to be anyone’s political-messiah.  

2. Neither did Jesus want to be known as a mystic or miracle worker, as was Honi in the previous century. Jesus was far more interested in preaching the Kingdom of God than doing miracles, although His miracles, combined with His teachings, pointed to His Messiahship and the Kingdom message.

3. The Jewish leaders had their own mystical formulas for healing various kinds of ailments. Jesus was not interested in getting involved in a discussion of healing methodologies, but only on proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

4. Possibly the most important reason is that Jesus directed the former leper to follow biblical protocol. He did not want him to tell anyone until he first went to present himself to the priest (see below), that the priest might ascertain if indeed the leprosy was indeed cleansed according to the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:3). His testimony in the temple would then be visible proof to the religious leaders that a Messianic Miracle or Sign had been performed, and that the Messiah had arrived.

“Show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses prescribed for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” This command to the healed leper was significant for four reasons.

1. Jesus obeyed the Old Testament laws because He lived to fulfill the Old Testament covenant. This covenant required the former leper to present himself to the priest to be officially pronounced healed. In essence, he was to follow the rules set forth by Moses.


567. A leper who has been healed was often not called “healed,” but “cleansed” because the disease was symbolic of sin.

2. By being obedient to this Mosaic Law, the priests could not ignore what Jesus was doing in the countryside. The priests and Sanhedrin could not ignore this healing because, as priests, they were required to investigate the claim and make a final declaration that the man was no longer a leper. It forced them to admit that Jesus had some type of divine strength and authority, a thought that was increasingly difficult for them to deny.

3. The healed leper had to have incredible faith in his healing, because, if he entered the temple with the disease, he would have received the severe punishment of “forty lashes minus one.”

4. The purpose of the “testimony to them” was not only to demonstrate to the religious leaders that Jesus obeyed the Hebrew laws, but that He was also the One who could perform the expected “messianic miracles.” The term “testimony to them” had legal implications concerning the truthfulness of the event.

Victims of the disease were social outcasts of the worst kind, usually suffering from condemnation and, unless family helped them, starvation. The healing not only saved the life of the leper but also restored his family’s reputation. In the meantime, the good news of Jesus healing the sick was exploding.

After the healed lepers were verified by the temple priests to be “clean” (meaning healed), the Sadducees realized they had to take Jesus seriously. The cleansing of this leper came by the spoken word of Jesus. The religious leaders, however, also had their so-called cleansing method,

569. Babylonian Talmud, Seder Mo’ed Pesahim 67a-b.

570. For further study, see messianic scholar Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Messianic Miracles. Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1983.

571. When the New Testament writers used terms such as “testimony” or “bore witness” or “I have seen and testify,” these are statements of legal terminology. These statements were common in Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures whereby the author placed himself under an oath concerning the truthfulness of the statement made. Bookman, When God Wore Sandals. CD Trac 5.

which at best is interesting and was hardly effective. The Mishnah has preserved their unusual healing formula, which appears to have some influences from neighboring cultures:

How did they cleanse the leper? He brought a new earthenware flask and put therein a quarter-log of living water; and he brought two birds that had lived in freedom. The priest slaughtered one of them over the earthenware vessel and over the living water, and dug a hole and buried it in his presence. He took cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet wool and bound them together with the ends of the strip (of wool); and brought near to them the tips of the wings and the tip of the tail of the second bird; and dipped them (in the blood of the slaughtered bird) and sprinkled (the blood) seven times on the back of the leper’s back; and some say, also on his forehead. So likewise they used to sprinkle the lintel of the house from the outside. He then came to set free the living bird.

Mishnah, Tohoroth 14:1

The healing performed by Jesus not only demonstrated His divinity over diseases, but also demonstrated that His power was far superior to the Jewish superstition of birds, hyssop, scarlet wool and whatever else they deemed necessary to heal a person. The healing by Jesus struck a powerful blow to their healing theology. Most certainly, they had to question how a man (Jesus) could have more power than their cultic ritual. Ancient people did not realize that diseases and illnesses generally occur because we live in a fallen world. Jesus, by healing the leper, demonstrated under no uncertain terms, that He was the Messiah. When the lepers went to the priests to have their cleansing (or healing) verified, the priest became painfully aware that the Messiah had arrived. When they heard that the miracle-worker was Jesus, the older priests may have remembered the twelve year old boy who once came to the temple and stunned them with questions.

“Jesus could no longer enter a town openly.” This does not mean that His divine power was limited, but difficulties stood in the way, especially since His popularity was growing exponentially. Some scholars have suggested that He may even have been excommunicated

573. Parenthesis by Danby, ed., Mishnah; See also Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 5b.
from some local synagogues, since He could no longer teach in them. If that is true, then the leaders of those synagogues probably forbade Jesus to enter due to pressure from the leading Pharisees in Jerusalem.

**06.03.08.Q3 What were the three “messianic miracles” that first century Jews believed the messiah would perform?**

The rabbis were convinced that the messiah would perform three kinds of miracles that would confirm His messiahship. Those anticipated “messianic miracles” were:

1. Healing a Jewish leper. Moses dedicated two chapters in Leviticus (13, 14) to the healing of a leper, but since then, not a single Jewish person had ever been healed of this dreaded disease. As a result, the rabbis said that when the messiah comes, he will heal them. Moses said that when a Jewish person with leprosy was healed, he or she is required to go immediately to the temple priests to be declared “clean.” In this case, the Jewish high priest was Caiaphas but the name of the Samaritan high priest is unknown. Regardless, the ten miracles, a perfect number as related to the Ten Commandments, made a profound impact on the people and religious leaders.

2. The casting out of demons from someone who could not speak. Some translations refer to a mute person (Gk. *alalos* 216 or *aphonos* 880) while the King James Version uses the old English word “dumb.” There was a 3-step protocol as follows:
   
   a. Ask the demon for his name, as it would speak through the possessed person.
   
   b. Wait for the demon to give its name. If no response, command an answer.
   
   c. Command the demon by name to leave by using the name of a more powerful authority (i.e. god).
   
   However, if the possessed person could not speak or hear, there was no way anyone could cast out the evil spirit. Therefore, it was concluded that only the messiah would be

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574. Kindly note, as previously stated, that the lower case “m” is sometimes used for “messiah” because the Jews did not believe the messiah would be divine. See also Alan Richardson, “Heal, Healing, Health.” 103-04.


able to cast demons out of a “deaf and dumb” person, meaning a person who could not speak or hear. This was significant because in various Inter-Testamental Jewish writings, the advent of the Messiah meant that evil would be defeated. See 08.06.08.

3. Healing a person who was born blind. It was for this reason that Mary said, after Lazarus died, “ Couldn’t He who opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept this man from dying?” That was not just a passing statement, but a reflection on the messianic miracles that Jesus performed. See 11.02.21.

Amazingly, the Essenes believed in a fourth messianic miracle: to raise the dead to life. Of the thousands of Dead Sea Scroll fragments is the famous Messianic Apocalypse (4Q521) that states the messiah will raise the dead to life.

Jesus healed many in order to reveal His power and authority over demons and illnesses. As was previously stated, while Jewish exorcisms involved magical formulas, Jesus cast out demons simply with His word. But as was repeatedly demonstrated, the performance of the messianic miracles also revealed the spiritual blindness of so many. Throughout Scripture sin is often described as moral blindness and the deliverance from sin is described as a removal of this blindness. To say that Jesus is the proverbial “light of the world” has more to do with spiritual blindness than it does with physical blindness, although He brings sight to the physical and spiritual realms.

578. 1 Enoch 55:4; Jubilees 23:29; Testament of Simeon 6:6; Testament of Judah 25:3; Testament of Moses 10:1; and the Testament of Solomon 20:16-17. See also Matthew 9:32-34; 08.06.08.

579. Fruchtenbaum, *The Jewish Foundation of the Life of Messiah: Instructor's Manual*. Class 7, page 13, and Class 10, pages 9-11; Research on the “Messianic Miracles” is credited to Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, a Messianic scholar and director of Ariel Ministries of San Antonio, Texas. For more information on his excellent scholarship, see http://ariel.org/. Retrieved September 26, 2013. See also 06.03.08.V (Video), 06.01.03 as well as the comparison of Dead Sea Scroll fragments 4Q278 and 4Q521 with Luke 4:16-30 at 06.02.02; Fruchtenbaum, *Messianic Miracles*. 4; Fischer, *The Gospels in Their Jewish Context*. (Lecture on CD/MP3). Week 10, Session 2.

580. See John 9:1-12; 11.02.21 and John 11:1-37 at 12.03.10.

581. For more information, see 08.05.04.Q1 “What is the miracle or mystery of Dead Sea Scroll 4Q521?”

582. Tobit 5:7-8; Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.2.5 (45-49).


584. Isa. 16:18; 43:8; Eph. 1:8; Mt. 15:14.

585. See comments by Rabbi John Fischer in 10.01.28.V where he discusses two unique healing methods of blind men.
Since many rabbis had taught for centuries that the messiah would perform these messianic miracles; Jesus did not have to say, “I am the Messiah.” He demonstrated His Messiahship! To make a messianic declaration would have invited a catastrophic Roman response. Rather, He permitted the people to reach that conclusion by themselves. Not only was Jesus One of gentle authority, but when He healed, the audience reflected upon one of the names of God – *Jehovah Rapha* – our Lord who is our Healer.

**06.03.08.Q4 How did the *Psalms of Solomon* influence people?**

The *Psalms of Solomon* was one of the most influential books that persuaded popular opinion in the first century. This scroll was written by a Pharisee after the Roman invasion in 63 B.C., most likely between the years 40 and 30 B.C. Its significance lies in the sections that are reflective of messianic anticipations. Yet the subject of a person coming with a messianic title or being identified as the Messiah/Christ or Anointed One/Son of David/Redeemer, was considerably complex because various religious sects had numerous, and sometimes, conflicting opinions. The Pharisees and many orthodox Jews believed that Divine punishment was upon them (as demonstrated by Roman occupation) because of their sins (their acceptance of Greek culture). The *Psalms* promised them victory and restoration over the occupying enemy. It is a literary style typical of some Old Testament books.

A copy of this book was most certainly in the hands of the Romans, as they paid Jewish spies handsomely for any information that might lead to a revolt. It was especially troublesome

586. See “Jesus, the Fulfiler of Selected Names of God” in Appendix 32 for additional attributes.

587. The book supposedly reflects the wisdom of Solomon, although the authorship is not identified. Therefore, it is in a category of Jewish writings known as the Pseudepigrapha. See 02.02.24 for more details.

588. Some ancient writers use the term “Judea” in the broadest sense. Examples are found in Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 5.15.70; Strabo, *Geographia*, 16.4.21; and Dio Sessius, *Roman History*, 37.15.2.

because it identified and cursed them as being the “Gentile foreigners” (2:2), the “lawless one” (17:11) and it encouraged Jews to pray to God to bring forth a “Son of David” (17:21) to rule over Israel. Therefore, the Romans associated anyone with any of these titles as being worthy of immediate death, especially since there were some thirteen rebellions against them between the years 63 B.C. and A.D. 70. In light of the political-social tensions, the following passages clarify why Jesus often told the people He healed to be quiet and not tell others of the miracle they received:

**Psalms of Solomon 2:2-3, 11**

Gentile foreigners went up to your place of sacrifice;  
they arrogantly trampled (it) with their sandals.  
Because the sons of Jerusalem defiled the sanctuary of the Lord,  
they were profaning the offerings of God with lawless acts...  
The daughters of Jerusalem were available to all, according to your judgments,  
because they defiled themselves with improper intercourse.

**Psalms of Solomon 17:11, 21-25**

The lawless one laid waste our land, so that no one inhabited it;  
they massacred young and old and children at the same time...  
See, Lord, and raise up for them their king,  
the Son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in  
a time known to you, O God.  
Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers;  
to purge Jerusalem from Gentiles who trample her to destruction;  
In wisdom and in righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance.  
To smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter’s jar;  
To shatter all their substance with an iron rod;  
to destroy the unlawful nation with the word of his mouth  
At his warning the nations will flee from his presence;  
and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts.

The writer continues…

590. See Appendix 25 for a listing of 1) false prophets who had messianic expectations and 2) a partial listing of revolts and social disturbances from 63 B.C. to A.D. 70.


And he will have Gentile nations serving him under his yoke, 
and he will glorify the Lord in (a place) prominent (above) the whole earth. 
And he will purge Jerusalem 
(and make it) holy as it was even from the beginning, 
(For) nations to come from the ends of the earth to see his glory (Isa. 55:5), 
to bring as gifts her children who had been driven out, 
And to see the glory of the Lord 
with which God has glorified her. 
And he will be a righteous king over them, taught by God. 

There will be no unrighteousness among them in his days, 
for all shall be holy (Jer. 23:5), 
and the king shall be the Lord Messiah.

Psalms of Solomon 17:26-32

Some historians believe the Psalms were used in liturgy since the messianic feelings are so intense, especially since the book contains eighteen psalms that are reflective of the Eighteen Benedictions. It clearly elevated feelings of national independence. Due to its popularity it is understandable that the common people and the Pharisees asked each other, “Have the [Jewish] authorities concluded that he is the Christ?” (Jn. 7:26). It is also understandable why Jesus rebuked them for shouting “You are the son of God” (Lk. 4:41). In the Passion Week, the Jewish leaders were in terror when Jesus rode into Jerusalem and they heard the crowds shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Mt. 21:9) and “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord” (Lk. 19:38; Jn 12:13). John adds the phrase “Blessed is the King of Israel” (Jn. 12:13). These terms as well as the phrase “hosanna,” had clear messianic nationalistic overtones. 

593. Charlesworth, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. 2:667-68. Additions for clarification within parenthesis by Charlesworth. The phrase “Lord Messiah,” is regarded by some scholars as a mistranslation from Lam. 4:20 (LXX). However, Charlesworth states that there is evidence in Greek and Syrian MSS for the rendering as shown.


595. See Appendix 18.

596. The messianic title “Son of David” appears in the following three groups of passages in the gospels where it is always reflective of the Davidic Covenant: 1) In various healings by Jesus – Mt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; Mk. 10:47-48; Lk. 18:38-39. 2) In connection of the harassment the religious leaders gave Jesus – Mt. 22:42-43, 45; Mk. 12:35, 37; Lk. 20:41, 44, and 3) The praise the crowds gave Jesus at His entry into Jerusalem – Mt. 21:9, 15; Mk. 11:10. See Rogers, “The Davidic Covenant in the Gospels,” Bibliotheca Sacra. Part 1 of 2. 158-78.
The Jewish people were not alone in their messianic anticipation. As previously stated, many people groups throughout the ancient Middle East were expecting a political-military leader. The Samaritans were expecting a messiah (Jn. 4) known as the Taheb, as were the Parthians (see the account of the magi; 04.04.06-07). The Essenes, descendants of the Zadokite priesthood, could not distinguish the differences between the Hebrew prophecies of the humble servant messiah and the one who would be a military leader (02.01.06). Hence, they concluded there were two messiahs coming – one who would be the son of David and would overthrow the Roman Empire and the other who would be the son of Aaron and would cleanse the temple of its corrupted religious aristocrats (see 02.01.06). The only people who did not want a messiah were the temple elite and Romans, who every few years were tormented by a Jewish fanatic who thought he was the messiah.

But no one in their wildest imagination ever dreamed the messiah who would be like Jesus. Therefore, Jesus needed time to reveal His identity, teach the people about the Kingdom of God, and slowly instruct them so their preconceived ideas would change. They needed time to think through the miracles they witnessed. That is why He told them not to tell others what they saw, which suggested they needed to think about what they witnessed.

The Roman Empire at this time enjoyed Pax Romana even though it was at the end of the Roman sword. However, in the little Jewish provinces, there was constant threat of rebellion for freedom, especially in Jerusalem. Many had their hopes escalated when they saw Jesus performing miracles, believing that anyone who could do such wonderful acts of kindness could also bring freedom to their nation. However, the Hellenists, leading Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, some scribes and elders, felt threatened by the Miracle Worker and desired to maintain a friendship with the Romans as not to lose the wealth and power.

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597. Blizzard, “Judaism - Part 1” Yavo Digest 1:5, 8; Guignebert, The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus. 196; See 06.01.03.

598. Possibly the most famous messianic fanatic was Simon bar Kochba who was responsible for the uprising of A.D.133-35, which lead to the second Roman destruction of Jerusalem and dispersion of all Jews from Jerusalem. However, there has always been a Jewish presence somewhere in the Holy Land from the time of Joshua until today.


600. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 423.

601. The provinces of Perea, Galilee, and Judah each had their own Roman appointee, who served as a puppet monarch under Rome.
Lk. 5:17; Mk. 2:2-4a; Lk. 5:19-20 (See also Mt. 9:1-2) Capernaum

THE PARALYTIC IS HEALED

Lk. 17 On one of those days while He was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord’s power to heal was in Him.

Mk. 2 So many people gathered together that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and He was speaking the message to them. 3 Then they came to Him bringing a paralytic, carried by four men, 4a since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd.

Lk. 19 Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the mat through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus. 20 Seeing their faith He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

An overlooked issue of this passage is related to the design and construction of a first century home. The typical home was so small that it would have been ridiculous to dig a hole through the roof for the purpose of lowering a paralyzed man. The average room was only about 150 to 200 square feet. Therefore, there is an excellent probability that this miracle occurred in the larger home of a wealthy family, who, surprisingly, may not have objected to the damage being done to their expensive roof. This opinion of wealth is implied by Luke’s report of the tile roofing material, as this construction method had only recently been introduced to this area by the Romans in 63 B.C. (see “through the roof tiles” below) and was rather expensive.
06.03.09.A. TYPICAL OUTSIDE STEPS TO THE ROOF. Steps to the roof or second floor were generally placed along the outside wall of the house. Roofs were nearly flat and collected water for cisterns during the rainy season so the family could have drinking water during the long, hot, dry summer. Roofs were also used as a sleeping area during hot summer nights. This 16th century house in Jaffa is built upon the traditional site of the home of Simon the Tanner (Acts 10:32). Photograph by the author.

“Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem.” By this time Jesus definitely had the attention of everyone, especially the Sanhedrin.602 Every religious leader who had any influence in a local

602. When the gospel writers used terms such as “Jews from Jerusalem,” or “Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem,” or similar statements ending with “from Jerusalem,” these persons were generally representatives of the Sanhedrin who came to listen, observe, and eventually challenged both John the Baptist and Jesus. Bookman, When God Wore Sandals. CD Trac 5.
synagogue came to hear Him. But according to Jewish protocol, the Sadducees and aristocratic upper echelon of the Pharisees of Jerusalem did not come. Rather, they sent their emissaries to observe Jesus. Sending an emissary was the same as personally coming. Later however, they themselves came.

It was well known that Jesus was an outstanding Torah teacher. He was not only popular with His clear message and pleasant personality, but He also presented new interpretations or *posek halakhah* (legal judgments). But since He was *not* an academically trained rabbi, according to rabbinic rules, He had no authority to present new ideas or interpretations. Hence, they watched His every move.

The healing of the leper had definitely caught everyone’s attention. Jewish leaders for centuries classified this miracle as one to be attributed to the messiah. Furthermore, they believed the One who could heal could also forgive sins. But that “One” was none other than Jesus who was problematic for them. Hence, when Jesus healed and forgave sins, He was declaring that He was God. That horrified them!

**“Through the roof tiles.”** Roofs of peasant homes were generally constructed by one of two methods.

1. Branches were laid from the top of one wall to another, then covered with palm branches, then covered with mud, and compacted with a roller. The compacted mud was then plastered to make it water resistant.

2. Large stones were placed on the tops of walls forming an arch which were covered with mud, compacted with a roller and plastered.

The former type was used throughout Israel, with the exception of some communities in northern Galilee. Both construction styles were prone to water leakage and constant maintenance. However, when the Romans arrived in 63 B.C., they introduced baked roofing tiles, which were first used on the more affluent homes. Such tiles would have been used on roofs constructed

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604. To make plaster, the ancients burned limestone for 72 hours until it became a heavy dust. Then they added water and placed it on the walls with a trowel. Because limestone is about thirty percent water, the burning process required considerable fuel. The result was that during the Roman period many areas were deforested. SOURCE: Interview with Arie bar David, tour guide and lecturer in August, 1999.

605. In 1992, a factory where tiles were produced was found under the International Convention Center in Jerusalem, and has been left “in Situ.” Israel Antiquities Authority, June, 18, 1998; “Tenth Roman Legion Tile Factory Open.” *Artificial*. 12:3 (Summer, 1998) 4.
with tree branches or timbers rather than stone slabs. Houses with dressed stone walls, plastered interior walls, and tile roofs clearly reflected a family of higher economic status in life.⁶⁰⁶

06.03.09.B. ROMAN ROOF TILE. Roman roofing tiles were introduced to the Jewish community by the Romans in 63 B.C. and were commonly used on the homes of affluent families. The initials “LEG-X-F” represent Legio X Fretensis.” Photograph by the author at the Haifa Museum.

“Their faith.” This miracle is one of unique illustration. While there is no mention of the faith of the sick paralytic, the writers Matthew (9:2), Mark (2:5), and Luke (5:20) specifically mention that it was “their faith” that prompted the healing. This implies the paralytic may not have had faith for his own healing, but his four friends did and, therefore, he received the healing. Like the term belief, the word faith has two critical components.

1. Faith means to accept the words of Jesus literally, including what He said about God as eternal and unchangeable truth. It is a mental change of thought and attitude (belief system), but not necessarily feeling-oriented.

⁶⁰⁶ Laughlin, “Capernaum from Jesus’ Time.” 58.
2. Faith is the commitment to put the belief system into action and results in a Christ-like lifestyle (see James 2:14).

06.03.09.C. ROOF TILE WITH TENTH ROMAN LEGION INSCRIPTION.
A illustration of a roof tile with the engraved image of a ship and a wild boar was found in Jerusalem. In the center of the seal are the initials “LEG-X-F” that represented “Legio X Fretensis.” Courtesy of Dan Bahat. 607

06.03.09. Q1 Did the phrase “Your sins are forgiven,” proclaim Jesus as Deity (Lk. 5:20)?

Jesus made a stunning statement when He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” In Mark’s narrative Jesus used the word teknon that means child or son. 608 It is a word of endearment that reflects the compassion and love that the leading Pharisees lacked. The statement, “your sins are forgiven you.” is used 13 times in the Hebrew Bible, including nine times in the Torah. 609 It should be noted that the religious leaders forgot the discussion Nathan had with King David. After the king repented, Nathan said,

608. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 322.
The LORD has taken away your sin; you will not die.

2 Samuel 12:13

In that case, Nathan did not forgive David’s sin, but rather, he conveyed God’s forgiveness and assured David of it. However, when Jesus forgave sin, He did so by the authority and power of God Almighty. This phrase was reserved for God alone and the Pharisees were horrified when Jesus used it. When Moses wrote Leviticus chapters 4, 5, and 6, he used the passive Hebrew voice. When Jesus said it, He also used the passive voice, a bold self-proclamation of deity.\(^\text{610}\)

Nonetheless, there must have been some who questioned, “Where is the evidence that His statement, ‘your sins are forgiven,’ is permitted and ratified in heaven?” Anyone could have said this with a degree of boldness. Jesus attested His right and power to do that which, by its very nature, lies outside of the realm of visible proof.\(^\text{611}\) Therefore, He performed the miracle of healing to convey to the audience that He did, in fact, have divine power to perform a messianic miracle.

It had not occurred to them that God might take on human form. No one had ever performed these kinds of miracles before, and yet Jesus performed all three messianic miracles that demonstrated His deity and for this reason, the Jewish leadership responded with, “He’s blaspheming!”

Since the Jews were so intent on an expected political-messiah, they could not imagine a messiah who would heal the sick, raise the dead, and forgive sins. Their preconceived ideas blinded them to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the ministry of Jesus. Ironically, from their own tradition is an interesting verse recorded later in the Babylonian Talmud that reads,

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60. Fruchtenbaum, Life of the Messiah. Tape 5, Side B.

61. See also 11.02.20.Q1 “What are the three examples of where Jesus claimed divine authority that brought Him into conflict with the religious establishment?”
This sick man is not healed
Until all his sins are forgiven him.

Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 41a

As previously stated, Jews, Greeks and Romans also associated illnesses with sin. There was an association between those who were sick and their physician; the sick were to pattern their behavior after their healer. The Greek writer Lucian (120-185 A.D.) preserved this interesting account, in which the sick are to get well by not becoming angry or excited, which were seen as “sins.”

He (Demonax) never was known to make an uproar or excite himself or get angry, even if he had to rebuke someone; though he assailed sins, he forgave sinners thinking that one should pattern after doctors who heal sicknesses but felt no anger at the sick. He considered that it is human to err, divine or all but divine to set right what has gone amiss.

Lucian of Samosata, *Demonax*

Lucian of Samosata and others like him were in sharp contrast to Jesus who simply healed people and told them not to continue in their sinful lifestyle. Some critics claim that Jesus did not understand His Messiahship because he failed to specifically tell the people He was the Messiah. Unfortunately, these critics fail to realize that Jesus frequently demonstrated His Messiahship and deity. Throughout history there have been many who claimed to be the Messiah, but only Jesus demonstrated His calling.

06.03.10 Mk. 2:6-12 (See also Mt. 9:3-8; Lk. 5:21-26) Capernaum

**SCRIBES QUESTION AUTHORITY OF JESUS**

6 But some of the scribes were sitting there, thinking to themselves: 7 “Why does He speak like this? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

8 Right away Jesus understood in His spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up,”

612. See Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. 341.

pick up your mat, and walk’? 10 But so you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” He told the paralytic, 11 “I tell you: get up, pick up your mat, and go home.”

12 Immediately he got up, picked up the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

There are several interesting observations to be made in this passage that are also recognizable elsewhere.

1. Jesus correctly diagnosed the paralytic’s condition,

2. He forgave his sins, and

3. He exercised the gift of discernment as to the evil thoughts of His critics.

It is interesting that Jesus replied to their thoughts with questions. Evidently, they were so angry at Him that they did not question how He was able to know their thoughts. On occasion, it might have been possible to correctly guess what they were thinking. Jesus, however, used this gift often with perfect accuracy. That alone should have made them realize His divine nature, not to mention that He healed the paralytic which was a miracle they had never seen. But the real issue in this discourse was the question of who can forgive sins. Irenaeus answered the question with another question:

**How can sins be rightly remitted unless the very One against whom one has sinned grants the pardon?**

**Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.17**

“He’s blaspheming!” Blaspheming (Gk. blasphemia 987) is the act of insulting the honor of God or using reviling and abusive language towards Him,⁶¹⁴ the penalty for which the offender was to be killed by stoning.⁶¹⁵ Likewise, those who insult the proclaimers of God’s Word are also guilty of blasphemy,⁶¹⁶ because they insult the agents of God and, therefore, God

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⁶¹⁵ Lev. 24:10-33; 1 Kg. 21:9-14; Acts 6:11, 7:58.

Himself. Conversely, those who bless the messengers are blessed because they bless God. The Pharisees refused to believe the divinity of Jesus or that He could forgive sins. Because this was beyond their reasoning, by deliberate decision or lack of comprehension, they concluded that He was blaspheming.

Anyone who insults God or the Holy Spirit is in danger of eternal damnation, and for that there is no forgiveness or relief (Mt. 12:32; Mk. 3:29). However, if someone is concerned about having committed this unpardonable sin, that concern, is self-evident that the unpardonable sin was not committed. Otherwise, there would be no concern for repentance.

**“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”** This question should have made them realize the deity of Jesus, but it also implied the unspoken charge of blasphemy. It has the exact counter charge of John 5:18 where they considered killing Jesus. By obeying Jesus, the paralytic demonstrated at this point that he had faith in Jesus to heal. Jesus, in turn, said, “Your sins are forgiven.” Again, the concepts of healing and forgiveness of sin are related because the ancients believed that illness was the result of sin in one’s life. Jesus claimed to have the authority to forgive sin, authority that was reserved for God alone. The miracle proved He was not an imposter. Anyone could say the words, “Your sins are forgiven,” though they could not really forgive sins, any more than they could heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, calm the storm, or walk on water. These miracles demonstrated His power, declared His deity, and, therefore, He had the right to say, “Your sins are forgiven.”

**“Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, pick up your mat, and walk’?”** In this question, Jesus offered a choice of answers to His critics. In true Jewish style, He offered the easier question first and the more difficult second. In Jewish logic, if one could answer the difficult question, then he could obviously respond to the easier one. Anyone could say that sins were forgiven because there would be no physical evidence. However, to tell a paralyzed man to get up and go home with his mat would first require a profound healing, a demonstration of answering the more difficult question. Therefore, by healing the man, Jesus likewise demonstrated He could forgive sin. From this point on, the Jewish leaders challenged Him continuously.

More importantly, the ability to forgive sins pointed directly to His deity. That was a major challenge for the Jews. They believed that man could not be a god or God. The horrific memories of Antiochus, who claimed to be a god was fresh in their minds. Everything Jesus said and did pointed to Himself as the Messiah, but usually did so indirectly.

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617. Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16; 1 Cor. 12:3; Jas 2:7; 1 Tim. 1-13.

MATTHEW (LEVI) IS CALLED

13 Then Jesus went out again beside the sea. The whole crowd was coming to Him, and He taught them. 14 Then, moving on, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and He said to him, “Follow Me!” So he got up and followed Him.

By now Jesus had six disciples, Philip and Nathanael as well as two sets of brothers: Simon Peter and Andrew, as well as James and John. Matthew became number seven. Jesus had an incredible teaching reputation, but it was the miracles that stunned the audience and captivated everyone’s attention. Consequently, He was teaching in the open countryside more frequently than in the synagogues. This was for two reasons.

1. The crowds became huge while synagogues could accommodate only a local congregation.

2. The words such as “Your sins are forgiven” were more than some religious leaders could handle, and therefore, an increasing number of synagogue doors were closed to Him.

After teaching the crowd, Jesus invited Levi, better known as Matthew, who was the son of Alphaeus, to be a disciple. His accounting profession was one that was hated by the Jews as will be explained later. But, first a description of his professional life.

“Tax office.” The tax office (Gk. telonion 5058) was a custom-house. The Romans contracted taxes with two kinds of tax collectors and many kinds of taxes.

1. The Gabbai collected on real estate, income (as from crops), and poll taxes, as follows.

   a. The ground tax consisted one-tenth of a farmer’s grain and one-fifth of his fruit. Tax was payable in cash or kind (grain or fruit).

   b. The income tax which was one percent of one’s income.

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c. The poll tax which ever male had to pay between the ages of 14 to 65 and every female had to pay who was between the ages of 12 and 65. It was paid directly to the treasury in Rome and was symbolic of slavery,621 – a detestable thought to the Jews.

d. Herod the Great established a slave market in Jerusalem and it is believed that the Gabbai collected the taxes on the slaves sold there.622

2. The Mockhes collected duty on imports, as well as export tolls on roads, the use of bridges, and ships that were anchored in the harbors. There was also a tax on wagon and cart wheels, on pack animals and the transportation of slaves.623 The import / export duty ranged from 2½ to 12½ percent on all goods.

Matthew was a Mockhes or customs official for the Roman government. As such, his official position was the superintendent of the customs house at Capernaum. This was probably one of the most lucrative positions in the eastern empire because of the multiple caravans that traveled the Via Maris and stopped at Capernaum, Magdala, or other lakeside village for fresh supplies and water.624 Since Herod Antipas controlled the District of Galilee, Matthew delivered all taxes and records to Antipas, who then passed them to his superior administrator in Damascus, who then passed them on to Rome. As a typical tax collector, he would have had a five-year contract with the Romans.625 So when he decided to follow Jesus, there is no question that he walked away from a contract that in modern terms was a gold mine.

Tax collectors were usually local men, functioning within the occupied community. As early as 212 B.C. the Romans had established a class of men who contracted with the government to perform various tasks, including the collection of tribute or taxes. Matthew and Zacchaeus were in this classification. However, as such they were hated by their fellow Jews for being “traitors,” considered worse than prostitutes, because they enhanced the wealth of the Romans and became personally wealthy at the expense of their own people as well as those who traveled through Israel.626


622. Moseley, Yeshua: A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church. 119; Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 249.

623. Moseley, Yeshua: A Guide to the Real Jesus and the Original Church. 119; Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 249.

624. See the Via Maris on these maps: 06.02.02.Z and 06.01.08.Z.


To acquire a tax collector position, men placed bids for the position in a particular region and the highest bidder received the appointment. Anything beyond what he needed for the governor was his to keep. If he did not receive sufficient funds, he had to pay the difference. This method of taxation resulted in a form of legal extortion in which the Jews became economic slaves.

Of the two kinds of tax collectors, the Mockhes was the worst. They were not only barred from the synagogue, but the religious leaders there frequently excommunicated them as well. He could not even be a witness in a Jewish court. Furthermore, since Roman coins had images of men and pagan gods, the strict Pharisees considered anyone who touched a Roman or Greek coin as filthy. Such a person violated the command against graven images. Therefore, for Jesus to call such a man to join His ministry was a profound statement concerning the love of God and His ability to change the lives of people.

Taxes paid by the local peasants were not collected by tax collectors such as Matthew and Zacchaeus, but by Gabbai. But regardless, to the typical Jew, tax collectors were a constant reminder that God had forsaken His people and His promise of land as an inheritance. They were in deep despair and had immense bitterness against both the tax agents and Romans. This may have been a reason as to why Jesus chose the two of them to follow Him.

Tax collectors were known to be two-way swindlers. They were known for their dishonesty and bribes from local rich and famous merchants. They would also underreport the income and taxes due to government officials, so they became victims as well. Clearly they were notoriously dishonest, which is why they were often barred from the local synagogue and condemned as being unclean by local synagogue rulers (Lev. 20:5). This was one of several reasons why the Romans took a census every fourteen years.

In Egypt, where the Roman administration was similar, numerous records written by tax collectors have been uncovered. Since the Romans streamlined all segments of government, it would have been the responsibility of Matthew to collect the tax and write a document similar to this first century Egyptian papyrus:

Diogenes, superintendent of the customs house at Soknopaiou Nesos for the Memphais harbor-tax, to the desert guards: Didymos presented one donkey load ...

627. Josephus, Antiquities 12.4.3.

628. Schurer, A History of the Jewish People First Division, 2:68-69. The subject of high taxation that resulted in economic slavery is presented by Josephus, Antiquities 17.11.2 (307-308). See also 02.03.03 “Economy” and 03.06.04 “4 B.C. The Death of Herod the Great.”

629. Lang, Know the Words of Jesus. 246.

631. See 04.03.09.Q1 and Q4 for further census details.
two measures...of oil, total two measures. Year 11 of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Imperator on the 23rd of the month New Augustus.

**Egyptian Toll Receipt on Papyrus**

Again, an ancient extra-biblical papyrus fragment illuminates the understanding of Scripture for modern readers. Amazingly, most of these documents were uncovered in the past three centuries as the number of Bible critics has exploded. It appears as if God, in His merciful grace, has been supplying mountains of evidence to not only confirm His word, but to add understanding of it as well.


633. On an interesting side note, a new imaging technology was developed in 2011 by two Hewlett-Packard scientists in conjunction with the University of Southern California to aide archaeologists. Known as Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), this new research instrument allows scientists to control light to highlight hidden details in ways never dreamed of previously for the proper reading of faded or damaged manuscripts and inscriptions. For more information, see Bruce Zuckerman. “New Eyeballs on Ancient Texts.” *Biblical Archaeology Review*. Nov/Dec. 2011. 37:6. 28.